Domestic Violence in Sports

Domestic violence is an issue that is not closely scrutinized when it comes to the athletic community. The media create a double standard by portraying the act of domestic violence among athletes differently based on the gender of the perpetrator.

Although athletes are seen as positive role models, they are highly criticized when involved in the act of violence toward their loved ones. However, consequences differ according to the athletes’ performance and, more importantly, their gender.

We performed a case study to analyze how the media portray athletes charged with domestic violence. We looked at two male and female cases. For the two male cases, we looked at Slava Voynov and Ray Rice and for the two female cases, we looked at Hope Solo and the case of Brittny Griner and Glory Johnson.

Statistics

- 4,774,000 women in the United States have experienced domestic violence by their intimate partners.
- 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence while 1 in 7 men will face domestic violence.
- The most average age when intimate partner violence is first experienced by men is age 18-24.
- Since the video of Ray Rice punching his fiancé was published by TMZ on September 8th 2014, seven additional NFL players have been arrested on charges of or relating to domestic violence: Justin Cox (safety), Ray McDonald (defensive lineman), Rodney Austin (offensive lineman), Bruce Miller (fullback), Joseph Randle (running back), Josh McNary (linebacker), and Junior Galette (linebacker).

O.J. Simpson

- Simpson’s legacy permits athletes to get away with their crimes.
- He had an eleven year NFL career as a running back for the Buffalo Bills and the San Francisco 49ers. He is known for being the first running back to rush for over two thousand yards in a single season.
- He had a history of physical abuse toward his wife Nicole Brown-Simpson.
- Reportedly fractured her skull during an incident on New Year’s Eve of 1989.
- He once said, “You’ve been here eight times, and you’re arresting me for this?” after the New Year’s Eve incident.
- He was released without being charged.
- His wife was eventually found stabbed to death in their home with a friend.

Hope Solo

- Women’s national soccer team.
- Recorded dragging fiancé out of the elevator.
- Both arrested and charged for simple assault.
- Rice is indicted on a charge of third-degree aggravated assault; his fiancé’s charges were dropped.
- Received a two game suspension in August.
- Video was later released of Rice punching his fiancé in the elevator.
- Incident led to the Baltimore Ravens terminating his contract, and for the two female cases, we looked at Hope Solo and the case of Brittney Griner and Glory Johnson.
- Less than a full year later; she played in the 2015 FIFA Women’s World Cup, leading the United States National Team to a first place finish.

Ray Rice

- Men’s National Football League.
- Under the influence of alcohol, Solo argued with her nephew.
- Recorded dragging fiancé out of the elevator.
- Half sister came into the living room to catch Solo hitting her son.
- Prosecutors filed a report that was unable to be used to proceed in the trials.
- Charges were dropped.
- Solo told GMA host Robin Roberts the she was a victim, not a criminal.
- WNT was attacked by the public because many believed Solo should not be allowed to play for the team for the Women’s World Cup 2015.
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Slava Voynov

- National Hockey League.
- Punched wife.
- Choked wife with both hands three times.
- Pushed wife to the ground approximately six times, yelling “Get out!”
- Kicked wife six times while on the ground.
- Pushed wife toward television causing blood to gush out from her head.
- Suspended from the NHL.
- Wife dropped all charges.
- Voynov decided to return to Russia under his own free will rather than be deported by the United States.

Brittney Griner & Glory Johnson

- Women’s National Basketball Association.
- Johnson left a small laceration and tooth mark on Griner’s finger.
- Griner gave Johnson a concussion by hitting her upside the head with a metal brief case.
- Dual arrest because it was an uncommon case.
- Unable to determine who the perpetrator was.
- Police were unsure how to handle a same sex domestic violence case.
- Consequence was a seven game suspension.
- Domestic violence in the LGBTQ community is a huge problem that is given the least attention.

Conclusion

- Due to the lack of female domestic violence cases there are few cases to compare.
- Female athletes do not face as severe consequences as male athletes.
- Female athletes, however, do get more heavily criticized than male athletes.
- Although male athletes get suspensions from their sport activities, they do not undergo what the average males will undergo in trial because of their legacy and access to money and better representation.

Overall, athletes depending on their gender are approached differently when involved in domestic violence. Females rarely receive suspensions from their team because there are an insufficient number of cases to establish new policies. However, female athletes undergo severe criticism from the media and the public. Male athletes are suspended and undergo lenient punishment compared to the average, non-athlete man.