

How the sports world turns, and the media turn

It's amazing to see how a single video of a man punching a woman in the face can change everyone's perspective.

Months ago, Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice was suspended for two games for punching his now wife, Janay Palmer, after a video showed up of Rice dragging her out of an elevator.

Some media members complained then about the NFL's leniency toward physically abusing your future wife. But, the NFL rode out the storm, claiming that the police did little about the [case](#), so why should they?

Then the other fist landed. TMZ released the video of Rice actually punching Palmer and the approach changed. The NFL went into full defense mode, suspending Rice indefinitely and announcing an independent committee to investigate domestic abuse in the [NFL](#), something that raises questions of its own.

Media now are in full frenzy mode. Calls for NFL commissioner Roger Goodell's head are being issued. Hands are being wrung in anguish. Righteous indignation rules.

And so much more has happened since Rice's punch was seen nationally.

Adrian Peterson, star running back for the Minnesota Vikings, was suspended for a game for whipping his child with a switch. Then, after he missed that game, the Vikings reinstated him. Then, after media outcry, the Vikings deinstated him, suspending him until the matter played out in court.

Other NFL players who had been playing despite current legal charges of physical abuse were suspended. The NFL is trying to

get its house in order.

The panic has even spread to the collegiate level. Florida State quarterback Jameis Winston was suspended for a half for screaming an inappropriate word into a live camera. Of course, Winston played all of last year with a sexual assault charge hanging over his head and was suspended for three baseball games because of an incident with shoplifting. So what's a little more controversy?

Media have jumped on this too, making sure fans know just how little Winston "gets it" (Stories [here](#) and [here](#) with a cutting tweet [here](#)). As media have pointed out, no one gets it.

The actions of Rice and Peterson have started national conversations on topics of spousal abuse and corporal punishment. Panels of four to six people on CNN give opinions on whether a whipping is OK. But few members of the media talk about their own role in this national fiasco.

Media are national enablers.

Media have traditionally praised talented athletes and, because football is such a violent sport, adopted a type of boys-will-be-boys mentality when covering the sport. Reporters praise the athletes. Florida State's Winston was hailed as a hero and a wonderful athlete deserving the Heisman Trophy after leading his team to an undefeated season and a national championship. He was hailed despite a sexual-abuse charge hanging over his head.

Sports media easily become enamored with the hype that comes with the job and overlook the work. It's work to find out if that sexual abuse story is true or if that athlete really beat his girlfriend that night. And, that might take away from the game and could draw viewers away from the channel those reporters might be working for. So many factors work against coming down on the star athlete that when it does happen, the story must be exceptional.

And then, those same media appear shocked when athletes *they* have privileged, become impervious to societal norms. And when the media turn on an organization, such as the NFL, those in power don't know how to stop it.

The NFL has floundered under the media's glare. Calls for commissioner Roger Goodell's head are becoming louder and possible replacements (former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is one) have been mentioned. The NFL even hired women to fix the league's domestic policy. (Perhaps they were picked from Mitt Romney's file of women?) All of this seems exactly what it is – poor public relations. And the media can pick up on that just as easily as they can build up a young man with extraordinary talent in a sport to the point where that individual thinks he can get away with anything.

That is, until the story becomes too good to ignore, so then they turn on him too.