

Athletes as Role Models

By Bala Prasad

When Cal Ripken Jr. was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame last year, he addressed the issue of athletes and being role models. "As years passed, it became clear to me that kids see all, not just some of your actions but all," Ripken said. "Whether we like it or not, we big leaguers are role models . . . Sports can play a big role in teaching values and principles."

Cal Ripken is right. Athletes, whether they like it or not, are role models for children. Of course they display the athletic virtues: diligence, perseverance, the value of training, fair play and sportsmanship, grace under pressure, the pursuit of excellence. But they can also be models of personal and public virtues. For example, Michael Jordan, an athlete with undying will, tremendous courage, awesome defense, and unbelievable scoring, makes a great role model for youths and adults. Michael Jordan shows he is also a great person off the court by the way he has given his money to charities and has dealt with the difficulties in his life. This is a person who is looked up to and admired by people everywhere.

When people become professional athletes or any kind of athlete that is brought into the public eye, they become a role model. A role model can set good examples by being educated, having good morals, and by staying drug free; or they can set bad examples by doing the complete opposites of these actions. As role models it is important that athletes show the youth of today the importance of getting an education. That is why college athletes can often be better role models than professional athletes – because they are more or less bringing publicity to their college and reinforcing the idea of getting a college education regardless of what profession you desire to pursue. Names like Duke, Notre Dame, Michigan, UNC, and UCLA might not be known to young children if it weren't were the shining college athletes that have come out of those schools; and ultimately it is good for children to associate college with success.

It is also a wonderful thing for children to have role models who are physically fit. That may encourage today's youth to exercise, remain active, and stay in shape – because they view their "heroes" as strong, fast, and agile. **Continued on Page 8**

Let Athletes Be Athletes Not Role Models

By Musafir

The athletes are hired by their employers and are paid to do their job and are not paid to be role models. However, they can be good role models or bad role models depending on their character as is true with any other profession.

Similar to other professions, an athlete should be judged by his prowess just like a surgeon is judged by his surgical skill and the success rate of the surgeries performed by him. In the same way, we should simply enjoy the sports and marvel the splendid performance of the athletes. We shouldn't care about what he did at the last night's party, what his new hairstyle is like, how long he stayed at disco bar the night before an important match! That should be his employer's business not ours.

It has always been my understanding that professional athletes are nothing more than athletes who have cultivated extraordinary physical talents. On a professional level, sports exist for one reason: entertainment. A professional athlete is an entertainer and, as such, has a perfect right to do or take whatever they need to increase the entertainment value of their sport.

Kids look up to their parents as role models and learn their behavior. No matter what we say about an athlete and regardless of how high we put him or her on the pedestal, kids do what their parents do and not do what they preach. When we transfer this role to the professional players, our kids would explore what their hobbies are, what they do every day. The sad fact is that most of the professional athletes are spoiled by the privileges given to them at an early age. They become great athletes but their celebrity status also hinders their development in other areas. Try to imagine an athlete who is accustomed to speaking obscene words, making obscene gesture to his fans, taking drugs, even dress in a pair of trousers printed with nasty letters – that is what our children will emulate from their role models.

Having said that, I also feel that there is no reason athletes should be held to different moral or legal standards than "normal" citizens. If a professional sports star breaks a law and the authorities manage to figure out what they were involved in, then punishments are warranted. Why is it, though, that an epidemic of unethical behavior among professional athletes is worse than something similar happening among the actors in Hollywood? What makes them different than actors, musicians or physicians? Unless their behavior interferes with their ability to enthrall their "fans," nothing else should matter. That's no different from any other field. Not all doctors and lawyers are good people either. So yes, let's hold our athletes to a high standard, but it's time to drop the pretense that professional athletes are moral role models.