

Chapter 39: Sport in America: The New Racial Stereotypes *Richard E. Lapchick*

Main Point:

Lapchick's main point in his article is that due to racial stereotyping we associate black athletes with drug and alcohol use and violence, especially toward women. Compared to statistics of drug and alcohol abuse in the general population of the United States, the percentage in athletic teams is only a small fraction. Even though only a small percentage of athletes use drugs and abuse women we believe the numbers are higher than they are because of media coverage and the media's own racial prejudices. Our society has certain stereotypes against athletes, especially black male athletes and while there are athletes that abuse drugs or are violent they tend to be the exception and not the rule.

Central Issues and Concepts:

- Society gets its stereotypes about athletes from what they read or see in the media. The people writing or reporting about them form our opinions about athletes, and an overwhelming amount of these writers happen to be white. According to Lapchick there are "1,600 daily newspapers in America employing only nineteen African-American sports columnists" (p.329). Fans are getting a skewed view of black athletes due to a drastic lack of black reporters in the sports field.
- Because the NBA and NFL have a larger percentage of black athletes we have a different view on those sports than we do on more white dominated sports such as hockey or baseball.
- When we think of college athletes we think of them having a harder time graduating and having lower standards set for them than non-athletes. Only a small percentage of college students graduate in four years but when athletes take longer than four years to graduate they are seen as dumb. Many college athletes are also assumed to be poor and are focusing on sports in order to make money. These stereotypes are mostly false.

Two Key Quotes:

- "Problems about athletes hit the papers and people think they detect a pattern because of the seeming frequency. But no one else's problems get in the papers. How do we make legitimate comparisons? With Astra and Mitsubishi, we look at the corporate climate and don't generalize about individuals. But with athletes, especially black athletes, we look at players and look for patterns to add up." (p.333)
- "I hear so many people say that if athletes do something in the community that they do it for publicity. Why can't we accept that athletes want to help? Sport and those who play it can help educate us and sensitize us. While we can't ignore the bad news, we should also focus on the overwhelming good news of what athletes do to make this a better world." (p.333)

Two Questions:

- Lapchick brings to our attention that many people say that athletes are trained to be violent as part of their profession and this simply spills over into their personal life. We don't however hold other men with violent professions, such as working in the army or the police force, to the same standard. Do we hold athletes to a higher standard simply because they are public figures or is there something more?
- Violence is part of our society, regardless of age, race, or class yet we associate all black male athletes as being violent and believe that violence within this group happens with more frequency. Why do fans focus on violence only within this one group of athletes and ignore it in other sports with a higher percentage of white athletes?