

Blame My Wife, Please

Chivalry in sports may be on the way out based on the recent actions of several athletes



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While chivalry in sports has been on the decline for a while, I'm afraid that 2012 may be the year in which it is finally being taken off of life support. The trend of athletes and coaches who are blaming their spouses for their misfortune or peccadilloes is alarming.

I'm not speaking simply of a player going into a slump because of trouble on the home front or situations where the media has blamed a spouse or significant other for the poor performance of a player. Certainly Cowboys' quarterback Tony Romo was the recipient of much scrutiny when he used a bye weekend in 2008 to go to Los Cabos, Mexico, with Jessica Simpson. And Matt Kemp's slump in 2010 (hitting .196 in June) was blamed on his relationship with the singer Rihanna. But in those cases, the finger pointed at the partner was not the finger of the athlete himself.

As Exhibit A in the case for the death of chivalry, we have Lamar Odom's miserable season with the Dallas Mavericks in which he went from being one of the most sought-after players in the league to its biggest disappointment. Odom pointed to the reality TV show with his wife, Khloe Kardashian, as the source of his downfall. What a surprise that life with the Kardashians might prove distracting. At the end of the season, Odom indicated that he would be abandoning "Khloe and Lamar" to try to get back to basketball. Seeing as how it is impossible to keep any Kardashian off the air, time will tell if the show continues as "Khloe."

Next, we have Roger Clemens, who alleged—evidently with success—that his chief antagonist in his trial for perjury before Congress, former Yankee trainer Brian McNamee, was at his house to provide human growth hormone to Clemens' wife but not to Clemens himself.

Finally, we have the University of Memphis basketball coach, Josh Pastner, who tweeted the name of a potential recruit—a violation of NCAA recruiting rules. Pastner's explanation for this gaffe, as told to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*: "My wife was yelling at me because I was on the phone too loud. ... She was complaining that I not only woke my daughter up, but I also woke the baby inside her up, because she's pregnant."

When I see modern sports figures throw their wives under the bus, I can only ask: "Where have you gone, Ben Hogan?" In 1949, Hogan did just the opposite. He and his wife were driving on a rural road and encountered a Greyhound bus approaching them head on. Hogan dove to the passenger side of the car at the last minute to try to protect his wife. That, ladies and gentlemen, is how it is done. I shudder to think what would happen if these contemporary sports figures were ever in a hostage situation. We might hear a line never uttered in a Western movie: "I don't care what you do to the girl, just leave me alone."

To be sure, male athletes do not have a monopoly on the blaming of a spouse. Track-and-field star Marion Jones, for instance, contended that her husband C. J. Hunter's positive drug test after the Sydney Olympics tainted her reputation as a clean athlete. We all know how that turned out.

There is a simple method to avoid such ungracious behavior: When you are asked about any problem with your athletic performance or trouble off the field of play, leave the words "my wife" or "my husband" out of any justification or even explanation. Milwaukee Brewers catcher Jonathan Lucroy recently learned this lesson the hard way when he broke his hand in his hotel room. While not blaming his wife in any way, he did let it slip that his injury was the result of his wife shifting a suitcase that fell on his hand. A far more simple and elegant explanation could have been "a suitcase fell on it." To be fair, Lucroy has steadfastly stood behind his wife since the incident, but the damage was done, as many Brewers fans shifted blame for Lucroy's injury to his wife.

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While I am not expecting the reincarnation of Ben Hogan, it would be nice if there were a remaining shred of chivalry that could be summoned in order to keep references to spouses in the sports pages to a minimum. ■

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