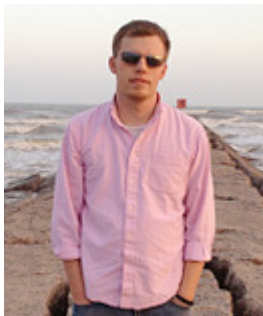


2nd Opinion: Sports stars shouldn't replace true heroes

October 24, 2013

As a 2006 graduate of the University of Oklahoma, I was fortunate enough to see Adrian Peterson burst onto the scene. I remember standing—because you don't sit in the student section—with a friend watching this specimen of athleticism during his first collegiate game against the mighty Bowling Green State University Falcons.



Phillip Larsen Adrian Peterson was a great Sooner. His freshman year, he finished second in the Heisman balloting behind Matt Leinart. Adrian Peterson is a phenomenal running back. Countless stories have been written about what he did last season, less than a year removed from major knee surgery. As an avid fantasy football player, I owe Peterson a huge thank-you for carrying so many of my teams to fantasy victory.

Like a lot of people I was saddened to hear about the death of Peterson's 2-year-old son. As a father, that is the nightmare scenario. My stomach turns just thinking about what I would do and how I would react if I lost one of my girls. The outpouring of support for Peterson was well-documented throughout all the sports world. I mourn with Peterson and the mother of the child for their loss. I weep for the loss of a child.

A tragic, moral failure

However, Peterson is no hero. The story surrounding his son's death proves this. As the emotional reaction began to subside and the truth about his behavior as a father began to surface, it became clear Peterson, although a superstar athlete, is no hero. The fact Peterson only met his 2-year-old son two months prior to his death reveals he does not deserve the status of hero we are so quick to bestow. Since this tragedy, further stories—that Peterson has had multiple kids with multiple women—have surfaced.

We have set ourselves up for failure. We have equated athletic ability with morality, and that is our mistake. Some expectations for our professional athletes are unrealistic. For example, we unfairly placed so much weight and expectation on Tim Tebow.

Re-evaluate our priorities

But this serves as an opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities. Our heroes are not NFL running backs or other professional athletes. Our heroes are fathers who take time to lead their households. Our heroes are parents who take time to talk frankly about God's purpose for spiritual health, sex, work and many other pressing issues of our day. Our heroes are fathers and mothers. Our heroes are pastors and teachers. Our heroes are those who invest in one another and in all things point to Christ.

It is OK to watch Adrian Peterson. It is OK to keep Adrian Peterson on your fantasy team. Check that. It's not OK to keep Adrian Peterson on your fantasy team. You should trade him to me. What is not OK is to make Adrian Peterson, or any other athlete, something he or she is not—a replacement for the true heroes in our lives.

Phillip Larsen is a follower of Christ and a member of West Metro Community Church in Yukon, Okla. He is the author of Suit Up and an accompanying four-week small-group study. Suit Up is available at www.suitupbook.com and on Amazon. He also blogs at

[larsenphillip.wordpress.com.](http://larsenphillip.wordpress.com)