



## **The Ray Rice Teachable Moment: Coaching Boys Into Men**

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There's a Playbook that we'd like to get into the hands of Roger Goodell, John Harbaugh, and every player, coach and owner working with the National Football League. It's not Vince Lombardi's artistic use of the Wedge. It's not Bill Walsh's clever invention of the West Coast Offense. But it's a Playbook that has the potential to change the lives of many young men who appear to know less about healthy relationships than they do about a two-point conversion.

It might change the lives of our sons, some of whom are entering U.S. colleges with no understanding of what constitutes rape or sexual consent. And it might have made a difference to Ray Rice and more than 80 other NFL players who have committed acts of domestic violence since 2000.

When the NFL's new draft picks enter rookie training camp each year, their attitudes about women are often already shaped by the bubble of fame and entitlement that early success has provided. We suspect that many of these young men receive little or no guidance about healthy adult relationships. If they witnessed violence in homes and communities where women may have been victimized or marginalized, then it's no surprise that they bring that worldview with them.

So let's get back to the Playbook. Because it's the centerpiece of an expanding national program called Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM) that engages high school athletic coaches to help shape the attitudes and behaviors of young male athletes. Above all, it teaches young men respect for women— and that off the field, violence does not equal strength.

Why isn't Coaching Boys Into Men— and other programs like it— required for every high school in America?

Many of the media pundits who are rightly outraged by the NFL's penalty for Ray Rice's domestic violence incident are asking, "What kind of message is the NFL sending to women and girls about how they are valued in society?" We have another question: What kinds of messages are young boys receiving from the Ray Rice incident?

We all know middle- and high-school boys who follow their NFL heroes with almost religious fervor. So when Roger Goodell and the NFL penalize Ray Rice's domestic violence incident far below Will Hill's infraction for marijuana, you can bet that they are getting that message loud and clear.

Athletic coaches play an extremely influential and unique role in the lives of young men. They often serve as a parent or mentor to the boys they coach. Michael Jordan has described coach Dean Smith as a "second father" and long-time coach Phil Jackson as his friend. Because of these special relationships, coaches are poised to affect player behavior both on and off the field.

# Coaching Boys INTO MEN

## IN THE NEWS

So isn't it obvious that coaches, who are often masters of communication, have a perfect opportunity to share positive messaging and teachable moments about women and girls? Hundreds of coaches designed the 12-week Coaching Boys Into Men program that promotes respect and healthy relationships from the first day of practice. And a CDC study in 16 Sacramento high schools found less bystander behavior in athletes using the CBIM curriculum.

We can't help but speculate that a coach-delivered prevention program could have made a difference in the culture at Ohio's Steubenville High School, where two players were convicted of sexually assaulting a young woman, and others documented their acts in social media.

In 1999, Futures Without Violence (formerly called the Family Violence Prevention Fund), a group that was instrumental in the passage of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, knew that it was unlikely to solve a social problem like domestic violence if only 50 percent of the population was paying attention. They suspected that men felt indicted, not invited, to be part of the solution. And they knew that most men aren't violent. So they began working with the Advertising Council to create a campaign for the general public that encouraged fathers to talk to their sons about respect for women. They asked men to talk with the boys in their lives.

Almost 15 years later, the message from a 30 second commercial featuring a father and son bears repeating: "You taught him how to hit a baseball, how to hit a receiver, a strike zone, a 9-iron, the net. You even taught him how to hit the open man. But how much time have you spent teaching him ... what not to hit?"