

12-2011

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**The Effects of Negative Publicity on the Performance
of Professional Baseball Athletes**

Undergraduate Thesis

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December 4, 2011

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In partial fulfillment of honors requirements for the

Midway Honors Scholars program

Abstract

This study researched the effects of negative publicity on the performance of professional baseball athletes. Four athletes' performance statistics were evaluated before a scandal that produced negative publicity, during the height of the negative publicity and after the scrutiny tapered off. Chipper Jones, Wade Boggs, Alex Rodriguez and David Justice were the athletes chosen for the study, and all four athletes experienced a similar scandal and negative publicity about their personal and professional lives. The results showed an effect on performance, but it was not always negative and could not be definitively linked to the negative exposure in the media. This suggests that further research is needed and should be continued on a broader scale.

Introduction

Public relations practitioners have a responsibility to be well-armed in today's society. This means equipping themselves with the means to prepare a client for as many anticipated pitfalls that may occur throughout the person's time in the spotlight. Ranging from local to national fame, today's professional athletes are held to a standard not only within their chosen sport but also within the culture of the public. One example of this was the case of Michael Vick, the former quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons. He was convicted of participating in an illegal dog-fighting ring. An ordinary member of society would have been quietly arrested and served a prison term in relative obscurity, but because of Vick's national exposure, the crime quickly eclipsed any achievements he may have made in football. It took a considerable amount of time and brand rehabilitation for Vick to become a viable name in professional sports. These instances can be seen many times throughout the different fields of professional sports. It is only through a

firm and specific plan of action that these human errors can be overcome and allow the individual to continue to pursue their chosen profession.

The general human condition is to want to know everything about everyone, most especially if they are placed in the spotlight or considered to be famous. This tends to hold especially true for the country's athletes. Should the public really know everything that happens in the private lives of a professional athlete? Is it really anyone's business how long they have been cheating on their spouses? The public seems to think that it is not only their right but also their responsibility to hold these individuals to a higher standard of morals and propriety. Because of this "need-to-know" within the public, it then becomes the responsibility of those working for the professional athletes to manage the message that people receive. It is also not enough to say the right words to the public. Edward Bernays, widely considered the "father of public relations," stated that one must display to the public that the words they are speaking are the truth. "To win public approval, actions are more important than words," (Bernays, 1979). Those closest to the athlete must work to crystallize the public's opinion of the client through words; the images the public sees are also vitally important.

In recent months a primary person that appears to be learning the importance of image perception is Tiger Woods. With the furor that was created over his automobile accident of 2009 and the following revelations of his private life, PR practitioners should understand the necessity of controlling the message that is given to the public as well as controlling what the public sees. Woods released a brief statement to the printed press but was not seen for a considerable amount of time, leaving the media and public to speculate and wonder (ESPN news services, 2009). A responsible public relations counselor should have seen to it that there was immediate exposure to limit the amount of speculation and concentrate only on the truth of the situation. "Public

opinion is the aggregate result of individual opinions – now uniform, now conflicting – of the men and women who make up society or any group society,” (Bernays, 1961 p. 61).

Without anyone telling the public what a given situation is they will ultimately decide for themselves, devoid of any real truth or fact to confirm their ideas. No matter whether it is controlling a negative perception of something the athlete has done or denouncing a rumor that has no basis in truth, the response should be the same (Bernays, 1961). Immediate exposure to the televised media gives a message that is based solely on truth in the words the athlete wants to use. If this is not done the public will use their own words and force the athlete to respond to them (Seymour, 1991). The idea of controlling the message comes from the thought that one would rather be making a statement than answering a question. If, in that statement, a person answers all the questions before they are asked then a coup has occurred. The public will hear exactly what they need to know in a manner the celebrity or professional athlete is comfortable with, not allowing for assumptions or conjecture (Coombs, 2007).

The next issue is why should anyone care about how this, perceived to be, overpaid individual is portrayed in the public eye. A professional athlete is not someone the public needs to worry about being able to complete his or her job. They are perceived as being simply a child playing with balls, sticks and the like, instead of gifted adults that are using their talents to provide the public with entertainment. The media, teams and professional leagues created this need to be entertained by professional sports as well as fostering resentment toward the money the athletes make to provide the entertainment. This is a conundrum that may never be solved. This makes the public relations representative’s job even more difficult. Their job is to create a relationship between the public and their client (Ashford, 1970). However, if the public already has a cemented opinion of their client’s occupation and salary, what do they do to help improve

the athlete's public perception? This is where management of the athlete's image occurs. Public appearances are scheduled, charities are formed and partnerships are formed with companies that portray the image desired by the individual. Then the issues become generating an image to the public based on truth and not spin. Being a public relations representative is not an excuse to lie to the public in order to achieve a desired result. It is the avenue to which people can relate a public figure to the general public (Lesley, 1983).

Professional athletes in general tend to be placed by the public into one of two categories: beloved or hated. Some athletes, however, do fall right in the middle, but it is the athletes that are securely in one of these two categories that seem to garner the most attention. If the athlete is perceived to be the 'bad person' and they commit some moral or ethical mistake the public generally is quick to excuse the behavior due to the expected nature of the person. This is not the case when a beloved athlete commits a similar mistake. The beloved athlete is placed on a high pedestal of morality, whether it is deserved. Then when a mistake is made that tarnishes this perceived public image, the athlete is quickly vilified and denounced as someone that no longer deserves the public's attention.

The reason behind a professional athlete wanting to have a positive image is simple: endorsement opportunities. When a business is choosing which professional athlete they want to endorse their product, they look to who already fits with its image (Graham, 2011). Businesses aren't looking to change a person. They simply want an endorsement by a person of already held similar values. This is why it becomes that much more damaging for a beloved athlete's image to become negative. If they are partnered with businesses that fit their perceived status, then the image is revealed as undesirable, the business tends to dissolve the partnership. This creates a

sharp decrease in income for the athlete and the possibility of future partnerships with other businesses (Graham, 2011).

To prevent these events from occurring, it becomes the public relations practitioner's job to help the athlete control the message to the public after a damaging message occurs. This is considered crisis communication management. According to Bernstein Crisis Management, Inc., a crisis is "any situation that is threatening or could threaten to harm people or property, seriously interrupt business, damage reputation and/or negatively impact share value," (Bernstein, 1996). The portion of the aforementioned definition that does the most damage is the damaged reputation. When a professional athlete's reputation is perceived as above reproach one day and then below the worst standard the next, it creates ripples throughout their professional lives that stretch into their personal lives. There are many arguments on both sides as to whether or not this is a fair place to put one individual. In the business world rarely does one person's reputation define the reputation of a company (unless the focus is on the owner/president). However, a professional athlete's reputation affects not only his team/sport but also his/her marketability (Bernstein, 1996).

In the face of crisis, a need for a new message is created. Before a crisis the message or image of the athlete is relatively easy to control. When they do something that befits their position with the public it is perceived as normal behavior and is easy to relate the message to the public. In the face of a crisis, where the image of the athlete is diminished, the message then becomes one that is constantly questioned. It would not matter if they were helping the poor or having the best performance of their professional career, everything would be questioned by the media and their public (Riess, 1990). If they are helping the poor, it is seen as a publicity stunt, and in the highly unlikely case of them performing well in their sport, it is perceived as being

neglectful to the situation at hand. A set strategy in the face of a crisis would prevent the media and publics from creating its own message as well as become helpful to maintaining the career of the athlete. “Action and interaction are continually going on between the forces projected out to the public and the public itself,” (Bernays, 1961 p. 77).

In other words, if the message between the forces that create public opinion is managed well, then the message becomes one of truth rather than that of what the different media and public outlets choose. Strategically handling a crisis could, in turn, improve the athlete’s professional performance, as well as improving the odds that they will continue to be a viable endorsement partner (Jackson, 2011).

The question then becomes how does a beloved athlete whose public image sharply decreased in a short period of time still go out and do their job? The professional media continuously hounds them and differing types of social media outlets spring up denouncing them as a viable role model. Why were they a role model to begin with? Those professional athletes that were not considered to be of high moral nature were not held to the same standards. What makes their mistake so much worse than that of a person that was perceived to be immoral or unethical in the beginning? Can they rebuild their image and still perform at a professional level? Should they have to concentrate on rebuilding that image at all, considering the initial image may not have been one of their own making?

Hypothesis

A professional baseball players’ performance will be negatively affected by negative publicity created by a personal scandal.

Literature Review

The practice of public relations is defined many different ways. L. Roy Blumenthal defined it specifically as the “effect on the general population ... might be termed as mass conditioning,” (Blumenthal, 1972). Another definition stated in the Public Relations Handbook is that “public relations can be defined as helping an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other,” (Lesley, 1983 p. 6). Lesley’s definition works with the idea that public relations is building relationships between the client and the public. For the purposes of this research it is essential to build on a working definition of public relations as well as understand the importance of the image of a professional athlete portrayed to the public.

Early on, public relations was perceived as a practice cast in a negative light. There “was a popular tendency, egged on by certain journalists, to attribute the whole Watergate mess to ‘the public relations mentality,’” (Hill and Knowlton Executives, 1975 p. xvii). Basically, public relations was considered the way for public figures to lie their way out of a given situation. Most people within the field were looked at as “spin doctors,” making the world see a mirage of the person’s nature. Journalists in the early days of public relations were quick to put distance between them and those in the PR field. Now they both lie firmly ensconced under the social science arena of mass communications or by a broader term of communication science, which is the study of human communication (Berger et. al, 1987). This scientific approach to discovering the importance of the many different forms people use to communicate is relatively new, dating back only to the beginning of the Cold War. Most especially the research is “dedicated to the inculcation of various communication skills,” (Berger et al, 1987 p. 3) due to the need to teach students the importance of and the why they communicate to each other.

Using the knowledge of why people need to communicate to each other, a public relations representative can help their client communicate more effectively with the publics they are trying to reach. “Naturally some publicity is designed for special purposes, and the purpose will determine,” (Ashford, 1970 p. 8) what form of media is sought to take the message. Public figures such as political candidates, professional athletes, etc. generally appear to be seeking the same kind of public approval. While one wants to be elected, the other wants to sell tickets and acquire fans. Both of these people want the world to view them in a positive manner.

People perceived as great or important are looked at, as a leader in society. Such a notion is seen as the great man theory. “Carlyle, who was a firm believer in the great man theory of leadership ... would maintain that the course of human events is contained in the biographies of great men,” (Schettler, 1960 p. 113). In today’s society many of those perceived great men and women are currently employed as professional athletes. So if one accepts the great man theory, then it can further the understanding to the need to have them be people in high standing with the general public. This high standing generally means that when a misstep is taken, the crisis is considered greater than usual due to the individual being considered of higher standing within the society.

A crisis in communications occurring can mean multiple things and have more than one running timeline. This is because “communications is a central function of crisis management,” (Seymour, 1991 p. 26). Simply having a crisis occur within a company or organization can be troublesome enough, but when communications break down, public perception draws a much larger audience to what could have been an internal problem. “Far too many corporations develop emergency planning systems but neglect to include communications,” (Seymour, 1991 p. 26). This creates a fatal flaw in the planning due to neglect toward the primary avenue to the

publics. Communications in an organization applies to a professional athlete in such a manner that the athlete is the primary organization, with personal staff being a line of communication to the staff and support personnel of the team. Here too, all of the components must be in harmony. Planning must be in place to prevent or minimize damage from a crisis to the athlete's personal or professional brand.

In terms of managing a crisis there are many pieces to ensuring a brand does not completely lose its value with the public. "Crisis Management is a process designed to prevent or lessen the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders," (Coombs, 2007 p. 2). This is where members of the public relations staff are crucial and should not be diminished or cast aside. "Public relations practitioners are an integral part of crisis management teams," (Coombs, 2007 p. 1). These people are quite literally the first line of defense when faced with a crisis that could potentially damage the reputation of the athletic organization and the individual athlete. "A crisis can create three related threats: (1) public safety, (2) financial loss, and (3) reputation loss," (Coombs, 2007 p. 1). For the purposes of this research, the latter two are the primary focus. Although in some cases public safety can be a concern when dealing with a professional athlete's crisis, this is not usually the situation. More often financial loss and loss of reputation have to be considered.

The spokesperson assigned to managing the situation must be well trained and understand all of the issues at hand. In fact, "a key component of crisis team training is spokesperson training," (Coombs, 2007 p. 3). This person must know that they are the voice to the public and, if the subject of the crisis cannot speak for whatever reason, they are speaking directly for them. Understandably, "a live feed on CNN is not the place to watch the boss launch his media training," (Stoff, 2007 p. 14). This is why training during non-crisis periods is so vital to the

managing of clients. If one is prepared for any possible crisis, then it will lessen the damage created by whatever situation arises.

Many actions are taken when a crisis first comes to light. In the instance of the scandal between President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, Clinton chose to deny the allegations (Garcia, 2011). This served two purposes: first, it would engender support from his most loyal backers and second, constantly bring in to question the truth of the charges, even if he later chose to retract the denial which he eventually did. This first step in crisis management is crucial as to how the public will perceive a client throughout the management processes. If a denial is made, or the situation is not given credence, the public may choose to ostracize the person for failing to live up to the standards of their position.

Oddly enough, professional athletes tend to be held to an even higher standard than political figures, particularly because of the influence an athlete has on the choices made by the public, most especially the younger generation. "Celebrity sports athletes have a positive [high] influence on adolescents' favorable word-of-mouth and brand loyalty," (Bush et. al, 2004 p.113). These choices could be on anything, ranging from beverage options to which vehicle a person decides to purchase. "Over the years, advertisers have paid famous athletes millions of dollars to endorse their products," (Bush et. al, 2004 p. 108).

Here is where the public relations representative must be diligent as to their research of their client. Should there be any "red flags" in the athlete's life, a plan needs to be in place for management of the issue before anything ever becomes public knowledge. This way any damage to the athlete's image can be managed and current or future endorsement deals not placed in too much jeopardy. "However, it is evident from the sex and drugs scandals associated with the

private lives of many sporting personalities that they have not yet recognized that they have a new duty in life: they are role models, not least for impressionable young people,” (Suter, 2009 p. 338).

The concept of professional athletes as role models is not new to society. Looking throughout history it is a concept well out of infancy. “The Greeks were the first peoples to approach sports not merely as an aspect of cult or a preparation for warfare,” and they revered their athletes as honored heroes and not just people placed in an arena for show (Guttman, 1981 p. 5). “Physical excellence was part of the Greek ethos,” (Guttman, 1981 p. 7).

These athletic participants were regarded with the highest esteem in Greek society, much like today’s athletes. “There is evidence to indicate that professional athletes ... came to dominate Greek athletic festivals,” (Guttman, 1981 p. 8). These men were paid for their service to their country’s athletics and rose to great esteem in the eyes of their countrymen.

Similarly to the ancient Greeks, the American men, first of higher class then trickling down through the working-class men, began to form clubs to celebrate their love of the newly developed game of baseball. “Baseball’s long-term popularity was not only a product of the dynamics and rituals of the game, but also its apparent congruence with the American value system,” (Riess, 1990 p. 313). Baseball didn’t sail through from its inception to now with any stains on the ideals. In 1919 there was the Black Sox scandal that alleged a team conspiracy to fix the World Series of that year. This scandal ended what was considered the “Silver Age of the game – from 1900 to 1919 ... ushering in, as irony would have it, the Golden Age of baseball,” (Goetsch, 2011 p. 82).

The Golden Age introduced such icons of the sport as Babe Ruth (someone very familiar with scandal), Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, and many others. No matter what pedestal the public wants to place an athlete on, they are bound to fall off a time or two in their lifetime. However, even “world leaders recognize the importance of sports, both as an element of their nations’ cultures and a tool for diplomacy,” (Jaksa, 2011 p. 39). This is where the combined efforts of those around the athlete become an essential piece to melding the image of the athlete with the needs of the nation of baseball fans.

“The disillusionment shared by fans and sportswriters was particularly unsettling in the 1994 season,” (Von Burg, 2009 p. 352). This was the year of the shortened season due to the players strike. In this instance no clear path was discernible to sustain the image of the players due to them being collectively described as overpaid men playing a game. Because baseball has come out of the scandals time and again, it shows the importance sport has to a community and even the nation. “Sport involves young – and not so young – people and gives a sense of national unity,” (Suter, 2009 p. 333). The people may, for a time, make the athlete ‘pay’ for their transgressions, but in the end they will come back to what they see as their sport. “Baseball takes elbow grease and community to sustain” and cannot stand on its own in a gilded cage (Perez, 2010 p. 325). These athletes require the support of the spectators or fans as it were. Over the years, baseball has withstood many types of ebb and flows toward the sport that it is today. “Some say the game did what it had to do in the dark to re-humanize itself to a republic that had already chosen football,” (Perez, 2010 p. 327).

The idea that a game upheld the standards by which Americans lived is one that follows the professional athletes in today’s society. They are held to a standard of living that belies their

humanity (i.e. possibility for making a mistake). So when this mistake is inevitably made, it is the responsibility of those around them to lessen the impact on their chosen career.

Methods

Performance statistics from four professional baseball athletes were analyzed before, during and after the specific crisis that damaged their brand occurred. Each crisis is defined by public opinion as well as actual occurrence in the athlete's professional or personal life. To create uniformity in the data, the professional athlete's statistics that were evaluated participate in the same sport, baseball. The statistics gathered were from the year before said scandal broke, the year the athlete had to perform while under the increased scrutiny of the public, and the year after the melee began to diminish.

The four athletes chosen were Larry "Chipper" Jones of the Atlanta Braves, Alex "A-Rod" Rodriguez of the New York Yankees, Wade Boggs of the Boston Red Sox and David Justice of the Atlanta Braves. Specific statistics that were analyzed were the players' batting averages during regular season and post-season play. Additionally, the players' field statistics were analyzed. Using both the batting averages and the field statistics gave a more complete view of the athlete's performance.

Jones from the Atlanta Braves was chosen because of the scandal that was caused by his extramarital affair he admitted to having with a Hooter's waitress. This affair produced a child and was fodder for media outlets during the 1998 baseball season, most especially during the post-season (Associated Press, 1998).

Rodriguez, player for the New York Yankees, was chosen for this study because of the publicized scandal of his affair with singer, Madonna. During 2008, multiple media outlets

covered the demise of Rodriguez's marriage as well as Madonna's divorce. The two were linked together and named as the cause of Rodriguez's divorce in the papers filed by his wife in July 2008 (Fanelli, 2008).

Boggs player for the Boston Red Sox was chosen because of an extra-marital affair that was exposed in 1988-89. There was a lot of speculation if he could keep up his spectacular batting averages and whether the scandal would affect the team's morale (Swift, 1989). This scandal was handled before the era of the 24-second news cycle created by the widespread use of the Internet that came in the late nineties and into the new millennium.

Justice, player for the Atlanta Braves, was chosen to increase uniformity within the study. His divorce from actress Halle Berry in 1996 was highly publicized and many allegations were made against the athlete (People, 1996). Much of what went on in this situation was speculated about due to both the actress and Justice attempting to remain quiet. The issue that this created was the public would create their own ideas about what was happening behind the scenes. It became a trial by the media as well as within the court systems, and his ability to perform under those circumstances benefited this study. As this was an archival research study, no IRB approval was needed to compile the data or complete the data analysis.

Budget

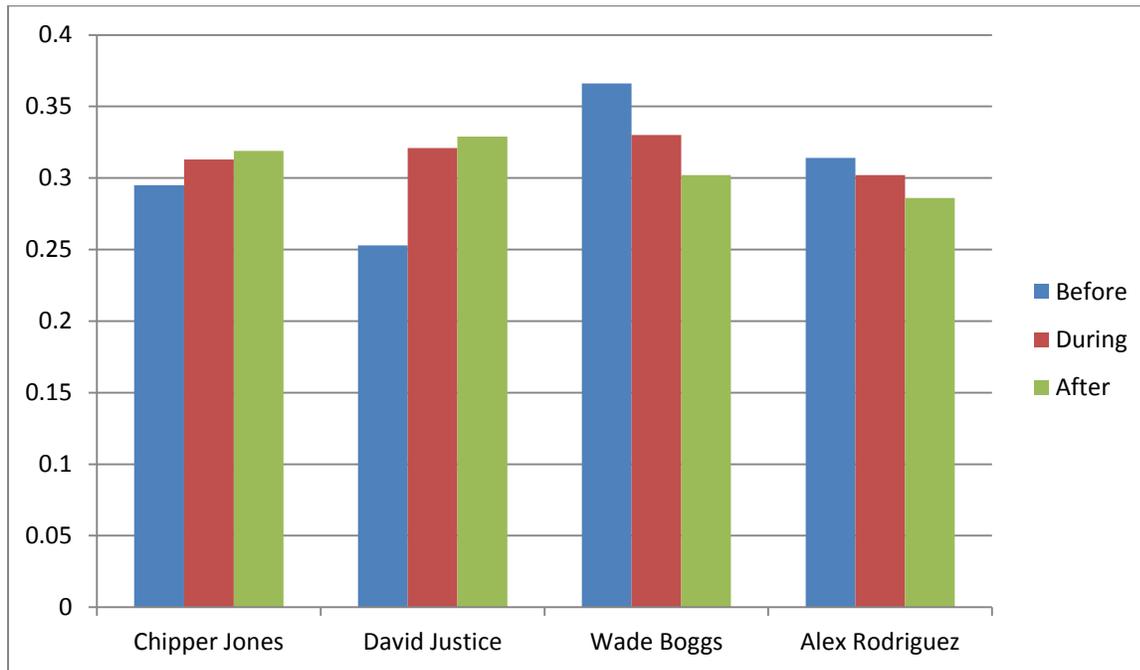
Other than the time to gather supporting and dissenting peer-reviewed articles as well as the time to analyze the statistical data of the different professional athlete's performance, there was no need for a budget for this project. However, further analysis of present and future effects of negative publicity would lead to a need for travel and other related expenses.

Data Analysis

In order to effectively gauge the how negative publicity affected the four professional baseball players' performance chosen for this study, I used their batting average for the year before the scandal, during the breakout of the scandal and after the scandal. This served to show whether or not the negative publicity damaged their performance levels. The batting average was chosen as an acceptable performance indicator because all four players were/are known for their prowess with a bat. Jones, Justice, Boggs and Rodriguez were all recruited to their teams because of their hitting abilities, as well as fielding capabilities. Fielding statistics were also used as an indicator, as all four players were/are key players for both offense and defense.

Figure 1 shows the batting averages of each player, as previously mentioned, the year before, during and after the scandalous event occurred. This analysis of the batting averages showed that two of the players' performance increased: Jones, 2.4%, and Justice, 7.6%. Most notably, Justice of the Atlanta Braves made a significant increase, 6.8 %, in his batting performance during the year he was enduring the most intense media coverage, due to his divorce proceedings with Halle Berry. The other two players' performances decreased: Boggs, -6.4%, and Rodriguez, -2.8%. The sharpest decline in this instance is shown in Boggs' performance, -3.6%, during the year that he was enduring the heaviest scrutiny.

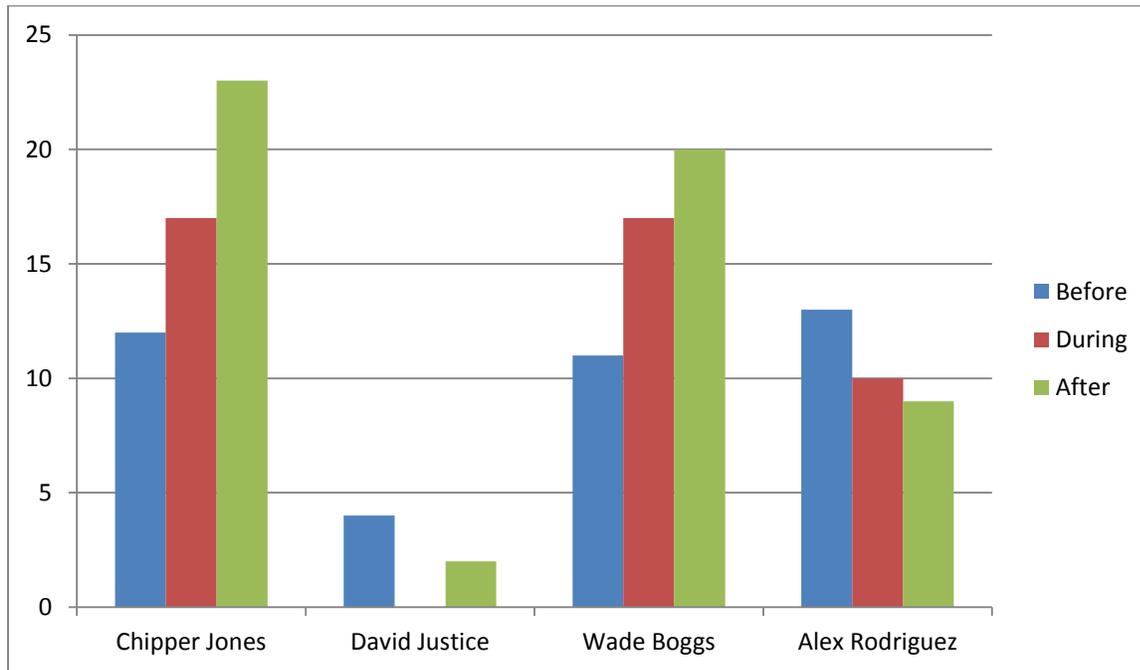
Figure 1



The second data analysis, Figure 2, was conducted to assess the effect the negative publicity had on the subjects fielding performance. As a player's number of errors can most accurately describe how well they are performing in the field, this statistic was utilized. For these purposes two players' data stayed consistent with the findings made with the analysis of the batting averages, Justice and Boggs. Again the most dramatic drop in Justice's errors occurred in the year during the more intense media coverage, going from 4 errors in the year before to zero errors in the year during the scandal. Similarly, Boggs' errors increased most dramatically in the year during the event, going from 11 errors to 17.

Jones and Rodriguez showed opposite results from that of their batting averages analyses. Jones' errors increased significantly in the year during and directly after the media coverage, while Rodriguez's errors dropped sharply in the year during the scrutiny and maintained a steady decline.

Figure 2



This data displays supporting and dissenting data toward the hypothesis that negative publicity would adversely affect a professional baseball player's performance. The supporting evidence is shown where Boggs and Rodriguez's batting performance declined from the year before the negative media coverage. The adverse effects are also shown in that Boggs and Jones's fielding errors increased throughout the outbreak of the scandal. However, Jones and Justice's batting performance as well as Justice and Rodriguez's fielding performance showed no adverse effects. In fact, in these instances the performance of the individuals increased, which is in direct contrast to the hypothesis.

Discussion

The hypothesis of this study was that negative publicity would affect a professional baseball player's performance in an equally negative way. What the data analysis revealed was that the performance was affected, but not merely in a negative manner. In a couple of the cases, the data suggests that the negative publicity served as a springboard for improvement.

In the case of Justice, his batting performance improved, while his propensity for making errors decreased. This correlation of the data, while it fails to support the hypothesis, does give a certain value to the theory that the attention would have an effect. This effect was one that could be attributed to Justice's probable ability to compartmentalize his life. He may have been able to strictly focus on his work, in other words, while he was playing baseball with his team the outside noise did not filter in. "The mental state typically associated with poorer performances in sport seems to be marked by feelings of self-doubt, lacking concentration" (Harmison, 2011 p. 5) and other distracting mental communication one can have.

The opposite side of this argument is that Justice was not self-aware to the point that the negative publicity would enter in to his thoughts. "One might say that individuals who compartmentalize display less evaluative complexity in their organization of self-knowledge," (Showers, 1992 p. 1047). This could be the reason why Justice was perceived as lacking empathy concerning his divorce, although none of this affected his ability to perform his job.

Similar to Justice, Boggs' performance was affected in both batting average and number of fielding errors. Though in Boggs' case, the affect was negative, suggesting the hypothesis of negative performance stemming from the negative publicity could be accurate. "For most athletes, the presence of the right mental and emotional state ... is associated with them

performing to their potential,” (Harmison, 2011 p.5). Boggs’ statistics suggest his emotional state might have been affected negatively by the negative publicity generated by the scandal, and that could have translated into his poorer performance on the field.

The cases of Jones and Rodriguez are split. One aspect of their performance declined while another aspect improved. Jones’ batting average continued on a steady rise throughout the influx of negative publicity, but his amount of fielding errors rose exponentially. The data suggests that the area requiring the most concentration, batting, was not an issue. This molds with the idea “that it is not just the positive or negative *content* of one’s knowledge about the self that matters, but how that information is *organized*, (Showers, 1992 p. 1036).”

Rodriguez’s performance effects were the exact opposite to that of Jones. His batting average declined through the years of negative publicity, but his number of fielding errors steadily decreased. This could be attributed his ease and confidence in the field as well as the fact that fielding is more about the team, while batting requires total concentration on him and his thoughts. “People tend to feel good about themselves when they are associated with a successful group,” (Jackson, 2011 p. 2) and with his team they were successful. However, when Rodriguez was at bat, it was not about his team as much as it was about him facing off with the pitcher.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to the author’s knowledge of scandal plagued professional athlete’s as well as by the time limitations of the research. Further research is needed to search for correlations between negative publicity and professional athletes. Other sports need to be investigated to improve the findings beyond that of, publicity affects performance. To make this a more substantial study, scandals and the publicity associated with them would need to be

investigated from the beginning of professional sports to the present day. In addition, interviews with the actual professional athlete's would assist in discerning whether their performance was affected by the negative publicity.

Conclusion

In society there will always be heroes, and as such, those heroes' actions will be scrutinized by their every action. It does not matter whether their actions are directly related to their chosen profession or if they are simply a matter of them being human and leading a life outside of their job. Mostly, American heroes tend to fall under two categories: soldier or professional athlete a.k.a. celebrity. Both categories can very easily be canonized without thought to the fact that they are people prone to make mistakes. However, celebrity type personalities are already under heavy media scrutiny due to the size of their bank accounts and the unique skill set that they possess. This close inspection places professional athletes under a greater likelihood of being the subject of a scandal. "The media are starting to realize that no one figure can be perfected as a scapegoat," (Von Burg & Johnson, 2009 p. 368) but that doesn't mean that they will stop trying to find that person who can take the blame for everything.

Professional sport is essential to the American lifestyle and has been seen as an acceptable alternative to war. "Just over a century ago the American philosopher William James called for a 'moral equivalent to war,'" (Suter, 2009 p. 332). This replacement idea is why those associated with the sport are so intensely scrutinized. This makes it the responsibility of the professionals managing the public perception of the athlete to help them through any crisis they may create themselves or have happen to them in the course of their time as a professional athlete.

This intense media scrutiny that professional athletes are subjected to creates a need for crisis management personnel. These people can ensure the longevity of the athletes' brand, if the crisis is managed in a timely and effective manner. "There is nothing Americans like more than a redemption story – particularly when the man being redeemed is supremely good at his job," (Anonymous, 2010 p. 70). This was seen in the case of Michael Vick, Chipper Jones and may soon be seen in the case of Tiger Woods.

This mini-study of the effects of negative publicity on four professional baseball athletes greatly needs to be expanded upon. Throughout the research of this topic, no actual study was found addressing how negative publicity is related to the performance of professional athletes. Availability of these individuals and the fact that most are not willing to expose weakness could be a factor in why these studies have not been completed. However, if public relations practitioners could have a better understanding of what the professional athlete needs by way of image perception control in order to keep their performance level at its peak, then the needs and wants of both the PR professional as well as the athlete could be met.

This research could also be used to expand the public's knowledge of the effects the intense media exposure to which the athletes are subjected. When the public increases their understanding of a subject a shift can occur displaying a general enlightenment and desire to change an accepted norm. "Norm creation involves the establishment of shared expectations, while norm change involves changing those expectations," (Brinton & Nee, 1998 p. 107).

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