

Mind your language

Following on from a recent assault by a player on a watching supporter, in a European Heineken Cup match, I think that it's worth noting the effect that bad behaviour has on younger viewers.

Instead of being role models for young people by simply showing off their skills, footballers and other sportsmen have been showing young people just what not to do. It seems like at least once a week now there is some incident or other involving violence or abusive language from sportsmen.

Whether its a punch up between two players, racially abusing one another or hitting out at a member of the public who paid to watch them, sportsmen seem to think that when they are highly paid athletes they are, in some way, above the law and they don't seem to realise the effect that they have on the young people who idolise them. Young people often copy what they see their idols do.

Before you say anything, I'm not jumping on the Wayne Rooney, stop swearing bandwagon. A friend recently mentioned the incident involving a rugby player who assaulted a member of the watching crowd. This sort of behaviour is completely unacceptable, whether from a sportsman or an ordinary member of the public. No one has the right to hit out at someone, no matter what they have said or done.

If the player in question, Trevor Brennan of Toulouse, had done this in the street, he would have been arrested on the spot and prosecuted for assault. I feel that on the pitch the law doesn't seem to count either. Yes, some will argue the case of Lee Bowyer's punch-up with fellow Newcastle team-mate Kieran Dyer. Bowyer punched Dyer, and was prosecuted for threatening behaviour by Newcastle Crown Court. However, in most cases players seem to get away with it. There are weekly brawls on the field of play and the players responsible are usually only punished with yellow and red cards.

Zenidene Zidane, who is one of my idols, was never in any legal trouble after his now infamous head butt on Italian defender Marco Materazzi in the World Cup final. This was completely wrong and millions of people saw him do it, yet although he got into trouble with FIFA, the football governing body, nothing was made of what was, in reality a common assault.

I wonder what will happen to Trevor Brennan? Personally I think that he will be fined and banned, both by his club and by rugby's governing body but beyond that I don't expect very much else will come of it. Do I think that any criminal charges will be brought against him? To put it simply, no.

Foul and abusive language, for the most part, is accepted by many as part and parcel of sport these days. In football players are continually swearing. You don't need to be an expert lip reader to know what a player is saying when he has just missed a sitter or because he thinks the referee has made a bad decision. Yet they get away with it most of the time. They only seem to get 'pulled up' for it when they make a racist comment or when they say it directly to the referees face. This sort of thing might be, to an certain extent accepted in an ice hockey match, which is by nature a rough sport but on the playing fields of Britain and Ireland, in my view, its anything but acceptable.

About this article

This article was written by Ben Ritchie and published on the [Reach for the Sky](#) website.

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