

Roll out the couch potato role models

Fall is here, that blessed time of year when all things "sports" grace TV screens like well-planned smorgasbords. The ultimate couch potatoes are in their glory for 24 sacred weeks until the game clock fills with zeros on Super Bowl Sunday and the world falls apart.



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

This weekend, while the kiddies enjoyed Halloween, the World Series, the Sony Tennis extravaganza, professional basketball, hockey and two days of wall-to-wall football filled TV screens everywhere. Fans and beer truck drivers were in a frothy frenzy of cliché-riddled sports chatter, spiked with cholesterol-infested tailgate food.

Ahh — life is wonderful. Out-of-shape former jocks (mostly in their imagination) can stare at screens, fill stadium parking lots and adore their role models with impunity. They can cheer, shout and scream encouragement for their favorite teams while they boo the opposition at the top of their lungs.

All of the hoopla is, of course, much to the disgust of their wives, significant others, children and (gasp!) non-sports oriented, obviously unpatriotic, denizens of American society.

Hmmm . . . let's back up a moment. "Role models" — an interesting term. I believe the standard definition has something to do with a person whom followers choose to imitate.

I understand when aspiring young athletes admire professional baseball players, football players or other sports figures. As accomplished athletes, they set lofty examples for young players to follow.

But that's where the admiration, respect and inspiration should end. Professional athletes are mostly young adults still developing as human beings. Why should they be burdened with the responsibility of teaching children how to behave?

When did the "role model" term spill into the lives of these people outside of the athletic arena? It used to be that athletes were only criticized when their performances were less than stellar on the field, court or wherever they played their sport of choice. Now, they are scrutinized if they have an argument with their girlfriend or wife.

A few years ago, the basketball legend Charles Barkley said, "I am paid to create havoc on the basketball court. I am not paid to raise your kids."

I agree with that.

A professional athlete enjoys handsome compensation for expertise in manipulating a ball. If young people, talented enough to join the ranks of the professionals, want to admire gifted players, by all means — do so. Up and comers should be inspired by the best.

However, the majority of the young population should not be looking at professional athletes as models for how to conduct their lives.

Most professionals just honed inherent skills to high levels. We are human beings, and our physical make-up has generations of complex influences. We are not created equal. Obviously, levels of ability, both physically and intellectually, vary dramatically.

Nonetheless, young fans should not be blamed. They did not create this "role model" responsibility. How can we blame them when they are inundated with as much personal information about every athlete as the media can supply?

This morning's sports page reported more about Alex Rodriguez's personal, off-the-field history than about the outstanding job he's been doing in post-season play for the New York Yankees.

The featured football article focused on Brett Favre, the Minnesota Vikings' quarterback, and his rift with the Green Bay Packers. The outstanding performance he gave as a gifted 40-year-old professional football player in yesterday's contest appeared to be incidental information.

Dramatizing the personal lives of athletes, movie stars, TV and radio personalities, musicians and recording artists puts a burden of responsibility on those unfortunate people that is ill-deserved.

I do not agree with those who claim that they chose to be involved in high-profile occupations and "it" comes with the territory. No, "it" does not. "It" was created by an irresponsible media in a never-ending effort to sensationalize the mundane and sell news.

Think about it. Would you go to an English professor to learn how to play football? Then why expect a football player to teach a young fan how to be a good student?

However, young people do need role models. I suppose we could suggest pillars of the business community and those in high political office. Hmmm . . . no, that would never do. I was wrong. Stick with the athletes. They at least have discipline. Role models are hard to come by when you live in a system you can't understand.

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