We All Share Responsibility

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As a microcosm of our society, sports reflects and reinforces inequalities and behaviors that are endemic. In contact sports especially, where there is a premium placed on aggression and violent behavior, athletes are rewarded from a very young age for expressing these behaviors.

What we are witnessing at the professional level is a culture that condones, promotes and rewards aggression and violence, even though some players are not psychologically equipped to compartmentalize that behavior on the field or arena. Because this has been their way of life since youth sports, and now it is their livelihood, these athletes are expressing accumulated years of character “underdevelopment.” These behaviors carry over into their personal lives, harming those around them.

*Athletes' aggression and violence is condoned and even rewarded from an early age.*

Teams and leagues can protect their profit margins for only so long by distancing themselves from these athletes, as the New England Patriots did when they cut Aaron Hernandez. Leagues would show corporate responsibility if they confronted their cultures of violence and developed sound programs to address the character underdevelopment they are inheriting.

Sports leagues can be leaders in the fight against gun violence, not with ephemeral press conferences or public service announcements, but with practices that discourage players from owning guns.

With its High School Character Development program, the N.F.L. could extend the curriculum to include anger management and conflict resolution. Youth-level coaches and administrators must also be aware of how they may harm their players by promoting aggression and violence over character development.

Ultimately, we will have to determine whether our favorite sports are more valuable to cheer and athletes more worthy of idolizing when we take a stand to stop the violence.