

## Generation “Selfie”

As 2013 came to a close, the word “selfie” seemed to just edge out “twerking” as the Word of the Year. In the sports world, however, there is little doubt that bullying was all the rage in 2013.

From the amateur ranks, which I covered extensively in my previous two blogs, all the way on up, a burst of allegations bordering on epidemic has occurred. Most puzzling however, is that in 2013 we even saw allegations of bullying extend into the professional ranks placing my beloved Miami Dolphins on the front pages of the sports section for all the wrong reasons.

The Miami Dolphins suspended Pro Bowl lineman Richie Incognito after allegations of misconduct made by linemate Jonathan Martin, who left the team in the middle of the season. Allegedly, Incognito bullied Martin in the locker room, bullied him on Twitter, and even used Martin and some younger guys as “ATM’s,” forcing them to pay as much as \$30,000 for team dinners as well as expensive trips to Las Vegas.

Neither player returned to the team after the scandal. While some teammates spoke out in support of Incognito, the NFL has yet to reveal the findings of it’s league-wide investigation.

Shockingly, Incognito was a member of the Dolphins “Leadership Council” instituted by Coach Joe Philbin after the release of Chad Johnson during his first year for the purpose of holding in-house meetings in an effort to enhance the culture within the team.

Philbin customarily chose captains for game-days according to efforts made in practice. The council was voted on by the players, something that often results in an epic fail at the amateur level, as young student-athletes tend to vote for the most talented player for a team captaincy, rather than the most qualified leader. There are countless captains. There are far fewer leaders.

The problem in the Dolphins case, as with many other sports teams is that the designated “leaders” lacked an understanding as to what true leadership really is.

The fact that this issue has now extended into the professional ranks raises the question as to whether or not this is a sign of a significant cultural problem. And, if a cultural problem does exist, what, if anything, can we do to prevent it from happening again in the future?

I believe we can do a better job and need to do a better job educating our youth at a grass roots level about real leadership. Coaching is not merely about teaching athletes how to play a game, it’s about teaching young athletes how to think.

But, who can we turn to as role models and how many examples of great leadership are there for a generation that as of last week declared “selfie” to be the word of the year? If parents, coaches, teachers, and school administrators don’t start from the ground up, there will certainly be more Incognitos and more Martins, regardless of who you believe was right or wrong in the scandal.

Sure, we’ve all heard stories of unspeakable acts of hazing as compared to instances of ignorant behavior chalked up and laughed off as, “*Boys will be boys,*” “*You have to pay your dues!*” or “*That’s*

*just the way it is.*” None of those aforementioned explanations will fly by the way in today’s litigious society. It’s better to figure out long before any attorneys get involved!

Personally, one thing that I have always done as a protective measure and safeguard against hazing types of behavior is to assign team equipment duties. Rather than turn the other cheek with knowledge that senior members of our team are forcing the sophomores or that occasional talented freshman to carry all of the varsity equipment. In my program, two seniors fill up all of our water bottles and carry them to-and-from during the first week of training camp, and the responsibility is then shared amongst each team member on a rotating basis throughout the season. Everyone stays involved and everyone contributes. No one shoulders an unfair daily burden.

Coaches, I urge you to take a long look at your program and evaluate if the right character people have been selected into a captaincy by someone other than you, or by a process that you have not had a say in. If that is so, please take careful notice if one or two underclassmen are carrying equipment by the truckload and serving water every day. If that has not yet been called bullying, it will be- Trust me, it’s the sports word of the year!

Today, make it your goal to teach your players how to be leaders. If you run a camp or coach at the elementary level take some time before and/or after your session to highlight great leadership and to point out how real leaders do it.

But, who can **Generation Selfie** turn to as an example of how to lead?

One of the greatest leaders in the history of sports- Mark Messier. Since his retirement from the NHL, the league has since named an annual leadership award after him for the player who most exemplifies great leadership both on and off the ice.

During the 1994 season, New York Rangers rookie Darren Langdon walked into the locker room at the Montreal Forum after just being called up to the NHL. To his surprise, a brand new Armani suit was hanging in his locker stall paid for by captain Mark Messier, who believed in making every teammate feel a part of the organization. Actually, Messier believed in making every trainer, staff member, bus driver, and team employee feel as if they had importance to the team.

The cost of suit that Messier treated Langdon to was in the grand scheme relatively inexpensive. Yet, what the gesture mean to Langdon was extraordinarily valuable. Messier made young Langdon feel appreciated. He also felt like he was wanted. From that moment on, whenever Messier spoke, Langdon listened, not out of fear of Messier, but out of respect for Messier.

Messier, who runs the annual Mark Messier Leadership Camp, would often speak of empathy and compassion as hallmarks that must be instilled in the mindset of a leader. In other words, to be a great leader, one cannot be selfish, or for lack of a better term a “selfie.” Instead, he or she must be completely selfless and their actions should reflect an intent to serve others and to help the greater good.

When asked about his leadership abilities, Messier said his style is best described by the following two quotes or sayings:

- 1- *“No one can govern without your consent”* – Abraham Lincoln

2- *“Correction without resentment.”* – John Wooden

Imagine that you are a kid just called up to play for the New York Rangers. A future Hall of Famer has just bought you a new suit. He went out of his way to acknowledge you, an anonymous rookie. He doesn't curse at you or about close family members on Twitter. He just talks to you as if he cares about you as a person.

Now imagine, you are a second year player on the Miami Dolphins. One of the members of the “Leadership Counsel” is a Pro Bowler. He has not bought you a suit. He hasn't bought you anything. Instead, he has mandated you to pay for a \$30,000 team dinner.

Which of those two men are you more likely to follow? Which man would you feel a sense of loyalty to? Which man would you want to bleed with when the chips were on the table? Which man would you want to run through a wall for?

Imagine, just imagine, if it somehow became en vogue to put others first inside your locker room. Imagine, if it somehow became cool to go out of your way to help a younger teammate. Imagine, no matter how self absorbed society and culture have become that inside your locker room, the Word of the Year for 2014 was...others.