

The Dangerous Twitter-Verse

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE – THE DANGEROUS TWITTER-VERSE
AUGUST 5, 2018

Over the past few weeks, the tweets of three major league baseball players have made headlines. All three players wrote and sent these tweets when they were in their teens. Josh Hader, a pitcher for the Milwaukee Brewers, was pitching in the All-Star Game when his tweets surfaced on social media. Sean Newcomb, an Atlanta Braves pitcher, was pitching a no-hitter against the Dodgers. It got to the ninth inning with two out and two strikes on the batter. While that drama was playing out on the field, Newcomb's tweets from his teen years were released across social media. Trea Turner, the all-star shortstop of the Washington Nationals, joined the lineup of major league players whose tweets were released into social media.

These tweets were written while each of these players was a teenager were teenagers and, seemingly, while each was in high school. Their tweets shared homophobic, racist, and sexist characteristics. The tweets were not mild comments, but were harsh, crude, and nasty attacks. All three players have apologized publicly, and their teams have issued statements deploring the tweets and expressing forgiveness and understanding on the grounds of immaturity.

This sort of thing has happened before to players of a number of sports in North America and Europe and to various show-business personalities, business executives, and politicians. The Twitter-verse is a very dangerous place, especially for immature teens. "Youthful indiscretion" and "immaturity" may well be a primary and legitimate defense, but the content of some of the tweets is harsh and invites a harsh response. The punishment for these actions varies, but in the case of teenage stupidity forgiveness seems in order, especially after public apologies and some sensitivity training.

When looking at all the things said and done, those of us beyond the age of thirty should be thankful that Twitter didn't exist in our teens. If comments made in the locker room or on streets with a group of friends had been posted on Twitter, we would all now be suffering from public humiliation.

In most cases, one would expect that the public humiliation should be a sufficient learning tool. If nothing else, it should lead to discretion in the future, if not contrition in the moment.

Beyond these immediate and obvious issues, there is more to contemplate. What is exposed in this development is not simply the stupidity and immaturity of youth. What is exposed is the nature of the teenage athletic and social world, where despite all the attempts at education the message doesn't always get across.

It is not acceptable to use homophobic slurs, anytime or any place. It is not acceptable to use racist language, no matter where or when. It is not acceptable, for teenage boys or post-teenage

boys to demean or harass women, in public or in private. These are basic tenets of American social life in the twenty-first century.

Yet, in the teenage and athletic worlds of the twenty-first century, it is clear from these and other tweets that these young male athletes operated in a culture in which these basic principles have not taken hold. The athletic and teenage cultures remain shot through with sexism, racism, and homophobia. The dangerous smell of testosterone remains in the air and is thick in the locker rooms of American high schools, as well as, in the social circles of American teenage boys. One of the things that these three baseball players had in common is that all three came out of that culture and were influenced by it.

Surprising? Certainly not. None of which is to justify or excuse these behaviors, only to understand them and to seek out their source in a twisted culture.

Public life is replete with examples of crudity across society. From the upper reaches of politics and show business to the headline makers in sport, case after case document the paradoxical reality that little has changed despite all the changes that have taken place.

It should not be too much to ask that public figures and private leaders change their behavior, and, perhaps, a beginning is now being made. Coaches and parents should not allow nor participate in any homophobic, racist, or sexist behaviors of any kind at any level.

Leaders need to lead, and, in our world in which sports figures have such an elevated status, there is a special obligation to lead in the right direction. This should be the primary lesson drawn from the Twitter storm of the last few weeks, not just for Josh Hader, Sean Newcomb, and Trea Turner, but for all those who consider themselves good sports and good people.

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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