

### If You're Not Cheating – Part III

*When my mother told me Superman wasn't real I immediately began to cry. The tears I cried that day weren't for the death of my hero. I cried because no one with enough power was going to come and save us. – Geoffrey Canada*

The death of a hero, real or fictionalized, is a very traumatic experience for anyone. It's so traumatizing, in fact, that a person's entire world can be destroyed by it. When it comes to sports, more than any other arena, the death of a hero seems to do have this affect.

With every scandal, doping related or otherwise, the heroes of sports are falling from the sky all around us. And whenever a high profile athlete falls, those who built him or her up seem to abandon them. Our natural response has been to step over them as if they aren't there. These all too real individuals become fictionalized through the marginalization of their existence once they've failed to meet the expectations of others. It may be true that, "with great power comes great responsibility" but does that make those with extraordinary abilities unworthy of forgiveness and redemption?

Falling from grace is a possibility for any athlete. Not because every athlete is tempted to make a bad decision, but more so because they're human. They may have found a way to maximize their abilities and achieve feats once believed to be impossible, but that doesn't make them immune to temptation.

It's important to note every athlete is responsible for how their life turns out. That, however, doesn't change the fact that we play a significant role in their meteoric-rise. It's tied in to our belief in them. Every time we cheer for them, every time we purchase merchandise with their name and face on it and with every fan letter we write and mail to them, we give them wings to fly higher and higher. The problem with those wings—they're made of wax. And when those who wear these wings get too close to the "goddess of victory" they melt, sending them spiraling back down to earth with no one to catch them and no soft place to land.

Why do we do this to our heroes? Why do we build them up just to let them fall? Is it because they have failed to live *up* to our expectations? Or is it because their actions proved they were actually just like us?

It's hard not to look up to athletes. Every time they compete they give performances that provide immediate gratification for every spectator. No matter what happens in the arena, they're revered as something more than human because they wield courage in a way we only dream of being able to do in our own daily life. They swing courage like sword cutting down their fears with every play they make. Their triumph over the many faces of opposition, especially when it appears as though all is lost, instills the type of hope that inspires not just dreams, but action.

Athletes are society's best role models and its greatest heroes. Every time they compete they show what it is like to be fully human. They play the "game" of life in a way we want to live it,

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they don't stop trying until the whistle is blown and the clock stops. This is what makes their achievements so meaningful and why their rise and fall has such a great impact on the world.

They're actually better than comic book heroes because they bring what most won't dare to imagine to life. They risk everything, including their own life, in order to achieve physical feats deemed only possible by their fictional counterparts. The most amazing thing about athletes is their ability to overcome their own fears and the doubts of others to even try. Their willingness to try is what inspires all of us to take risks with our own lives. Their achievements provide us with immediate proof that, "impossible [truly] is nothing" when it comes to the limitations of mankind.

Let's return the favor to our heroes. Let's not let them fall without being there to catch them. They needed us to believe in them so that they could rise. We should show them that they can believe in us and that they can rise with our own heroic act—our forgiveness. Let's remind them that they don't have to win all the time and that they shouldn't resort to cheating to try to make this happen. Let's let them know that they're still amazing regardless of whether or not they break a record. In fact, we should let them know we'd see them as being more amazing because we can relate to them and that it's ok to be human.

Let's not spend too much time persecuting our heroes simply because they're not the gods we've built them up to be. Those who have cheated and fallen from their place in the Mt. Olympus in our minds are sore enough from the pain their feeling now after hitting the concrete floors we walk on every day. Now that they're back on our playing field, maybe we should extend a hand to help them to their feet, dust them off and push them in a new direction.

We revere athletes because they're also human. It's because they're not gods that makes what they achieve so inspiring. Their greatness lies not in what they accomplish. It lies in the fact that they, someone just like us, could fly from the free throw line, break 10-seconds in the 100 meter dash or complete that Hail Mary pass. Let's show them something even more amazing than these feats. To err may be human, but forgiveness, now that's something worthy of a place amongst the stars.