

FAIR OR FOUL

Sports and Criminal Behavior in the United States

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INTRODUCTION

For generations, sports have dominated water cooler conversations across the country. During this same period, crime has been the most popular subject of the media, including the news, television, and movies. Over the last few years, we have seen an integration of these two worlds. More and more discussion and media coverage of the sports world focuses on crimes committed by athletes, steroid use, or disorderly fans. The sports page has looked more and more like the crime reports. One need only open the newspaper to read about the Barry Bonds steroids debate, Michael Vick's dog fighting conviction, or the fan and player fight during the Detroit Pistons and Indiana Pacers basketball game. This book is an examination of the increasingly connected worlds of sports and criminal behavior.

In the first part of the book, I examine criminal behavior among athletes. The influence of athletic membership on behavior begins in high school. Athletics hold a special place in many communities across the country. Towns support their athletic programs through pep rallies, fundraisers, and attendance at sporting events. Nothing is more American than the Friday night high school football game or the weekend afternoon soccer or baseball game. Parents encourage their children to participate in sports at earlier and earlier ages. But with all the talk of teamwork, fitness, and competition, is there a darker side to athletic participation? Are the stories in the paper an anomaly or is there something inherent in some sports or teams that encourages criminal behavior (for example, the Glen Ridge [NJ] High School football team rape case)? I discuss the issues of aggression, masculinity, and group mentality in relation to high school athletes' criminal behavior including a detailed examination of hazing.

Athletes continue to hold a special place in the community when they enter college. The sense of entitlement and privilege that began in high school continues into college. This is coupled with a greater sense of freedom, and in many cases, increased access to alcohol and drugs. The

special treatment that colleges afford their athletes only heightens the student-athletes' sense that they are special and in some cases above the law. There are numerous examples of big-time college football and basketball programs (such as the University of Miami football team and University of Cincinnati basketball teams) that have looked the other way regarding their athletes' criminal behavior. I examine many explanations for the increased risk of criminal behavior among Division I athletes in basketball and football, including NCAA regulations which forbid student-athletes from working during the school year, cultural differences between athletes and other students present on campus, and a lack of accountability from the colleges.

The spotlight is greatest when the athletes enter the professional ranks. With increased money and fame, any criminal violations by professional athletes receive increased media attention. Recently, there has been an epidemic of professional athletes committing crimes, especially in the NFL and NBA. Along with violent and sexual offenses, the most widely discussed criminal activity has been drug use, specifically steroid use, among athletes. The criminal component to the steroid issue has been largely ignored in the press, with most of the discussion focusing on how it affects the athletes' performance. I will cover high-profile examples of professional athletes' criminal behavior including Barry Bonds, Michael Vick, and Adam "Pacman" Jones.

Other connections between sports and crime, such as spectator violence at sporting events, are also examined. Spectator violence can take many forms, from throwing bottles onto the field to attacking a player during a game to full-fledged riots after a game. Although the violence in the United States does not parallel the level in Europe and South America associated with soccer, there have been many unfortunate incidents. The brawl between the Detroit Pistons and Indiana Pacers that spilled into the crowd is one of the more high-profile examples of this issue. Spectator violence raises many issues including security at sporting events and excessive alcohol use surrounding sports. Additionally, I discuss the issue of whether the effects of watching sporting events extend beyond the fans at the game to those outside the arena or those watching at home.

Another link between crime and the sports world involves gambling. There are many different forms of gambling, some legal and some illegal, from casino gambling and lotteries to betting with bookies or online. Although more and more states are looking to gambling as a guaranteed revenue generator, there is also a dark side to gambling, with increasing crime rates and gambling addiction. Gambling has also impacted what takes place within the sports world; I address many high-profile examples

of sports fixing including the 1918 Black Sox scandal, the Boston College basketball point shaving scandal, Pete Rose, and NBA referee Tim Donaghy.

Although the beginning of this book paints a negative (albeit realistic) picture of athletic participation in relation to criminal behavior, this is not the whole story. For many people athletics has served as a powerful positive force in their lives. Parents who encourage their children to participate in sports do so in the hope that sports will be beneficial for them. There are many benefits attributed to membership on sports teams including character building, exercise, friendship, learning how to win and lose, and the very basic benefit of giving kids a positive activity to keep them off the streets. A prime example of this is the Midnight Basketball program which operates in cities across the country and gives youths and young adults a safe environment and activity to keep them off the streets and away from crime during peak criminal hours.

Many correctional officials are well aware of the positives associated with athletic participation. I look at the key role that sport plays in the lives of prison inmates. For many inmates, playing sports provides a positive way to spend their time and an outlet for their aggression. Many prisons operate softball, basketball, and volleyball leagues. However, sports in prison have come under scrutiny from the public, especially weight lifting and boxing programs; many see sports as a way of breeding faster and stronger criminals and not an example of hard time or punishment. Corrections officials argue that sports are essential to maintaining a secure prison, serving as one of the few rewards that can be taken away from inmates, and helping to keep health care costs for inmates down. I explore the positive benefits of sports participation in prison and out.

CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY AND ATHLETES

The first three chapters of the book examine the relationship between athletic participation at various levels (Chapter 1, High School; Chapter 2, College; and Chapter 3, Professional). Each chapter presents specific issues related to crimes committed by the athletes and the research surrounding the major issues. It is nearly impossible to talk about athletes in general because of the many differences that can encompass them, from a swimmer to a wrestler to a football player. Even within the same sport, it is hard to make comparisons; for example, there are vast differences between a high school football player who rarely makes it into the game and a starting quarterback in the NFL. Although some criminological theories fit more closely with high school athletics compared to professional

athletes, there are some generalizations that can be made and some theories that apply to athletes in general. It is possible to draw some general conclusions about athletic participation and its relationship to criminal behavior. While all sports are included in some of the discussions and research, there is a bias toward the more popular, revenue-generating team sports like football, baseball, and basketball. Additionally, this book focuses almost exclusively on male sports. While some discussions of athletics include comparisons between male and female athletes, most of the examples and research focus on male athletes.

With this being said, criminological theory can offer us some guidance in comparisons between someone we would consider an athlete versus a non-athlete in terms of criminal behavior. Momentarily putting aside social factors, which undoubtedly influence a person's criminality and will be examined specifically in relation to high school (Chapter 1), college (Chapter 2), and professional athletes (Chapter 3), there are some basic core differences between athletes and non-athletes that are important in explaining crime. Take this typical description: *An aggressive male, with an athletic build who is between the ages of 16 and 25.* Is this describing the typical athlete or criminal? According to research, this description would fit both. The majority of high school, college, and professional athletes discussed in the book have the same characteristics as much of the criminal population. So an underlying question of the first half of the book is: does being an athlete make an individual more likely to commit crime?

In *Crime and Human Nature*, Wilson and Hernstein argue that there are certain constitutional factors that contribute to criminal behavior. Constitutional factors are characteristics that are usually present at or soon after birth whose behavioral consequences appear during the child's development. This is not to suggest that there is a crime gene or that some people are born criminals. However, some characteristics that are inheritable affect, to some extent, the likelihood that individuals will engage in criminal activities.¹ Individuals differ at birth in the degree to which they are at risk for committing crime. Biological factors correlate with crime; however, they are generally not recognized as causing crime. Biological factors set in motion a series of psychological and social events in a person's life that lead to crime. They are distal, indirect causes at best. While reading the following discussion of Wilson and Hernstein's arguments, keep in mind your stereotypical idea of an "athlete."

Early theories of criminology focused on biology as a possible explanation for criminal behavior. Although many of these theories have been discredited, some theories are still worthwhile in looking at criminal

behavior among athletes. One of the earliest (and most controversial) criminological theories focused on body type (somatype) and the idea that body type influenced the risk of criminality. While many shake off the notion today that there is a “criminal” body type, there is research that demonstrates a correlation between body type and criminal behavior.² There are three general body types: endomorphs, mesomorphs, and ectomorphs. Endomorphs tend toward rounder bodies, a mesomorph toward heavy-boned muscularity, and ectomorphs toward linearity. There have been many studies that have examined the impact of body type on criminal behavior; the general finding is that criminals’ body types differ on average from the general population. Criminals tend to be more mesomorphs than ectomorphs. Obviously, there are differences even among criminals with this depending on what type of criminal behavior you are discussing, for example, violent crimes versus tax fraud. This does not mean that body type causes crime; however, there is a correlation between mesomorphs and criminal behavior. Additionally, studies have looked at andromorphy, which assesses the relative maleness of a person’s overall physique. The research demonstrates the more “masculine” body type characterizes the average criminal.³ Some studies suggest that body types also have correlations with personality types, for example, mesomorphs have been found to be more expressive, domineering, and given to higher levels of activity.⁴ Additionally, criminal theorist William H. Sheldon argued that mesomorphs are more unrestrained and have an impulsive self-gratification. These personality characteristics have also been found to correlate with criminal behavior.⁵ Athletes are more likely to be mesomorphs and many of the personality traits associated with mesomorphs can be found in athletes (especially boxers, and football and hockey players).

Besides body type, gender is another constitutional factor that impacts criminal behavior. There is no more consistent pattern, historical and cross-cultural, than males commit more crime than women. This is surprising given the changing place of women in society. Even as there have been many social and cultural changes between men and women, especially greater equality for women, this has not affected the fact that males commit many more crimes than women. Males in 1960 were responsible for 82.5% of arrests for homicide; in 2000, males were responsible for 87.5%. Although women comprise 51% of the population, they are arrested for only 18% of all violent crimes and 32% of property crimes, relatively consistent with the numbers from decades earlier.⁶ These ideas are supported by examining athletes and criminal behavior, with more male athletes committing crimes than female athletes.

Additionally, age is a constitutional factor that impacts crime. Crime increases during early adolescence and doesn't begin to decline until the mid-twenties. This also would correspond with much of the discussion of athletes, as there seems to be a spike in the later stages of high school, into college, and the beginning of the professional career with a general decline in athletes who play past their mid-twenties. The other constitutional factor that Wilson and Herrnstein examined is intelligence, which they argue shows a clear and consistent pattern between criminality and low intelligence. This is something that has not been thoroughly investigated in relation to athletics.

Another interesting factor that impacts criminal behavior is personality, which is also to some degree inheritable. Research has shown that criminals are typically aggressive, impulsive, and cruel.⁷ Aggression is a trait that is rewarded in athletics and is sometimes hard for athletes to leave on the field. Personality and behavioral problems are related to the environment in which a person is raised; however, each characteristic comes with some genetic inheritance. Societal reactions to such predispositions may determine, to a large degree, the form of continued behavior. For example, someone who is 6-feet 8-inches tall and 300 pounds with an aggressive personality is going to elicit different reactions from people (for example, schools, the community, and sports teams) than someone who is 5-feet 8-inches tall, 175 pounds, and introverted.

Now what do being young, athletically built, and male all have in common? It seems that young male mesomorphs have higher testosterone than their counterparts (and many athletes as well). This may explain greater levels of aggressive behavior among this group. High blood testosterone levels have been linked with increased aggressiveness. Male sex-hormone testosterone levels have been linked with aggression in teenagers⁸ while other studies show that adolescent problem behavior and teenage violence rise in proportion to the amount of testosterone in the blood of young males.⁹ Research has concluded that there is a "moderately strong relationship between testosterone and adult deviance." The relationship is "largely mediated by the influence of testosterone on social integration and prior involvement in juvenile delinquency."¹⁰ This means that high levels of testosterone have some effect on behavior but the effect is also going to be determined by the social environment (for example, whether the behavior, possibly violent behavior, is encouraged, rewarded, etc.).

Interestingly, steroid use, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, raises the level of testosterone and has been linked with aggressive behavior and destructive urges.¹¹ Testosterone alone would not explain

aggressive or criminal behavior, as most young males have high levels of testosterone and most do not commit crimes. However, others have found that high levels of testosterone combined with low levels of serotonin are responsible for aggressive behavior. Testosterone in one respect produces dominance-seeking behavior, but not necessarily aggression because the body produces serotonin which induces calmer responses. If the person has low levels of serotonin, the person will experience greater frustrations and be more likely to act out aggressively, especially if he also has higher levels of testosterone.¹² It is interesting to take note of this type of brain activity and chemicals when looking for explanations for criminal behavior, but they cannot be examined in isolation from the social environment in which a child, teen, and adult live. Starting a discussion of theory with biological factors may seem to place them as more important than others, but they are just some of the many explanations for the connection between athletics and criminal behavior. Not every young, athletically built male commits crimes, thus it is important to analyze the social atmosphere in which the athletes play. In the first half of the book, I explore what it means to be an “athlete” in every sense of the word, not just biologically but sociologically, psychologically, and culturally. How an athlete is treated by his peers, coaches, and teachers in high school, how he is recruited and viewed on a college campus, and how much money and freedom he has as a professional will all be examined in the chapters ahead.

Although some of the criminal issues and theories in the book cut across every level of participation, there are specific topics for high school athletics that do not apply to professional athletes. The chapters are set up to focus on each level specifically, but there is much that is universal to all athletes within each chapter. For instance, the chapter on high school contains a section on hazing, which is something that begins in high school and presents many problems for high school athletes and administrators. However, hazing takes place in college and the professional ranks as well. The discussion focuses on high school athletes in Chapter 1, but college and professional athletes are also detailed. In Chapter 2, sexual assaults among athletes are detailed; this is an issue that has received substantial attention among college athletes. However, it is also an issue that affects high school and professional athletes. Then in Chapter 3, steroid use is discussed. While most of the attention and debate surrounding steroid use by athletes has focused on professional athletes, this is an issue that is also pertinent to high school and college athletes.

PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES AND CRIME

Sports kept me off the streets. . . . It kept me from getting into what was going on, the bad stuff. Lots of guys I knew have had bad problems.

Michael Vick, 2001¹

The first week of December 2008, New York Giants wide receiver Plaxico Burress was arrested for accidentally shooting himself in a night club in New York City. He did not have a permit to carry the weapon in New York. The same week, O.J. Simpson made national headlines when he was sentenced for kidnapping charges stemming from a botched robbery of sports memorabilia in Las Vegas. As if these incidents were not bad enough for the sports world, Carolina Panthers Jeremy Bridges was arrested and charged with two counts of simple assault and battery and one count of communicating threats. This was Bridges' second arrest in 16 months. The first came when he was charged with pointing a gun at a woman outside a strip club; he was later convicted of a misdemeanor assault charge.² Additionally, six NFL players were suspended that week for testing positive for a diuretic that can be used as a masking agent for steroids. Unfortunately for sports fans, these weeks have become all too common.

The professional sports world has been hit hard by criminal stories over the last few years. The sports page has looked more like the crime blotter with Kobe Bryant (2004), Barry Bonds (2006), and Michael Vick (2007) dominating the sports headlines. Unfortunately for all three, the stories had to deal with their criminal behavior. Michael Vick's dog fighting charges, Barry Bonds' association with steroids and subsequent federal charges for perjury, and Kobe Bryant's rape charge became the focus of the sports world. This chapter will examine the world of professional athletics and its growing connection with crime. The sense of superiority (elite deviance) that comes with the money and fame of being a professional athlete will be examined. Specific attention will be given to steroid

use and crimes against women. Examples from Major League Baseball, the NBA, and the NFL will be presented.

The problem of criminal behavior among professional athletes is in many ways simply an extension of the problem of college athletes. Take for example running back Laurence Phillips. Phillips was living in a foster home in California when he was recruited by the University of Nebraska. He played running back for the Cornhuskers, where during his junior year, he was arrested for assaulting his ex-girlfriend. He dragged her down a flight of stairs by her hair and shirt and repeatedly banged her head into a mailbox. She had to be taken to the hospital where she received stitches on her head. Despite the severity of the attack, Coach Tom Osbourne did not kick him off the team but suspended him for six games. Phillips played in the final three games of the season. He finished the season by leading Nebraska to a win in the 1996 Fiesta Bowl and national title, where he ran for 165 yards and three touchdowns.

When he decided to leave college a year early, his past did not discourage an NFL team from paying him millions of dollars. The St. Louis Rams picked him sixth overall in the 1996 NFL draft. While with the Rams for less than two seasons, he was arrested three times, served a jail sentence for domestic violence and was sued by two different women, one for domestic violence and the other for sexual assault.³ He was finally cut by the St. Louis Rams after he was reportedly fined 56 times for violating team rules. However, within a week the Miami Dolphins signed Phillips to a contract. He played just two games for the Dolphins before they cut him. Even though he was only with the Dolphins briefly, he was charged with assaulting a woman at a night club, to which he eventually pled no contest. After the Dolphins, Phillips played for NFL Europe then had short stints with the San Francisco 49ers, the Canadian football league, and the arena football league. If you are a talented player, there will always be a team willing to look past criminal behavior. This does nothing to discourage the player from breaking the law.

Professional athletes are the cream of the crop of athletic ability and are some of society's most recognizable people. The fact that many of them are involved in criminal behavior should not be surprising given the nature of their profession and the privileged lives they live. Many professional sports rely on aggression and players who display a level of violence that is not welcome in most job fields, so it is not surprising that many athletes have a propensity for aggression and violence off the field as well, especially when their behavior is rarely punished. Their fame and wealth also insulates them from adherence to social norms, luring athletes to indulge in illicit behavior and enabling popular athletes to routinely escape accountability. The public has been more than willing to overlook

the criminal behavior of athletes. Fans, in general, have not walked away from their team or sport because of the increasing criminal behavior perpetuated by the players. The public looks to sports as an escape and it is not willing to surrender this escape because of the behavior of the players.

CRIMINOLOGY THEORY: PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

I think our society's worship of elite athletes, because we coddle and fawn over them, in some ways we've created antisocial beings who believe their needs come first.

Merrill J. Melnick, a sports sociologist at the State University of New York at Brockport⁴

Many criminal theories would not be applicable to professional athletes because of their class status. The problem with many criminal theories is the underlying assumption that crime is more likely to occur in the lower classes. In 2007, the minimum salary was \$285,000 for NFL players; in 2009, the NBA minimum salary was \$457,588.⁵ The average salary in the NFL in 2009 was roughly \$770,000.⁶ During the 2007–2008 year, the average NBA salary was \$5.356 million. Professional athletes present a contradiction in that they have a high income yet many came from lower class backgrounds.

Theories that focus on crimes committed by members of the upper class or the wealthy typically focus on white-collar crimes like embezzlement or fraud. Criminologist Edwin H. Sutherland defined white-collar crime as violations of the law “committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation.”⁷ He claimed that many people fail to recognize that people in high standing in society often commit crimes but are not recognized as much by members of society or the courts. Sutherland said that:

My thesis is that the traditional/conception(s) and explanations of crime (are) misleading and incorrect; that crime is in fact not closely correlated with poverty or with the psychopathic and sociopathic conditions associated with poverty, and that an adequate explanation of criminal behavior must proceed along quite different lines. The conventional explanations are invalid principally because they are derived from biased samples. The samples are biased in that they have not included vast areas of criminal behavior of persons not in the lower class.⁸

Now Sutherland, who was writing in the 1930s and 1940s, was referring to members of the upper class working, for example, in the oil industry,

stock exchange, and politics. But Sutherland did note, as would apply to professional athletes, white-collar criminals are far less likely to be investigated, arrested, or prosecuted than are other types of offenders. When they are, on rare occasions, convicted, white-collar criminals are far less likely to receive active prison terms than are “common criminals.” The sentences they receive are likely to be shorter as well because of their social standing. In many cases, white-collar criminals are well respected in their communities. More and more in criminology, white-collar crime has focused on the type of offense being committed rather than the occupation or social standing of the offender. There is very little research on violent or street crimes committed by the wealthy.⁹ Typically, the focus on class structure and crimes leads to the conclusion that class structure gives rise to different types of criminality. This is where professional athletes do not fit in, they are wealthy and yet, in many cases, commit violent and gun-related crimes. I use the term *wealthy* deliberately, rather than upper class. The notion of class includes more than simply income.

Additionally, theories involving elite deviance have traditionally been restricted to the activities of persons and organizations of the highest social status, involved in the systematic exploitation of the powerless by economic domination, denial of human rights, and crimes of governmental control. It causes vast amounts of injury, has incalculable monetary costs, and undermines public trust in political and economic institutions. The notion of “elite deviance” typically centers on crimes committed by companies or chief executive officers (CEOs)¹⁰ rather than simply people with high incomes like professional athletes.

Criminologists Hirschi and Gottfredson, who attempted to come up with a “general theory of crime,” wrote that: “we outline a general theory of crime capable of organizing the facts about white-collar crime at the same time it is capable of organizing the facts about all forms of crime.”¹¹ They state that white-collar criminals are motivated by the same forces that drive other criminals: self-interest, the pursuit of pleasure, and the avoidance of pain. Part of their theory asserts that a single mechanism: low self-control, accounts for all crimes. Self-control is the degree to which a person is vulnerable to temptations of the moment. They argue that it is acquired early in life and is the number one factor of individual level criminal behavior. Self-control develops by the end of childhood and is fostered through parental emotional investment in the child, which includes monitoring the child’s behavior, recognizing deviance when it occurs, and punishing the child. They suggest that some people have a lasting tendency to ignore the long-term consequences of their behavior, that such people tend to be impulsive, reckless, and self-centered, and that

crime is often the end result of such tendencies.¹² While self-control is an important condition, this denies that structural or situational factors also affect a person's propensity to commit crime.

Building on their work, future studies have identified characteristics of people with low self-control. Some of the findings are that risk-seeking is an important determinant of self-control and that people with little self-control are drawn to activities that are adventurous and exciting. These people prefer physical activity over contemplation or conversation and tend to be indifferent or insensitive to the needs of others. Although they may not necessarily be antisocial or malicious, they are predisposed to being self-centered, have low frustration tolerance, and are inclined to handle conflict through confrontation.¹³ This corresponds with the situation for many professional athletes. The term "terminal adolescence" has been used to describe the emotional state of many professional athletes. Because so many have been coddled since childhood, their emotional growth may be stunted. Self-centeredness, insensitivity to the needs of others, and a sense of invincibility which is typical of adolescence, are prominent in many professional athletes. When they are young, their peer group and teachers allow them to do what they want. Their status as jocks prevents them from normal social development. The athletes have rarely been held accountable for their behavior, which makes them unable to handle any problems, personal or professional, that may arise.¹⁴ In many cases the athletes never grow up because they never have to. They have been treated as objects and thus treat others as objects. Because they have never been held accountable, they have a more difficult time identifying society's boundaries.¹⁵ Adding to their lack of self-control, many professional athletes display a narcissistic personality. They are self-absorbed, have an exaggerated sense of self-importance and entitlement, and show insensitivity to the needs and feelings of others.¹⁶

Many professional athletes are in the position of being well-known rich celebrities. However, this does not completely cover up the fact that many came from rough backgrounds. Many athletes were raised in crime-ridden inner cities, so while they may receive large pay checks, their roots, and in many cases friends, still have connections to their old neighborhoods. Many of the professional athletes discussed in the book (i.e., Michael Vick, who is discussed in the next section) have a hard time escaping the bad influences of their friends from the old neighborhood. This situation has been termed "ghetto loyalty,"¹⁷ which is felt primarily among black athletes from poor backgrounds who feel an obligation to help their friends from home. As simple as it sounds, many professional athletes' problems stem from their reluctance or inability to escape the influence of their old friends. It is a

difficult situation for many athletes who are suddenly multi-millionaires. They need people around them who they can trust, as most of us would, so they turn to their old friends. Yet, for many athletes their oldest friends still have ties to the old neighborhoods and the criminal element that comes with it. The problem with “ghetto loyalty” is that often the “friends” do not have the player’s best interest in mind and may take advantage of the player’s new-found wealth and celebrity status. Many of their neighborhood friends have not left their criminal behavior behind. However, these friends may be the only people that the player feels comfortable with and feels that he can trust. According to a *Sports Illustrated* article on Michael Vick,¹⁸ there are four reasons why this loyalty is felt so strongly by the athlete. First, many of the players from crime- and gang-ridden neighborhoods are given a “pass” when they are growing up; they are left alone because the community recognizes that they have a shot to be a star. However, this “pass” leads to a sense of indebtedness for the player when they make it big. Also, for many of these athletes, these friends may have been the only people there for them since they were a child which creates strong bonds. There is also pressure to give back to the community and for the player not to forget where he came from. And finally, many of the players are fearful and may only feel safe when they surround themselves with people they have known for a long time.

At a professional level, athletes have away games and travel to other cities to play their matches, leaving their families at home. This is nothing earth-shattering; however, when you plug this into crime patterns you find that it has a significant effect. Spending periods of time apart may cause problems in the home environment which can have an effect on family cohesion and is a major issue with athletes’ arrests. Breakups of marriage and instances of domestic violence can be the result of intense training and team obligations. This weakening of family ties and lack of a stable home where the entire family is together puts an elite athlete into a cohort that has some of the key characteristics indicative of a fatherless family. Of course the money and fame help with some issues, but it can also be a double-edged sword in terms of exposure and accessibility to the formal legal structure.¹⁹

Cultural spillover theory is very helpful in understanding the connection between professional athletes and criminal behavior. The main idea behind cultural spillover theory is that the more any given culture (including a subculture) tends to endorse the use of violence to attain socially approved ends, the greater the likelihood that this “legitimate violence” will be generalized to other aspects of life where the use of violence is less socially approved.²⁰ Put differently, cultural support for the use of violence in one area of life may “spill over” into other areas of life where its

use may be inappropriate. An example of this theory in effect is previous research that has demonstrated that rates of domestic violence are higher among couples where at least one person is on active duty. The finding suggests that the violence that is taught and used in the military spills over into a soldier's other areas of life, with his or her spouse, where the violence is not appropriate.

The theory draws many of its ideas from subculture theory which states that the norms and values of the group that you belong to may differ from the wider society. In some violent subcultures there are support, rewards, and encouragement of violence, which makes violent behavior more likely. Some occupations, like police officers, can be viewed as subcultures where workers adhere to a set of norms and values that may be unique to the job. If you think of professional athletes and their occupation, the term "violent occupational subculture" could apply. Within their occupation, violence is seen as legitimate and rewarded. This legitimate use of violence in one aspect of the athlete's life may spill over into other aspects of their lives as well. As Bloom and Smith argue in their article about hockey players and violence:

The legitimization-of-violence thesis suggests that hockey players who approve of violence that is generally considered acceptable within the context of the game, may also approve of more illegitimate violence in other social settings and behave accordingly.²¹

Cultural spillover theory builds on these ideas and suggests that the more a culture supports legitimate violence to attain its goals, the more illegitimate violence will occur in that society. So sports in which violence is encouraged and rewarded may see an increase of illegal violence among its participants. This theory holds promise for looking at criminal behavior among boxers, hockey players, football players, Ultimate Fighting Championship fighters, and other sports in which violence is an integral part of the game. A study by Bloom and Smith found that players from the more competitive Canadian hockey leagues were more likely to approve of violence and to act violently in non-sport settings than players in less competitive leagues and non-hockey players.²² An article in *The Indiana Law Journal* suggests that:

The most commonly asserted arguments to explain the possible higher incidence of criminal activity among athletes are that athletes' disregard for rules, violence against women, and drug related activities result from a combination of factors: athletes are conditioned to believe that they are entitled to behave that way; athletic competition and their subculture of sports perpetuate drug use; and the subculture of men's sports devalues women and encourages violence.²³

Even on the professional level, when dealing with men in their twenties, many of the explanations of criminal behavior among athletes deal with their peer group and subcultures that they belong to. These ideas are demonstrated most clearly with the case of former Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick.

HIGH PROFILE EXAMPLE: MICHAEL VICK

Michael Vick was an electrifying player from his first year as a quarterback at Virginia Tech University. In 1999, Vick, after being red-shirted his freshman year, led Virginia Tech to an 11-1 record and became an instant sensation across the country. Vick continued to excel as a sophomore and following the end of the season decided to enter the NFL draft. Vick, whose family was still living in the housing project where he grew up, was taken with the number one overall pick by the Atlanta Falcons. As a rookie with the Falcons, Vick became one of the most talked about players in the league. His ability to run as a quarterback made him a unique talent. Vick became a Pro-Bowler in his second year, leading the Falcons to the playoffs. However, off-field problems started to surface for the young player. In November 2006, he was fined \$10,000 by the league for making obscene gestures to the home fans while leaving the field. Then in January, Vick's water bottle was confiscated going through airport security when they found a "marijuana-like" substance in a hidden compartment in the bottle. Laboratory tests would later conclude that the substance was not marijuana and no charges were filed. These were minor events compared to the discovery of a dog fighting operation at one of Vick's Virginia homes in April 2007. A small complex of sheds used for training and fighting the dogs was discovered behind the main house where the police removed 54 dogs (when the police searched the house again in June, they discovered the remains of seven more dogs) along with a so-called rape stand used to hold dogs in place for mating, an electronic treadmill modified for dogs, and bloody carpeting.²⁴

The operation, named "Bad Newz Kennels," was run by Vick along with Purnell Peace, Quanis Phillips, and Tony Taylor. Police discovered a series of dogfights in which the operation participated, including several fights in the fall of 2003 when Vick was sidelined with a broken leg. Vick was charged in July 2007. The indictment revealed that in April 2007 Vick, along with Peace and Phillips, "executed approximately eight dogs that did not perform well in 'testing' sessions by various methods, including hanging, drowning and/or slamming at least one dog's body to the

ground.”²⁵ They were charged with felony charges of conspiring to travel in interstate commerce in aid of unlawful activities and conspiring to sponsor a dog in an animal-fighting venture. After Vick’s associates all reached plea agreements and agreed to testify against him, he reached his own agreement on August 24, 2007. He pled guilty to one felony count of conspiracy to operate an interstate dog fighting operation. Vick admitted to providing most of the financing for the operation, as well as participating directly in several dog fights in Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, and South Carolina. He also admitted to sharing in the proceeds from these dog fights. Additionally, he acknowledged that he knew his associates killed several dogs that didn’t perform well. However, he denied actually killing any dogs himself. While awaiting sentencing, Vick failed a drug test in September 2007 and was placed under house arrest until sentencing. He entered prison early to begin serving his time in order to be released earlier and hopefully resume his football career. In December 2007, he was sentenced to 23 months in prison, more than Peace, Phillips, and Taylor and also more than the 12 to 18 months prosecutors originally suggested as part of Vick’s plea agreement. The lengthier sentence was handed down because the judge said Vick lied about the extent of his involvement with the operation.²⁶ On July 20, 2009, Vick was released after serving 18 months in prison and an additional two months in home confinement. A week after being released, he was conditionally reinstated by NFL commissioner Roger Godell. After being reinstated, he was signed by the Philadelphia Eagles on August 13, 2009, to a two-year contract (he was fully reinstated and played in Week 3 of the season).²⁷ Eagles coach Andy Reid, after saying “This is America—we do make mistakes,” continued with, “I’m a believer that as long as people go through the right process, they deserve a second chance.”²⁸ Eagles team president Joe Banner had similar sentiments on Vick: “It was very tough initially, but everybody we talked to said the same thing, that he was remorseful and that he had gone through an incredible transformation, that he was basically good at heart. We heard this over and over again from people who felt he deserved a second chance.”

Michael Vick suffered from bad judgment throughout his career. He was never able to remove himself from his hometown. As soon as the football season was over, he would return to Newport News, Virginia, and hung out almost exclusively with his friends from childhood. Vick suffered from “ghetto loyalty” in that he was not able to escape the world and friends from where he grew up. Vick was interviewed on *60 Minutes* by James Brown days after signing with the Philadelphia Eagles. He was asked why he didn’t stop the dog fighting operation:

“When I was in prison. I was disgusted, you know, because of what I let happen to those animals,” Vick said. “I could’ve put a stop to it. I could’ve walked away from it. I could’ve shut the whole operation down.”

“But you didn’t. Why not?” Brown asked.

“But I didn’t,” Vick acknowledged.

Asked what kept him going, Vick told Brown, “Not being able to say, or tell certain people around me that, ‘Look, we can’t do this anymore. I’m concerned about my career. I’m concerned about my family’.”

For many athletes, who have never really grown up, peer pressure and not wanting to look like they have “sold out” can still have a powerful effect on their behavior.

Vick grew up in Newport News, Virginia, with two sisters and a younger brother. His brother, also a football player, has had his own share of criminal problems. Marcus Vick followed his brother to Virginia Tech University to play quarterback. He was redshirted and did not play his freshman year in 2002; the following year he served as the back-up quarterback. Then as he was entering his third year at Virginia Tech he was suspended for the 2004 season after two off-field incidents. In May 2004, he was convicted of three counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Vick, along with two teammates, had provided alcohol to 14- and 15-year-old girls. He was sentenced to 30 days in jail and fined. The second incident involved a July 3, 2004, traffic stop in which Vick eventually pled guilty to reckless driving and no contest to marijuana possession. He was fined \$300, had his license suspended for 60 days, and was ordered to complete 24 hours of community service.²⁹ He was readmitted to the football program in January 2005. During the 2005 season, Vick was the quarterback who led Virginia Tech to an 11-2 record and a Gator Bowl victory. However, the Bowl victory did not go by without incident as Vick stomped on the leg of Elvis Dumervil, a Louisville defensive end. Vick was subsequently kicked out of Virginia Tech after school officials learned about another off-field incident for driving with a suspended or revoked driver’s license and speeding; these were Vick’s eighth and ninth traffic offenses since he enrolled at Virginia Tech in 2002. The president of the university stated that Vick was kicked off the team “due to a cumulative effect of legal infractions and unsportsmanlike play.”³⁰

After being dismissed from Virginia Tech, Marcus Vick declared himself eligible for the NFL draft. Days after his declaration, he was arrested in his hometown for waving a firearm at three teenagers during an altercation in the parking lot of a McDonalds. Police said the parents of a 17-year-old boy reported that Vick pointed a handgun at their son and two others.

He was not drafted in the NFL draft but was signed to a one-year contract with the Miami Dolphins, where he spent most of the season on their practice squad, only playing in one game. After the season ended he was cut from the Dolphins. He continued to have problems with the law after his release. In September 2008, he settled a lawsuit with a teenage girl who claimed she suffered psychological trauma from their nearly two-year sexual relationship. In October 2008, Vick was convicted of eluding police, driving under the influence (DUI), and driving on the wrong side of the road after an incident in June 2008 where he fled a bicycle patrol officer who observed him and a woman in a dispute. When the officer approached the car, Vick sped away. He was pulled over by another officer and failed a sobriety test. He received a 12-month suspended jail sentence on the DUI charge, had to pay \$530 in fines, and lost his license for a year. Currently, Marcus Vick is unsigned.³¹

RESEARCH ON PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES AND CRIME

While there has been a limited amount of research examining professional athletes and criminal behavior, there has been no shortage of media coverage of the subject. Although media coverage alone is not enough to suggest there is a problem, the fact that in 1997 the NFL introduced its own anti-crime policy should provide some evidence that criminal behavior is a concern among professional athletes. The policy initially led to fines and/or mandated counseling for players who had pled guilty to violent crimes or accepted plea bargains. Paul Tagliabue, the commissioner of the league stated, “as an organization whose continued success depends on integrity and public confidence, the NFL simply cannot tolerate conduct that victimizes other individuals and results in a loss of respect for NFL players.” In 1998, the league began fining employees for violations. Crimes that fall under the league’s programs include the use or threat of physical violence, the use of a deadly weapon, illegal possession of a weapon, hate crimes, the destruction of property, and domestic violence. Any NFL employee or player charged with one of these crimes must undergo counseling. A conviction or guilty plea will subject the player to a fine or the possibility of suspension without pay as determined by the commissioner. Under the policy, a longer suspension, and possibly banishment, can follow a second conviction.³²

Jeff Benedict and Don Yaeger did a study on NFL players’ criminal behavior which revealed that 21% of them had been formally charged with a serious crime (the findings vary by race with 28% of black players and 9% of white players having an arrest). The authors note that the percentage of players with a criminal record is conservative and is likely

higher (especially because juvenile offenses were not included). They examined players during the 1996–1997 season and concluded:

NFL teams are recruiting a new breed of criminal players, the likes of which should disturb all NFL fans. Gone are the good old days of NFL recruits having rap sheets detailing merely drunken brawls and vandalism. In are the days of lethal violence, rape, armed robbery, home invasion, kidnapping, and drug dealing.³³

The players who had criminal records had on average 2.42 arrests per player. Of the players with criminal records, 29% had been arrested before entering the NFL, 56% were arrested after entering the NFL, and 15% were arrested both before entering the NFL and after. After researching the crimes committed by NFL players, the authors note that the athletes are treated differently than other criminals. They are rarely held accountable for their crimes or stigmatized for their actions due to their athleticism. Simply put, the NFL's criminal players are treated differently than virtually every other criminal who commits similar crimes.³⁴

However, Jeff Benedict then did a study with Alfred Blumstein comparing the criminal violence of NFL players with the general population.³⁵ They found that the chance that a male living in a U.S. city with a population of more than 250,000 (reasonably representative of NFL cities) would be arrested for one of the offenses examined in the NFL study at one time in their lives was 23% (varying greatly by race: 51% for blacks and 14% for whites).³⁶ While recognizing some limitation in their study, they conclude that the NFL players seem to have a lower rate of violence than the general population. Their study is interesting and points out the surprisingly high percentage of the general population that has been arrested. However, there is one issue that I have with their study. They used the arrest rate of 20-year-old males for the calculations of the general population or comparison group. Although this may be a reasonable representation of the basic breakdown of NFL players, most NFL players are millionaires (the league minimum when their study was conducted was \$200,000). I am not sure if the general population is an accurate comparison group for NFL players given their income. Blumstein and Benedict recognize this issue and point out part of the image problem the NFL has:

Arrest data on these other comparison groups (those making more than \$200,000 per year) is not available. But those people would tend to be corporate executives or professionals, undoubtedly of a very different socioeconomic status, and much more likely to be exemplars of traditional anti-violence middle-class norms. Thus, even if data were available for such a group, comparison with them seems less than appropriate.³⁷

Many people believe that professional players should, because of money and celebrity, adopt a more mainstream attitude and behavior. Many fans see professional athletes as extremely blessed and lucky and think that their behavior should correspond with their now high-profile and high-paying position. While these expectations may be too high, I believe that these higher expectations of behavior are part of the problem for professional athletes and sports leagues and may lead to the increased media attention on athletes' transgressions.

In 1983, Isaiah Thomas of the Detroit Pistons stated the following regarding the image of professional athletes as criminals:

If there are 276 players in the NBA and 276 other people, of those 276 ordinary people, you're going to have 10 or 15 who don't conform to the norms of society, that do drugs. Well, that's what we have in the NBA: 10 or 15 of our 276—maybe not even that many. I think that's damned good.³⁸

However, after studying NFL players, Jeff Benedict did a similar study of NBA players and their criminal backgrounds. He used the names of the NBA's players in the 2001–2002 season (he excluded foreign-born players) and found that 40% have had formal criminal complaints for a serious crime filed against them. Benedict notes:

It should not be surprising that so many NBA players are being arrested these days. We should be surprised that players aren't being arrested even more. After all, they are, by and large, adolescents who are excessively paid and over-hyped to play a boy's game while living in a cocoon where they are pampered, protected, and never told no. When they are accused of breaking the law, handlers and the best lawyers money can buy rush to their side. Excuses are made, exceptions to the rules are demanded, and quick and dirty forgiveness is expected through lawyerly denials, public apologies, and an occasional hand-slapping in the form of a one or two-game suspension and a small fine.³⁹

In his research, he found that females were the most frequent victims of the players' criminal behavior and that police officers were second. He argues that many of these players have never been told no or held accountable for their behavior and start to believe they are above the law. Women are in a position to tell the athletes no, which can result in sexual assaults or abuse. Police officers also have the ability to tell the players no and this often results in either verbal or physical confrontations. He also found that about a third of the NBA players with an arrest record had already been in trouble with the law before leaving college (one out of

every three players with an arrest record in the NBA was arrested while on college scholarship).⁴⁰

Benedict argues that the culture of NBA players encourages many of their criminal encounters. The players are on the road for long stretches of time away from the stability of their family (possibly wife and kids), they make frequent visits to strip clubs and night clubs which can increase the chances of “getting into trouble,” and additionally he finds that many NBA players have a penchant for guns. The fact that many NBA players (and professional athletes in general) find it necessary to carry a firearm suggests many things. First, players because of their wealth and fame are at a greater risk to be criminally victimized. But part of the fear that drives gun ownership may have to do with the type of people they associate with and the places where they hang out. Professional athletes and guns will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

HIGH PROFILE EXAMPLE: ADAM “PACMAN” JONES

Football player Adam “Pacman” Jones’ name has become familiar to sports fans, not because of his accomplishments on the field (although he is a very good cornerback), but because of his repeated transgressions off the field. Jones went to college at the University of West Virginia where he left after his junior year. At West Virginia, he allegedly beat another student with a pool cue during a bar altercation. He was charged with malicious assault, a felony that eventually was reduced to a misdemeanor.⁴¹ In 2005, Jones was drafted sixth overall by the Tennessee Titans. In his two years in Tennessee he had 10 incidents requiring police attention, five arrests, no convictions, and two cases still pending.⁴² His most famous run-in with police happened in Las Vegas on February 19, 2007, during the NBA’s All-Star weekend. Jones was at a strip club when he threw thousands of dollars on the stage (known as “making it rain”). When the dancers started to collect the money, Jones allegedly grabbed one of the dancers by the hair, hitting her head against the stage. This led to an altercation between his group and the bouncers of the club which left one of the bouncers paralyzed after being shot by one of Jones’ associates. Under the NFL’s new player code of conduct policy (implemented in April 2007), Jones was suspended for a year. Commissioner Roger Goodell ushered in the policy, which takes a strong stand toward criminal behavior:

While criminal activity is clearly outside the scope of permissible conduct, and persons who engage in criminal activity will be subject to discipline, the

standard of conduct for persons employed in the NFL is considerably higher. It is not enough simply to avoid being found guilty of a crime. Instead, as an employee of the NFL or a member club, you are held to a higher standard and expected to conduct yourself in a way that is responsible, promotes the values upon which the league is based, and is lawful. Persons who fail to live up to this standard of conduct are guilty of conduct detrimental and subject to discipline, even where the conduct itself does not result in conviction of a crime.⁴³

The other football player suspended by the commissioner was Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Chris Henry, who was arrested four times in just over a year (he also played at West Virginia University with Jones).⁴⁴ Henry was suspended for eight games. He was one of nine Bengals arrested in the past nine months.⁴⁵

Adam Jones was traded to the Dallas Cowboys in 2008 and after serving a 17-month suspension was allowed to start the season. Jones joined Tank Johnson on the Cowboys, who was arrested for illegal firearm possession in December 2006 (he had three arrests in 18 months with the Chicago Bears) and was famously allowed to travel with the Chicago Bears to the Super Bowl in February 2007 while under house arrest, during which he was allowed to leave the house for work.

Jones did not last long in Dallas before he ran into trouble again in October 2008, getting into a fight with one of his bodyguards. He was suspended for four games. Jones was released by the Cowboys at the end of the season when allegations of another incident surfaced. Jones was accused of arranging to have someone shoot at three men outside of an Atlanta area strip club in June 2007 (while he was under NFL suspension). One of the alleged victims said that they were shot at as they left the club after having a dispute with Jones inside the club. Jones denied the charges and the police have not made any arrests.⁴⁶ In August 2009, Jones allegedly signed a one-year contract with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers of the Canadian Football League in hopes of making it back to the NFL. Days after the story broke, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers made an announcement that they would not be signing Jones to a contract.

The following is a chronology of Adam Jones' legal trouble:

- *April 2005*. Named on an incident report after a fight in a Georgia strip club. Case was dismissed.
- *June 2005*. Police found marijuana in a Nashville hotel room occupied by two of Jones' friends. Jones was present, but one of the friends took responsibility.

- *July 2005*. Arrested and charged with two counts of misdemeanor assault and one felony count of vandalism after a fight at a Nashville nightclub. Charges were dismissed.
- *February 2006*. Charged with felony and misdemeanor obstruction of justice after an incident outside a house in Fayetteville, Georgia.
- *March 2006*. Arrested and charged with marijuana possession in Fayetteville. Charge was dismissed.
- *April 2006*. Police said a vehicle registered to Jones was involved in a drug trafficking ring in Nashville. The car was confiscated from an acquaintance of Jones, and 1,653 pounds of marijuana, 128 pounds of cocaine, and \$608,000 were seized. Jones was not charged.
- *April 2006*. Jones was at a gas station at 1:50 A.M. when gunshots were fired after an altercation. Police questioned Jones, who was labeled as a witness.
- *August 2006*. Arrested and charged with public drunkenness and disorderly conduct after an incident at a nightclub in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. In January, a judge ruled charges would be dropped if Jones had six months of good behavior.
- *October 2006*. Issued a citation for misdemeanor assault after being accused of spitting in the face of a 21-year-old woman at a Nashville nightclub. Charge was dismissed.
- *February 2007*. Questioned by Las Vegas police after a triple shooting at a strip club left a security guard paralyzed. On March 26, police recommended prosecutors file a felony charge of coercion and misdemeanor charges of battery and threat to life against Jones.⁴⁷

Jones, like other potential draft picks coming out of college, was put through rigorous evaluations and background checks.

Prior to the 2005 draft, Jones had one issue in his past. While enrolled at West Virginia University, Jones was involved in a fight. He was arrested and put on probation for the incident. Still, coaches' evaluations, support group evaluations, educational evaluations and personality profiling of Jones were all excellent. You would be hard-pressed to find anyone inside West Virginia University who would say anything negative about him.⁴⁸

These evaluations must not have examined his past too thoroughly. Looking at Jones' upbringing offers some clues to explain his downward spiral of criminal behavior. Jones was raised by his mother, Deborah Jones, and his grandmother, Christine Jones (she died when he was a freshman in

college). His father was murdered when Jones was four years old. Deborah Jones had her own share of criminal problems, serving three years in prison. She has been quoted as saying "I have probably been to every jail in Georgia. I've sold dope. Disorderly conduct. I've done everything."⁴⁹ Pacman sounded similar in a 2005 interview he gave when he was on the Tennessee Titans: "Anything you can name, I have done it. When I walked around, everybody in the neighborhood would tell their children to stay away from me. I have been in the worst situation that there could be."⁵⁰ He flunked out of two junior high schools before attending Westlake High School and becoming a star on the football team. The head coach of the football team, Dallas Allen, remembers meeting Jones for the first time. He said that Jones walked into his office as a freshman and told him that he was going to start. Then, on the first day of school, Jones got into a fight and was suspended for the first three games.⁵¹

Like Michael Vick, Jones seemed unable to leave his past behind him when he made the NFL. Jones maintained a home in a nice suburb of Atlanta, only a few minutes from the housing project where he grew up, and spent all of his down-time there. One of Jones' former Titan teammates says that Jones' posse sometimes numbered a half dozen or more and that Jones stresses the loyalty that he feels toward his friends from the Washington Road (Atlanta) days. Jones' continuing behavior suggests a systematic disregard for authority and a potentially fatal attraction to danger,⁵² possibly some of the same characteristics that made him a star on the football field (and will probably lead another NFL team to take a chance on him).

STEROID USE AMONG ATHLETES

Steroids were not illegal until the Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 1990 which placed steroids into Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act as of February 27, 1991. The law defines steroids as any drug or hormonal substance chemically and pharmacologically related to testosterone (other than estrogens, progestins, and corticosteroids) that promote muscle growth. The possession or sale of anabolic steroids without a valid prescription is illegal. Steroids are prescribed by doctors to deal with issues related to low levels of testosterone produced by the body or issues with body wasting (for example, patients with AIDS). Federal law mandates simple possession of illicitly obtained anabolic steroids carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison and a minimum \$1,000 fine for the first offence (individual states have their own laws and penalties).

Athletes take steroids to enhance their performance and physical appearance. They are taken orally or injected in “cycles” of weeks or months. Cycling involves taking multiple doses of steroids over a specific period of time, stopping for a period, and starting again. In addition, users often combine several different types of steroids to maximize their effectiveness while minimizing negative effects (referred to as “stacking”).⁵³

The side effects for steroid abuse are a common theme among news reports, with most reports focusing on the negative effects that steroids can have on teenagers. The negative effects of steroid use on teenagers have become an increasing concern as use among high school athletes becomes more widely known. Steroids can have a devastating impact on high school athletes and was one of the biggest motivations for the Congressional committee that was formed to look at the issue. There have been a number of high school students who committed suicide after using steroids. The most well known is Taylor Hooton, whose father started the Taylor Hooton Foundation after his son committed suicide in 2003 because of the depression he suffered as a side-effect of steroid use.

The major side effects from abusing anabolic steroids can include liver tumors and cancer, jaundice, fluid retention, and high blood pressure. Other side effects include kidney tumors, severe acne, and trembling. In addition, there are some gender-specific side effects. Men often see a shrinking of the testicles, reduced sperm count, infertility, baldness, development of breast tissue, and increased risk for prostate cancer. Women sometimes start to grow facial hair and exhibit male-pattern baldness, experience changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle, and a deepened voice. The damage to teens can be the most striking with their growth halted through premature skeletal maturation and accelerated puberty changes. This means that adolescents risk remaining short for the remainder of their lives if they take anabolic steroids before the typical adolescent growth spurt.

One of the more widely discussed side effects of steroid use is “roid rage.” Research has shown that aggression and other psychiatric side effects may result from steroid abuse. Many users report feeling good about themselves while on anabolic steroids, but researchers report that extreme mood swings also can occur, including manic-like symptoms leading to violence. Depression often is seen when the drugs are stopped and may contribute to dependence on anabolic steroids. Researchers also report that users may suffer from paranoid jealousy, extreme irritability, delusions, and impaired judgment stemming from feelings of invincibility.⁵⁴ These effects can prove especially dangerous for athletes who may already be prone to aggressive behavior.

One of the more interesting aspects of the steroid issue is that the criminal implications are rarely discussed. Most of the discussion focuses on the integrity of the game or cheating in the sport but rarely is it mentioned that steroid use is illegal without a prescription. Even the athletes who have faced criminal charges related to steroids (i.e., Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Marion Jones) have done so because of perjury charges related to their testimony denying steroid use. The criminal element of steroids is almost never discussed as would be the case with a drug like cocaine or marijuana.

Steroids have been used by athletes since the 1970s (or earlier) but it has only been over the last decade that their use has come into the mainstream. The 1998 home run chase by Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa, which made a mockery of Roger Maris' long-standing single season home run record, was praised at the time as saving national interest in baseball, but is now looked back on as a direct result of steroid use by athletes. The use of steroids by baseball players became so widespread that the mid-1990s through 2005 is now referred to by many as "the steroid era" because of the astronomical number of home runs that were seen as, at least in part, due to the use of performance-enhancing drugs by the players. There have been assertions that many officials and owners in baseball were aware of the widespread use of steroids but didn't comment on it because of the positive effects it was having on the financial aspects of the game. The silence on steroid use quickly changed as public opinion and media scrutiny of the issue intensified. The issue was placed squarely in the national spotlight when President Bush gave his State of the Union address in January 2004:

To help children make right choices, they need good examples. Athletics play such an important role in our society, but, unfortunately, some in professional sports are not setting much of an example. The use of performance-enhancing drugs like steroids in baseball, football, and other sports is dangerous, and it sends the wrong message, that there are shortcuts to accomplishment, and that performance is more important than character.

This culminated in a hearing before the House Government Reform committee on March 17, 2005, in which many of the stars of baseball were called to testify. Mark McGwire, Jose Canseco, Curt Schilling, Sammy Sosa, Rafael Palmeiro, and Frank Thomas testified while Barry Bonds and Jason Giambi were not required to attend due to their involvement in the ongoing BALCO investigation. During the hearing, Rafael Palmeiro famously waved his finger at the committee members and said:

“Let me start by telling you this: I have never used steroids, period. I don’t know how to say it any more clearly than that. Never.” Palmeiro tested positive for steroids the following August and was suspended for 10 games by Major League Baseball.

The result of the hearing was increased drug testing and penalties for steroid use. Additionally, Major League Baseball recruited former senator George Mitchell to conduct an investigation of the steroid era, which resulted in the “Mitchell Report.” The Mitchell Report examined the use of steroids in baseball and named 86 players linked to steroids (including seven Most Valuable Players [MVPs] and 31 All-Stars). The report concluded that Major League Baseball was slow to react to steroid use and laid out a testing plan for the league to move forward.

For a first positive steroid test, a player is suspended for 50 games by Major League Baseball. A second positive test carries a 100-game suspension and a third positive test carries a lifetime ban. This policy was implemented in November 2005 after Congress chastised MLB for its lenient policy that was put in place in January 2005, before the Congressional hearing (first offense, 10 games; second, 20 games; third, 60 games; fourth, one year; and fifth, commissioner’s decision). However, this was a sharp increase over the policy that had been in place since 2002, where a first offense carried counseling as its penalty.

The NFL began testing players for steroids in 1989, with a first positive test resulting in a minimum four-game suspension, a second positive test carrying a six-game minimum, and a third positive test resulting in a one-year minimum suspension. According to a health survey of 2,552 retired NFL players from the 1940s to the 1990s, 20.3% of the players from the 1980s answered yes when asked “During the time in which it was acceptable to use performance-enhancing steroids, did you use steroids?” The study found that use was the most frequent in the years just prior to the NFL testing policy. Of all of the retired players, 9.1% answered yes to the question. Offensive linemen (16.3%) and defensive linemen (14.8%) reported the highest proportion of steroid use. The study also found that those who used steroids had significantly higher rates of herniated disks, knee ligament injuries, and meniscus injuries. In addition they indicated more elbow, foot, ankle, and toe problems than those who said they played steroid-free. It also found a link between steroids and depression, attention deficit disorder, and increased alcohol consumption.⁵⁵

The NBA began testing for steroids in 1999, with a first positive test resulting in a five-game suspension, a second positive resulting in a 10-game suspension, and third offense coming with a 25-game suspension. After being scolded by members of Congress during their hearing on performance-enhancing drugs

in sports, the NBA increased their penalties. The NBA's current policy is a 10-game penalty for the first offense, the second infraction is 25 games, and the third a full season. It's not until the fourth strike that a player is banned from the league. The National Hockey League began testing for steroids during the 2004–2005 season. For a first violation, a player is suspended for 20 games, 60 games for a second violation, and a permanent ban for a third violation.⁵⁶ The Olympics has the strictest testing system with a two-year ban for one positive test followed by a lifetime ban for a second positive test.

The NCAA tests Division I and II athletes randomly for steroids throughout the year and during championship or playoff rounds. Following a first positive test, an athlete cannot compete in any intercollegiate sport for one year and loses one of four years of eligibility. After the second positive test, the athlete loses all remaining eligibility and is permanently banned from intercollegiate competition.⁵⁷

Steroid use has become an important topic for high school athletes as well. In 2006, New Jersey became the first state to institute a statewide steroid-testing policy for high school athletes, followed by Florida in 2007. In 2008, Texas began a massive testing program, testing between 40,000 and 50,000 students a year (only two people tested positive out of the first 10,000 students).⁵⁸ Penalties vary greatly by state: Texas suspends athletes for 30 days for the first positive test, 90 days for Florida, and one year in New Jersey.⁵⁹

Studies show that between 2.7% to 3.5% percent of high school seniors have used steroids at some time in their lives with 1.8% having used in the past year.⁶⁰ Males consistently report higher rates of use than females; for example, in 2008, 2.5% of 12th-grade males versus 0.6% of 12th-grade females reported past-year use. The NCAA on average finds between 1% and 2% positive tests for steroids with its testing program.

HIGH PROFILE EXAMPLE: BARRY BONDS AND BALCO (BAY AREA LAB COOPERATIVE)

Barry Bonds has become the face of the steroid issue. Bonds was an all-star player for the Pittsburgh Pirates beginning in 1986 and winning two Most Valuable Player awards with the Pirates. In 1993, he signed with the San Francisco Giants and his appearance and level of play changed. Bonds began hitting home runs at a record rate, first beating the single season home run record in 2001 and then topping the career home run record in 2007. Bonds was not signed by a team in 2008. All of this happened under increasing speculation about his steroid use.

In 1998, Bonds reconnected with a boyhood friend and personal trainer Greg Anderson. Bonds hired Anderson as his trainer and started to receive supplements from him after undergoing blood and urine analysis at the Bay Area Lab Cooperative (BALCO). Bonds did a photo shoot promoting BALCO's nutritional supplements.⁶¹ On September 5, 2003, BALCO was raided by federal investigators and its owner Victor Conte was arrested.⁶² The BALCO grand jury heard many athletes testify about their association with BALCO. Bonds, along with baseball players Jason Giambi, Gary Sheffield, Benito Santiago, football players Bill Romanowski and Barrett Robbins, track and field stars Marion Jones and Tim Montgomery, and boxer Shane Mosley were among the athletes who testified. The BALCO scandal became the focal point of the steroid discussion as players' testimony, which was supposed to be confidential, was leaked to the media. Bonds denied ever knowingly using steroids. On December 3, 2004, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on Bond's grand jury testimony that he admitted to unknowingly using steroids known as "the clear" and "the cream" during the 2003 season. Bonds said his personal trainer, Greg Anderson, provided the steroids. His denials would lead to subsequent federal charges of perjury and obstruction of justice in November 2007.

Victor Conte and Greg Anderson, Bond's personal trainer, were indicted in February 2004 for various charges related to steroid distribution. On July 15, 2005, Conte pled guilty to steroid distribution and money laundering in a deal with federal prosecutors and spent four months in prison and four months under house arrest. Anderson pled guilty to the same charges in exchange for a six-month prison sentence of which he served three months in prison and three months under house arrest. Adding more intrigue to the case, in 2006 Anderson was subpoenaed to testify in a grand jury investigating Bond's perjury during the grand jury investigating BALCO. Anderson refused to testify and was imprisoned on contempt of court charges. Additionally, *San Francisco Chronicle* reporters Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada, who reported on the leaked BALCO grand jury testimony and subsequently wrote the book *Game of Shadows* about the case, were called to testify about their sources. The reporters refused to reveal their source and were threatened with jail time for contempt of court. Before the reporters were sentenced to prison, one of Victor Conte's attorneys, Troy Ellerman, admitted that he allowed *San Francisco Chronicle* reporters Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada to view transcripts of the grand jury testimony of baseball stars Barry Bonds, Jason Giambi, and Gary Sheffield, and sprinter Tim Montgomery. On July 12, 2007, Ellerman was sentenced to 30 months in prison, of which he served 16 months. Barry Bonds' trial is scheduled to begin in 2010.

Just as it looked like Bonds would be the biggest star linked to steroids, in February 2009, *Sports Illustrated* revealed that New York Yankees' third baseman Alex Rodriguez, widely considered the best player in baseball, had failed a steroid test in 2003. Two days later, Rodriguez admitted to using steroids from 2001 to 2003. His connection to steroids was a big blow to the sport as many saw him as the future home run king who could restore some legitimacy to the record that had been tarnished by Bonds. One of the interesting aspects of the Rodriguez story is the test itself. The Major League Baseball Player's Association (MLBPA) agreed to confidential survey testing for steroids in 2003. There were to be no penalties associated with the tests and the names of those who failed were to remain sealed. The intent of the test was to see if more than 5% of players were using steroids. If the 5% threshold was reached, then mandatory testing would begin the following year with penalties attached to positive tests. The survey test revealed 104 positives, a few percentage points above the 5% mark. Rather than destroying the tests or the list of positive players, the MLBPA union wanted to fight some of the positive tests as false positives in hope of getting the percentage of positive tests below 5% (thus avoiding mandatory testing for its players). This was all happening while the federal government was investigating Barry Bonds and the BALCO case. When the federal investigators working on the BALCO case learned of the survey steroid test, they asked the MLBPA union for the test results of the 10 baseball players that were associated with BALCO. The union refused to turn over the tests for the "BALCO ten." The federal investigators, not pleased with the refusal, returned with a subpoena for all the tests. So the confidential test and list of positive baseball players, while still sealed, was now in the hands of more people. Other names from the list, including Sammy Sosa, Manny Ramirez (who also was suspended 50 games during the 2009 season for testing positive), and David Ortiz, have surfaced in the newspapers as well. In August 2009, a federal appeals court ruled that federal investigators acted inappropriately when they seized all of the names on the steroid list.⁶³

ATHLETES AND GUNS

Professional athletes, most of us came from the streets. We feel like we know the streets and can pretty much protect ourselves. But now we're in a position where we're being targeted, and the stakes are just too high.

NBA player Ben Wallace⁶⁴

Estimates vary but anywhere from 20% to 80% of Major League Baseball, NBA, and NFL players own guns. There are no reliable statistics as

many states do not make available to the public the names of registered gun owners. It is also hard to determine given the number of illegal guns and the differences in (or lack of) registration requirements for guns used for hunting (like shotguns). Whatever the percentage, guns have become part of the athlete's world. This may simply reflect a broader trend across the country, as the percentage of people across the country who own guns is around 30% with nearly 40% indicating that there is a gun in their house. The percentage is even higher among men, with 47% indicating gun ownership, with nearly two-thirds indicating that they have a gun for crime protection.⁶⁵ Thus, it is not surprising given athletes' wealth that many feel compelled to own a gun for protection. So while most estimates place gun ownership among athletes over 50%, it may not simply be ownership but rather use or even misuse of guns that is at issue.

Gun related incidents are not confined to the professional ranks:

University of Nevada point guard Armon Johnson and four other Wolf Pack athletes were involved in incidents that led to Ahyaro Phillips being arrested and dismissed from the basketball team for carrying a handgun on campus. Phillips was arrested for carrying a gun after he confronted two football players on campus following an earlier altercation with them at an off-campus party, Nevada athletic officials said.⁶⁶

There have been a number of high-profile incidents involving professional athletes and guns. In 2008, New York Giants wide receiver Plaxico Burress shot himself in the leg with an unregistered handgun inside a New York City nightclub. In addition to Burress, football players Pacman Jones (previously discussed), Tank Williams, and Marshawn Lynch, along with NBA players Allen Iverson and Gilbert Arenas, have faced illegal gun charges. Most recently, on September 24, 2009, Cleveland Cavaliers guard Delonte West was stopped for speeding on his motorcycle in Maryland. Police found a loaded handgun in his waistband, another gun strapped to his leg, and a loaded shotgun in a guitar case on his back.⁶⁷

One of the more noteworthy incidents involved Seattle Seahawks receiver Brian Blades. On July 5, 1995, Blades shot his cousin Charles Blades dead after an argument. He was charged with manslaughter in the death of his cousin. Blades maintained that the death was accidental.⁶⁸ According to police, the semiautomatic handgun went off in close range and hit the bottom of his cousin's chin. Brian Blades called 911, indicating that the gun had gone off accidentally. According to testimony, Brian Blades and his brother, Bennie, who plays safety for the Detroit Lions, went out the night of the incident with some friends. They were called back to Bennie Blades'

house when they heard that Bennie's former girlfriend wanted to pick up the child that Bennie had fathered. During a dispute between Bennie and his former girlfriend, Brian got involved and Bennie shoved Brian. Brian got angry and went back to his townhouse to get his gun. Brian's cousin Charles Blades went after Brian to try and calm him down. Their friends also went back to Brian's townhouse and heard a struggle between Brian and his cousin. They heard Brian say, "Let loose the gun," and heard Charles say, "Put the gun down."⁶⁹ Then the gun went off, hitting Charles under the chin and killing him. Then another shot went off; a bullet was found in the office desk. Brian Blades then called 911. One of the friends, Wilbur Peterson, went inside to try and calm Brian down. Peterson called 911 as well. He said that during his call, Blades picked up the handgun and pulled the trigger, although it was not clear where the gun was pointed. The chamber was empty, police said, thus no shot was fired.⁷⁰

On June 14, 1996, after a week-long trial, Blades was found guilty of manslaughter and faced up to nine and half years in prison.⁷¹ However, even before the verdict had been returned, defense attorneys filed a motion contending that the prosecution had not proved that Blades had acted with culpable negligence in the death of his cousin. The next day in court, the trial judge reversed the jury verdict, agreeing with the defense attorneys' motion.⁷² Blades played for the Seattle Seahawks until his retirement in 1998.

Another noteworthy gun incident involved the NBA's Stephen Jackson. Jackson (discussed in the following chapter for his involvement in the brawl that took place between players and fans during a game in Detroit) and three of his teammates, Jamaal Tinsley, Marquis Daniels, and Jimmie Hunter, left a strip club and were followed by a group of men. After some words were exchanged, one of the men hit Jackson with his car. Jackson took out his gun and fired five shots into the air. The car drove off and the police arrived. The police found a small amount of marijuana in the passenger-side door of Tinsley's car along with Tinsley's and Daniels' guns (all of the guns had the proper permits). Indiana Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said the players committed an "error in judgment" by staying out late during training camp.⁷³ Jackson, who was the only player charged with a crime, eventually pled guilty to a felony count of criminal recklessness for firing the gun. He was fined \$5,000 and had to perform 100 hours of community service. He was suspended for the first seven games of the 2007–2008 basketball season.⁷⁴ Deon Willford, who hit Jackson with his car during the incident, was convicted of felony battery and sentenced to two years in prison, two years probation, and 100 hours of community service.⁷⁵

The NBA and NFL have similar policies regarding players and guns, each noting that even if players are licensed to carry a gun, they cannot carry them into stadiums and arenas, practice facilities, or on team planes.⁷⁶ The NFL's official advice: "In some circumstances, such as for sport or protection, you may legally possess a firearm or other weapon. However, we strongly recommend that you not do so."⁷⁷ Shortly after Stephen Jackson's arrest, the commissioner of the NBA said he is against NBA players carrying guns in public: "I don't think it's necessary to walk the streets packing a gun. I think it's dangerous for our players."⁷⁸ Roger Goodell, who has taken a strong stance against criminal behavior among NFL players, has handed down penalties for gun-related incidents. Before Chicago Bears defensive tackle Tank Johnson was found guilty for illegal firearm possession (he had a previous arrest for illegal firearms), Goodell suspended Johnson from the league for half of the 2007 NFL season.⁷⁹

Even with league policies in place, an increasing number of athletes continue to carry guns. While many athletes are some of the biggest and strongest people on the planet, many carry guns for protection. The players believe more and more that they are a target for criminals. With their astronomical salaries, glamorous lifestyles, and celebrity status, many athletes are living in fear for their safety. Their fears have been fueled by a rash of recent incidents involving athletes. For example, a few of the stories involving athletes since 2007:

- In 2007, Miami Heat forward Antoine Walker, along with a cousin, was accosted and robbed at gunpoint inside Walker's home in an exclusive section of Chicago. Walker was confronted in his garage, bound with duct tape, and robbed of thousands of dollars in cash and jewelry, as well as his Mercedes.
- A few weeks after Walker's robbery, New York Knicks center Eddy Curry, his wife, and an employee were similarly robbed and tied up at Curry's home in suburban Chicago. Police believe it was the same group who robbed Walker. The group fled Curry's house with \$10,000 in cash and several pieces of jewelry.⁸⁰
- Houston Rockets forward Carl Landry suffered a minor leg injury after a gunman opened fire on his vehicle just hours after the team had returned to Houston after a game against the Hornets.⁸¹
- Denver Broncos cornerback Darrent Williams was killed when a gunman sprayed the stretch Hummer in which he was riding in downtown Denver early on New Year's Day.
- Washington Redskins safety Sean Taylor was shot and killed inside his South Florida home by intruders.

- In 2008, Oakland Raiders wide receiver Javon Walker was beaten and robbed in Las Vegas.
- Jacksonville Jaguars offensive tackle Richard Collier was shot as he sat in a vehicle with a former teammate, resulting in his paralysis.

Although these examples might not necessarily constitute a crime wave, it may be understandable why more athletes are looking for protection.⁸² The story of Sean Taylor was most troublesome for athletes as he was in his home when robbers entered his house. Taylor, who was in his bedroom with his girlfriend, picked up a machete that he kept next to his bed when he heard noises in the house. The machete did him no good as the attackers came through the bedroom door, and shooting him in the thigh and severing his femoral artery.⁸³ Taylor died the following morning at the hospital. This was not the first time that someone broke into his house; on November 17, an intruder slipped through a front window of his house and went through drawers and a safe but apparently did not steal anything. No one was home at the time.⁸⁴ Taylor's death received national attention and he was mourned across the NFL. He was the second NFL player to be shot dead during the year; Denver Broncos cornerback Darrent Williams was shot and killed in his rented limousine as he was leaving a New Year's Eve party.

Ironically, Taylor had been in trouble with firearms previously. In June 2005, Taylor was arrested and charged with felony assault and battery after he pointed a gun at three men outside a house and accused them of stealing two all-terrain vehicles from him. Taylor, accompanied by several people, assaulted one of the men and made death threats before driving off. Minutes later, a group of men drove by Taylor's parked SUV and shot it with bullets from an AK-47 and a pistol. Taylor's vehicle was empty at the time, and the gunmen were never identified or arrested. Prosecutors negotiated a plea deal with Taylor and agreed to drop the felony charges. He was sentenced to 18 months probation and pledged to donate time and money to various charities and schools in southern Florida.⁸⁵ Five men (aged 17 to 20 years old) were arrested for the break-in and murder of Taylor. Two of the men had connections to Taylor (one dated his sister and had been to a party at his house, while another one had cut the grass and been to a birthday party at the house) and stated that they did not expect Taylor to be home when they broke in (Taylor was not with the Redskins because of an injury).⁸⁶ In May 2008, one of the five arrested pled guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 29 years. As part of the plea, he agreed to testify against the other defendants in their trials.⁸⁷

Taylor's story only reinforced to many athletes the belief that they need a gun to protect themselves. While his story is a terrible tragedy, others think athletes can reduce their risk of victimization by being more careful about where they go and with whom they associate. Former Utah Jazz forward and Hall of Fame player Karl Malone, who is a member of the National Rifle Association (NRA) and strong supporter of the right to bear arms, does not believe players should be arming themselves for protection but rather should stop hanging out in places of risk. He said:

Three A.M.? My goodness gracious, what were you doing out at 3 o'clock in the morning? Who were you with? Where were you at? Do you need a gun to protect you or do you need a babysitter to get you where you need to be all the time so that you don't get in any trouble?⁸⁸

Although protection from crime, given their enormous wealth, may be the most cited reason for gun ownership, there are other factors as well. For example, many professional athletes come from crime-ridden areas and do not abandon their home or childhood friends. Many athletes, like Michael Vick, for example, maintain close ties with their friends from growing up and continue to hang out in their old neighborhoods.⁸⁹ This makes them targets not only because of their wealth but also jealousy, which is a powerful motivator. Many people in the community may be jealous of the attention that the star athlete receives, especially when this attention comes from women.⁹⁰

This also points to a cultural reason for gun ownership. Many athletes are from rough inner city neighborhoods where, unfortunately, guns are a part of life. Chicago Bears linebacker Bryan Cox, who owns seven guns, said: "Where I'm from in East St. Louis, a gun was like a credit card; you didn't leave home without it." In contrast, many other athletes are from rural areas where hunting is common. Carolina Panthers tight end Wesley Walls said he grew up hunting in the woods of Mississippi and that shooting a gun was part of everyday life.⁹¹ Additionally, guns have become part of the culture for athletes with some viewing them as a status symbol or simply "cool."

Sports, especially football, are getting more violent. Players get bigger and stronger and more athletic. And they hit harder. Their daily routine is about aggressiveness and violence, and maybe they take that into their leisure time, too. So for some, even their relaxing time is rough-edged. But in some cases, there seems to be a street-cred thing, too. Some athletes find themselves with so much money, and the guns are a sort of bling.⁹²

In *Taking Sports Seriously: Law and Sports in Contemporary American Culture*, Standen says that while athletes' fame and money make them targets for

crime, “athletes are no more rich and famous than actors or musicians. Yet players appear to come up on the police blotter as both perpetrators and victims of gun-related incidents far more than most other celebrities.”⁹³ Many actors and musicians may not feel pressure to maintain a “rough edge” so don’t mind paying a bodyguard to be the one carrying a gun. Likewise, while athletes make a lot of money, many do not make nearly as much as some actors or musicians who can afford to pay for security.

HIGH PROFILE EXAMPLE: NEW JERSEY NETS’ JAYSON WILLIAMS

Jayson Williams was one of the leading rebounders in the NBA before his career was cut short by leg and knee injuries in April 1999. He played for nine seasons, the last seven with the New Jersey Nets. After the injury, Williams became a studio announcer on NBC’s NBA coverage and became a visible celebrity at many charity events. On February 15, 2002, Williams hired Costas Christofi to drive friends (along with some of the Globetrotters) from a charity sporting event featuring the Harlem Globetrotters in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to a restaurant in Hunterdon County, then to Williams’ nearby 30,000 square-foot estate.⁹⁴

After arriving at Williams’ place, Christofi was invited inside to take a tour of the home. Christofi, who was a basketball fan, was excited to be permitted in the house. Williams, who had been drinking (a state police test of his blood, taken eight hours later, showed his blood alcohol level to be 0.12%, or 0.02 percentage points higher than the state’s legal definition of intoxication in 2002), led the group on the tour which took them up to his bedroom. According to testimony at his trial, Williams appeared in his bedroom with a 12-gauge Browning Citori shotgun. Shortly after entering the bedroom, Christofi was hit in the torso by 12 buckshot pellets fired from the gun. According to a witness, Williams said: “Oh, my God. What just happened? My life is over.”⁹⁵ Rather than call for an ambulance, Williams changed his clothes and then conspired with the other guests to make the death look like a suicide. He coached his guests on what they should tell the police while a friend wiped Williams’ fingerprints from the gun and later buried his blood-splattered clothes off a highway.⁹⁶ Christofi bled to death before the police arrived about a half-hour later.

After initially sticking to Williams’ story to the police, the story began to unravel with the coroner’s report, police suspicions, and witnesses coming forward. On February 25, Williams was charged with reckless manslaughter and four counts related to the cover-up of the death (the grand jury added aggravated manslaughter to the charges after finding that Williams’ actions had shown “extreme indifference to human life”).⁹⁷ Before the start of the

criminal trial, Williams settled a civil suit with Christofi's family for \$2.75 million.⁹⁸

After a 15-week trial in 2004, Williams was acquitted of aggravated manslaughter and two other serious charges in Christofi's death and a mistrial was declared on the reckless manslaughter charge. He was convicted of four other lesser charges that he had covered up his involvement in the shooting. The judge did not set a sentencing date because the prosecution was entitled to retry Williams on the deadlocked reckless manslaughter charge.⁹⁹ A few weeks later the prosecutors announced that Williams would be retried on the charge of reckless manslaughter. The retrial is still pending.

This was not the first gun-related incident for Williams. In 1994, he agreed to enter a first-time offenders program after he was charged with reckless endangerment and unlawful possession of a weapon for firing his Sig Sauer automatic pistol at a security van outside the Meadowlands arena, where the Nets played. Over the objections of the prosecutor at the time, the judge accepted Williams' application to have the charges dropped in exchange for agreeing to take out ads in the local newspaper denouncing the dangers of guns, and for giving talks to young people on the dangers of drugs and guns.¹⁰⁰

Then in 2001, about six months before the Christofi shooting, Williams had been drinking in a restaurant with two friends, including Dwayne Schintzius, a former professional basketball player who was staying at Williams' estate at the time. After the three men returned to Williams' house, Schintzius bet Williams \$100 that he could drag one of Williams' watchdogs (a Rottweiler) out of the home. Schintzius won the bet, by dragging the dog by its legs out of the house. When Williams left the area, Schintzius thought he went to get the \$100. He came back with a shotgun and fired two rounds at the dog, nearly decapitating it. Williams then reloaded the weapon, pointed it at Schintzius and told him, using a profanity, to get the "dog off my porch or you're next."¹⁰¹ The prosecutors in his 2004 manslaughter trial learned of the dog shooting in an anonymous letter mailed to them; the judge ruled that it was inadmissible at the trial.

While awaiting the retrial, Williams continues to make news. In April 2009, he was stunned with a Taser by New York police officers after he resisted attempts by the officers to take him to a hospital. The police were called to a hotel in Manhattan around 4 A.M. when a female friend reported Williams was acting suicidal. When officers arrived, the 6-foot-10, 325-pound Williams appeared drunk and agitated, the police said. Then on May 24, 2009, Williams was arrested for allegedly punching a man in the face at a bar in Raleigh, North Carolina. He was charged with simple assault. The charges were later dropped by the victim.¹⁰² Additionally, his wife filed for divorce claiming he was abusive, adulterous, and had a drug problem.¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

On July 28, 2009, New Orleans Saints running back Reggie Bush broke up with his girlfriend Kim Kardashian. ESPN's Sportscenter considered this breaking news and covered the story at the top of the show. In a world where professional athletes' break-ups are news, it is no wonder that any criminal transgression receives intense media coverage. Although the media may be guaranteed to cover the crimes of professional athletes, making the problem look worse than it really is, there is no denying that there are serious criminal incidents involving professional athletes

Carolina Panthers wide receiver Rae Carruth became the first active NFL player ever charged with first-degree murder.¹⁰⁴ In 1999, Carruth hired three men to murder Cherica Adams, a girlfriend of his, after she became pregnant. Carruth drove in a car in front of Adams; when Carruth stopped his vehicle, she stopped her car as well. A car pulled up alongside her and opened fire.¹⁰⁵ Adams survived the shooting, as did the baby who was removed from the mother by caesarian section. However, Adams died a week later from injuries related to the shooting. Carruth was acquitted of first-degree murder but was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder, shooting into an occupied vehicle, and attempting to kill an unborn child. He is serving a minimum prison sentence of 18 years, 11 months. (Van Brett Watkins, who fired the shots into Adams' car, pled guilty to second-degree murder, conspiracy to commit first-degree murder, attempting to kill an unborn child, and shooting into an occupied vehicle. He was sentenced to a minimum of 40 years, five months.)¹⁰⁶

Professional athletes, because of the lack of accountability that starts at earlier and earlier ages, in many cases develop a sense of extreme entitlement and "above the law" attitude. This attitude, mixed with the aggressive nature of many sports, can lead to violent outbursts off the field, especially when they are told "no" either by their wife, another woman, or a police officer. The combination is even more dangerous when you add to the equation guns and/or steroids, both of which are used by more and more athletes. All of these risk factors would not necessarily lead to crime, but the chance is increased by many athletes who continue to associate with friends from their old neighborhoods. Many professional athletes come from rough backgrounds and have a hard time leaving behind the negative influences of their hometown.

While the media may play a role in the perception of "athletes out of control," there is no denying that professional sports leagues have an increasing problem regarding violent behavior. It is easy to point to the fact that in earlier generations, reporters would not cover stories of players'

transgressions (for example, Babe Ruth or Mickey Mantle); thus, it just looks like today's players are behaving worse. This would not be telling the whole story. Professional athletes may simply be reflecting the larger society which is increasingly more violent or possibly are being held to a higher standard by the public who demands more of its highly paid heroes. Either way, crime is an issue that has become central to the coverage of professional sports.