

## Oh Captain, My Captain

As 2013 came to a close, there seemed to be a bit of a debate whether “selfie” or “twerking” held the distinction as the word of the year. In the sports world, there is little doubt that bullying was all the rage in '13.

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 fails drastically at the amateur level, as young student-athletes tend to “vote” the most talented player for a captaincy, rather than the most qualified leader.

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

What's the solution? We need to educate our youth at a grass roots level about real leadership. Coaching is not merely about teaching athletes how to play, it's about teaching young athletes how to think.

Who can we turn to as a role model 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 coaches, teachers, and school administrators don't start earlier and don't do a better job, there will certainly be more Incognitos and more Martins, regardless of who you believe was right or wrong.

One of the greatest leaders in the history of sport was my all-time favorite athlete Mark Messier. Since his retirement, the NHL has named a leadership award after Messier for the player who most exemplifies 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 et al feel as if they had importance to the team.

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.