

9-4-2015

Pharoah and Roger

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Pharoah and Roger" (2015). *On Sport and Society*. 46.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/46>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
September 4, 2015

In the world of sport or in the world generally, how often can you say that today there are two major pieces of good news? Yesterday was such a day.

The first piece of good news came from the owner of American Pharoah, Ahmed Zayat, who announced that his horse would not be retired and would finish the season at the Breeder's Cup running in the Classic. When Pharoah finished second at the Travers Stakes last week there was great disappointment and in the wake of the race there were some indications that Zayat was seriously considering retiring the horse. Thank goodness he has thought better of that decision.

American Pharoah became the first horse to win the Triple Crown since 1978. This was followed by a very impressive win in the Haskell Stakes at Monmouth Park in early August. Then he went to Saratoga for the Travers, the track that is known as the "Graveyard of Champions." Many great horses, including Secretariat and Man 'O War lost at Saratoga, but their greatness was not diminished by that loss.

It would have been a shame if American Pharoah's career ended with the Travers and that he would not be given a chance to add to his impressive resume at the Breeder's Cup Classic. Pharoah's place in horse racing history is secure with the Triple Crown but adding the Classic to his list of wins will enrich his legacy. It will also offer one more opportunity to see a great horse race against the very best competition.

The even bigger piece of good news came from the U.S. District Judge Richard Berman who handed down his much anticipated decision in the so-called "deflategate" case. For Patriot fans the big news was that the judge rescinded the four game suspension of Tom Brady.

For those who have watched the train wreck that is Roger Goodell's leadership of the NFL over the past few years, the judge affirmed the notion that arrogance coupled with bad judgment are the hallmarks of the Commissioner of the NFL. Goodell's losing streak in the courtroom has been extended, and the list of mistakes seems to be growing geometrically.

Roger Goodell has become the new poster boy for the Peter Principle. For those who don't remember Lawrence J. Peter's book from 1969, it was an attempt to explain why things always seem to go wrong particularly in hierarchical management cultures. The simple explanation was that everyone will eventually reach their "level of incompetence." This happens because people are put in positions or promoted to new positions based on the performance at their previous positions, rather than, and this is the key, based on the requirements for success in the new position.

One only has to track Roger Goodell's rise in the hierarchy of the NFL from volunteer for the Jets to Commissioner to understand what has happened here. In 1982 Goodell fresh out of Washington and Jefferson College with an economics degree was able to land a position as an unpaid intern in the NFL league office. He turned that into a paid position with the New York Jets the following year. The next year he was back in the league office as a public relations assistant. In 1987 Commissioner Rozelle appointed him as assistant to Lamar Hunt, president of the AFC. At every level Goodell built his resume and enhanced his reputation.

In 1990 Goodell's star continued to ascend as he went to work for Commissioner Tagliabue where he served in nearly every significant capacity of league operations. This led to his appointment in 2001 as NFL executive vice-president and chief operating officer. Among other things Goodell was the point man on television contracts, dealt with labor issues, and headed NFL Properties.

When Paul Tagliabue stepped down as Commissioner in 2006 Roger Goodell was the logical choice to be his successor. After all Goodell knew the operations of the league inside out, and was by far the most experienced and knowledgeable person within the league hierarchy. It was a simple choice. It was also the wrong choice.

Roger Goodell once said that although he did not have an advanced degree in business, he had in fact gotten his MBA equivalency studying at the feet of the previous two commissioners. This indeed was true. What seemed to slip past the hiring board was the fact that Goodell's wooden and awkward manner did not play well on television, and

that his long record of success led to a total lack of self-doubt and resulted in arrogance.

He had the power and so he would use the power. He was number one and his initial success as Commissioner in handling the labor issues and television contracts left him flying high. It also provided cover for some of the early missteps with the Roethlisberger case, spygate, bounty gate and other lesser gates he had to close. What followed was a string of disciplinary losses starting with the bungling in the Ray Rice case. Both the courts and the former Commissioner publicly reprimanded Goodell for overstepping his power.

And now this.

Judge Berman used harsh language to characterize the Commissioner's actions. One might even conclude that Roger Goodell has finally arrived at his "level of incompetence."

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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