Off-field Misconduct

On July 20, 2009 Pittsburgh Steelers’ quarterback Ben Roethlisberger was accused of sexually assaulting a women in Lake Tahoe the previous summer. The accuser, Andrea McNulty, filed a civil complaint accusing Roethlisberger of sexual assault and battery, false imprisonment and emotional distress. McNulty was an employee at the resort Roethlisberger resided in while attending the NBC American Century Celebrity Golf Tournament. After being summoned to fix his television she alleged Roethlisberger refused to let her leave his hotel room and then proceeded to assault her (Hartsfield, 2009). Roethlisberger denied the allegations and claimed counter lawsuits of slander and libel (Sonner, 2009). Not even a year later, a 20-year-old college student in Milledgeville, GA accused Roethlisberger of sexual assault. Due to lack of evidence, charges were never formally filed (Ramati, 2010). National Football League Commissioner Robert Goodell suspended Roethlisberger for the first six games of the 2010 season, and refused to allow him to participate in any offseason activities until the he underwent a "comprehensive behavioral evaluation by professionals." Although both of this cases have not resulted in criminal convictions, Goodell cited his reason for the suspension as “[players] are held to a higher standard as an NFL player, and there is nothing about [Roethlisberger’s] conduct in Milledgeville that can remotely be described as admirable, responsible, or consistent with either the values of the league or the expectations of our fans” (Bouchette, 2010). Roethlisberger did not contest the ruling.

On the November 28, 2008 Plaxico Burress, New York Giant’s receiver, accidentally shot himself in the right thigh while at a New York City nightclub. He was taken to a local New York City hospital for treatment and released two days later. Burress had a permit to carry a concealed weapon in Florida, but the states of “New York and New Jersey do not recognize permits from Florida” (Cavana, 2008). The Giants immediately responded by suspending him for the season. Burress faced charges of two counts of weapons possession and one count of reckless endangerment, which could require a 3 ½ to 15-year prison sentence (Schwartz, 2008). After reaching a plea agreement with the prosecution, Burress pleaded guilty to the lesser charge, attempted possession of a dangerous weapon on September 22, 2009. He was sentenced to two years in prison (Newspapers and the Associated Press, 2009). According to the National Football League’s Personal Conduct Policy, any individual employed by the league must avoid “conduct

1 The assistance of Chelsea Kearney is acknowledged with appreciation.
detrimental to the integrity of and public confidence in the National Football League.” Failure to comply with this policy can result in disciplinary actions at the discretion of the commissioner (National Football League’s Conduct policy). Commissioner Roger Gooddell decided Burress’ suspension ended after his prison term completion (Pedulla, 2009). Following his release in June 2011, Plaxico was drafted to the New York Jets.

On January 14, 2010 Gilbert Arenas, a guard for the Washington Wizards, was formally charged with felony gun possession after bringing an unlicensed firearm outside his home into the Wizard’s locker room. Arenas claims it was a joke aimed at his teammate, Javaris Crittenton. The two had an argument over a gambling debt at when Arenas brought an unloaded firearm to the locker room. Crittenton then brought his own firearm into the same facility (Lawrence Daily News Sports Writer With The Associated Press, 2010 January 15). National Basketball Association Commissioner David Stern decided to suspend Arenas without pay because his behavior showed "[he is] not currently fit to take the court.” In response to his suspension, Arenas made shooting gestures with his hands. Stern thought his actions showed a blatant disregard for the situation. He therefore suspended Arenas indefinitely (Mahoney, 2010). Arenas entered into a plea agreement with the prosecution, agreeing to plead guilty. On March 26, 2010, Arenas was sentenced to two years probation and 30 days in a halfway house, avoiding any jail time (L. Alexander and Mike Wise, 2010; Lawrence, 2010 March 27). After completing 30 days in a halfway house, Arenas continued to play for the Washington Wizards. President Ernie Grunfeld decided not to void his contract, believing Arenas changed (Associated Press, 2010).
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