

The Celebrity Athlete: A Powerful Endorsement Tool in the Mass Media

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**THE CELEBRITY ATHLETE:
A Powerful Endorsement Tool in the
Mass Media**

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To my family and friends:

Thank you for your endless love, support, and encouragement.

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Abstract

Athletes have become major celebrities within the mass media in modern society. They appear in a wide variety of mediums and advertising campaigns that may or may not be directly related to sports. Their level of fame and popularity has landed many star athletes with multi-million dollar endorsement contracts with companies who want to associate with the athlete's image and brand. This work attempts to further understand and analyze the role of celebrity athlete endorsers, how companies select and market their athlete spokespeople, and how audiences consume and react to these endorsements.

A look at the history of celebrity athlete endorsements provides a basic understanding of how athletes became involved in advertising. This is followed by a close examination of one of the biggest athlete brands of all time: Michael Jordan. Next, certain factors and attributes are discussed that companies look for in an athlete in terms of the importance and affect that they have. This leads to a theories section that applies different lenses to the interactions between celebrity athletes and consumers in an attempt to better understand the relationship. Through these theories, it becomes clear that companies must make strategic decisions in choosing the athlete, the message, and how to connect with their target audience in a way that communicates trust and credibility. Creating a relationship between the celebrity athlete, the product, and the consumer is vital for long-term endorsement success.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Playing Field

Today the developed world is saturated with a variety of advertisements. People are exposed to ads in the newspaper in the morning, on the radio they listen to at work, on the billboard they see on the drive home, during commercial breaks while watching evening television, and everywhere in between. Advertisements try to connect to their audience in a multitude of different ways. Some may employ humor, others use drama, and others may go with a straightforward approach and simply explain the benefits of the product or service they are selling. Whatever the method may be, the goal of the advertising enterprise is to inspire action so the individual responds positively to what that advertisement is selling. However, advertisers often realize they may not be the best person to deliver their messages. As a result, celebrities from an assortment of fields are frequently used to endorse certain products.

A 2010 study found that within the United States, approximately 25% of all advertisements feature a celebrity endorser (Schaefer, Parker, & Kent, 2010). Celebrity endorsements have reached a point where it is considered “a ubiquitous feature of modern marketing” (McCracken as cited in Hsu & McDonald, 2002, p. 19). However, celebrity endorsements come with a high price tag.

Athletes are one of the celebrity advertising categories representing a significant portion of dollars spent. In 2010, a total of \$46.3 billion was invested by sponsors on endorsements from a variety of stars from the sports world, and U.S. companies alone spent \$17.2 billion (Koo, Ruihley & Dittmore, 2012). Clearly, business both in the U.S.

and abroad see athlete endorsements as a worthwhile investment as the industry has grown into a multibillion-dollar operation. This is understandable as the list of potential benefits that it may have includes enhanced ad recall, increased product desirability, better ability to gain and hold consumers' attention, increased purchase likelihood, and increasing brand loyalty (Schaefer et al., 2010). Faces such as those of Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Alex Rodriguez, Peyton Manning, LeBron James, and Dale Earnhardt Jr. are frequently seen through different media channels and often become highly recognizable to people even outside of sports (Melnick & Jackson, 2002). In fact, a study done in California shopping malls found that a photograph of the back of Michael Jordan's head was more recognizable to people than the faces of Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and Jesus Christ (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). While this may be hard to believe, it is the result of the widespread use of celebrity endorsements that causes people to see pictures or video of someone like Michael Jordan far more than some political, economic, or historical figures. Companies such as Nike, one of the major athlete endorsement users, have paid a hefty price to make this the case. Nike projected their 2010 spending on endorsements by celebrity athletes to be \$712 million dollars (Koo et al., 2012).

Media as Manufacturers

At the very start of this entire process, however, is the creation of a celebrity. After all, there are many very talented professional athletes, musicians, and actors, yet that in and of itself does not make someone a celebrity. The recipe for a celebrity requires that the media to takes the individual and build them into a larger than life personality through their repeated coverage of them on multiple media platforms. An athlete cannot

become a celebrity without the media telling the public about that athlete. Boorstin explains the uniqueness of a celebrity by comparing it to a hero when he says:

The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness ... The hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero is a big man; the celebrity is a big name. (as cited in Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 2).

In this sense, the media is inseparable from the athlete celebrity, or any celebrity, despite what individual accomplishments they have. Games could still be played, records could still be broken, championships could still be won, but celebrities would not be made unless the media publicized these athletes and provided people with the means to create an emotional or sociological attachment to them. As Andrews and Jackson point out, “from the outpourings of the commercial media...we are, at least superficially, privy to a wealth of information that encourages us to develop a sense of familiarity, intrigue, and sometimes obsession with celebrity figures (2001, p.1). The media’s crucial role in this process primes the audience for the messages that advertising companies want to send them by creating and encouraging relationships with the athletes.

While it may seem obvious, the media’s coverage of sport, aside from the celebrity side of it, is also vital for the creation of celebrity athletes. People can watch a variety of different sports on their televisions, on the Internet, listen to them on the radio, and read about them in print. If an athlete were to just strictly be talked about and covered in the media without the public having the opportunity to see them play their sport and see for themselves what the media is talking about, the level of celebrity would not be nearly as high. Nowadays, anyone with basic cable has the chance to watch multiple different professional and college sports, as well as major sporting events such as the

Olympics. This access to sport in the home and social spaces establishes a base understanding of the athlete for the general public.

Sporting events also serve as some of the best marketing opportunities for companies. The audiences that tune into major events are highly attractive to advertisers who want the most sets of eyes possible. The Super Bowl is the classic example of this as the cost of advertising reaches into the millions of dollars due to the incredible number of viewers. Super Bowl XLIV broke a viewership record that “M*A*S*H*” had held for 27 years when 106.5 million people tuned in for the game (Hibberd, 2010). At the same time, the prices of these ads reflect the crowds they draw. The 2013 Super Bowl charged its advertisers \$4 million for just 30 seconds of airtime, which was a new record high (Konrad, 2013). Other sporting events, such as the championship series for major professional sports, the Olympics, the College Football BCS Championship, and the College Basketball March Madness Tournament, all offer the opportunity for companies to get their message out to a large group of people at once. In this regard, not only has the media built up this athlete that people will respond to, but they also provide the platform on which to feature the athlete and message through their far-reaching coverage of sporting events.

The Game Plan

Even though athlete celebrities are fairly commonplace as product endorsers and marketing campaign figures today, that wasn’t always the case. Both sport and the media have grown extensively in the last century to get to where they are now. This paper will first take a look back at some of the early athlete celebrities and what their role in the media and advertising was like. Throughout the 20th century, the image of the athlete

celebrity continued to morph into what it is today. The first athlete to take endorsements to a whole new level and really set the stage for years to come was Michael Jordan, and his impact on sports figures as endorsers is the second area of focus. As one of the most well known sports figures of all time, Jordan established and marketed his brand unlike any other athlete before him. Once that groundwork and buildup to today have been established, the next step is taking a closer look at what specific attributes are important for a celebrity athlete to be successful in the marketing world.

While there is no set criterion, certain factors have been found to be important across the board, while some vary based on the product and image the company wants to project. This leads into the next section of theories that researchers have developed to better understand what to look for when selecting an athlete for an endorsement and what separates effective and not effective marketing campaigns. This is followed up with a discussion of a few specific areas of the celebrity athlete endorsement realm that cannot be lumped together with mainstream endorsement strategies such as marketing the bad-boy athlete, utilizing females in campaigns, and how companies react to scandal or behavior issues with athletes they have under contract. Finally, the conclusion will summarize earlier arguments, emphasize certain key points, and suggest some areas for further research. Through the information presented and discussed, it will become evident that the rise of professional athletes as high-profile celebrities has allowed them to become powerful product endorsers and marketing tools in the mass media. This complex relationship between the player, product, company, and customer requires proper strategic decisions to be made so that the customer will understand and buy into the message that the player and company is trying to communicate.

Chapter Two: A Blast From the Past

The First of Their Kind

For many people today, it might be hard to imagine a society where sport does not play a major role. Sports have their own section in most newspapers, they can be found on multiple television channels throughout the day, and they serve as a focus point for many social gatherings. The Super Bowl, for example, attracts both football fans and non-football fans to come together and watch the game, the commercials, and the halftime show. In this sense, sport's role in modern society is much more than just a game, but rather serves as a piece of the culture and a social connection amongst individuals. It is only with this state being how it is that athletes have the ability to rise to celebrity status. However, it took almost all of the 1900's for sports to first gain traction within the United States and then grow to the popularity level that they have today.

As stated earlier, the rise of the sport celebrity is closely tied to the media's publication and dissemination of sport. For this reason, the true beginnings of sport, in the sense that the public sees it in today, lies with the creation of the first newspaper sport section that appeared in 1895 in *The New York Journal* established by William Randolph Hearst (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Other newspapers at the time followed suit and established their own sports sections' to fulfill the public's craving for more information and coverage of these sports stars both in terms of on field performance and their personal lives. Andrews and Jackson highlight the important role that early newspapers played by saying they "provided a mechanism and forum for the transformation of notable athletes into nationally celebrated figures: a process of familiarization

which...evolved as an effective means of increasing newspaper circulation” (2001, p. 6). This positive feedback loop resulted in some of the first nationally recognized athletes including W.G. Grace, Gwyn Nicholls, and Tod Sloan (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). These athletes played cricket, rugby union, and horseracing, respectively, which, at the time, were considered the major sports because national professional leagues had not yet been established.

The print media however, was not the only channel through which sports reporting was attracting large crowds. Grantland Rice, a sports journalist that gained notoriety in the 1920’s, was one of the early reporters who began producing newsreel segments on sports that were shown in movie houses at the time (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). These segments offered the opportunity for more lively and personable description for the audience as reporters created an image of what the athlete was like and how they played the game that was unique from what someone could read in print. Even though endorsements were not occurring during these early stages of sport, it was crucial to establish this increased level of attention in the press and the public so that future celebrity athletes could develop.

Diamond Legends

While multiple professional sports leagues are popular today, it was baseball that took off in America first as early as the mid 1800’s. What started as local teams and leagues began to grow into professional leagues spanning large geographic areas. As the structure and rules of the game and leagues were being sorted out, the interest from the general public began to grow as well (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). By the early 1900’s, as major newspapers started having sports sections and film segments on sport became

popular, businesses decided it was time to make their move. In 1905, Hillerich and Bradsby, the makers of the Louisville Slugger baseball bat, agreed to what many believe was the first endorsement deal with Hall of Famer Honus Wagner (McGhee, 2012). Rather than being given millions of dollars like athletes are given today, H&B supplied Wagner with bats that had his name branded on them to use during games (McGhee, 2012). After Wagner's agreement, other companies got in on the action. Ty Cobb was one of the next players to get an endorsement deal in 1907 after just two years of playing professional baseball (McGhee, 2012). Coca-Cola made him one of their lead spokespeople and hoped that Cobb would be able to sustain his early success so they could ride along on his wave of increasing publicity (McGhee, 2012).

Although some of these early celebrity athletes were able to earn success in the marketing world, no athlete of the time was able to become as popular and sought-after as New York Yankees power hitter Babe Ruth. Ruth first came into the league in 1914 as a pitcher, but was moved to the outfield after a few years because of his value in the batting order as an everyday player (McGhee, 2012). The change proved to be a good one as Ruth began to break all sorts of batting records and became known as one of the best homerun hitters of all time. To this day, Ruth ranks first in slugging percentage, second in runs batted in, third in home runs, and tenth in batting average. This astonishing on-field success quickly thrust Ruth to the forefront of the sports world and made him one of the most well known players of all time (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). As a result, Ruth became the top target for companies looking for an athlete to align their brand with. With so many endorsement deals directed his way, Ruth had to hire a business manager, possibly the first athlete ever to do so, just to handle all of his offers (McGhee, 2012).

On top of Ruth's phenomenal athletic success, he also had the personality and charisma that people were attracted to and admired making him an even hotter target for companies (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Ruth was a hit with media and developed a reputation as a glutton and womanizer for all of his partying and socializing as the team travelled the country. At the same time, Ruth was respected as someone who had come from a lower-middle class background and had a somewhat troubled childhood to a national hero. He had a unique:

Capacity to project multiple images of brute power, the natural uninhibited man and the fulfillment of the American success dream. Ruth was living proof that the lone individual could still rise from mean, vulgar beginnings to fame and fortune, to a position of public recognition equaled by few men in American history. (Rader as cited in Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 6).

Because of this, Ruth's appeal went much further than just sports and athletics. Ruth was a cultural icon that symbolized hard work, determination, and the ability for even the average man to achieve the highest levels of greatness. This made his appeal both powerful and broad so a variety of different companies and products could benefit from his image being attached to theirs. Sports companies could obviously draw from his athletic power and skill, but a car company that makes their cars in America could use his home-grown story to emphasize taking pride and believing in the hard work of America laborers.

Even businesses with less of a direct connection with Ruth's skills or story would still benefit from him endorsing their product strictly because people would recognize him and have a positive reaction towards him. It is this versatility in his marketability, coupled with his slugging power, which made him the first true celebrity athlete on a national scale. At the height of his fame, Ruth endorsed a wide array of products such as

candy bars, baseball gloves, cigars, Girl Scout cookies, chewing tobacco, cereal, underwear, gasoline, and soft drinks (McGhee, 2012). Ruth's role in the marketing and endorsement industries ushered in an important concept that may not be apparent on the surface: that an athlete's story and what they represent to people can be equally as effective and powerful of an influencer as the player's actual on field accolades.

On the other side of this relationship, some of the early companies to get involved with marketing through sports celebrities were able to reap the benefits of establishing a firm connection and brand image early on. Wheaties sought to build a strong bond to the sports world, which started with their tag line of 'Breakfast of Champions' (McGhee, 2012). The sports reference opened the door for a variety of different athletes to become spokespeople for the product as the slogan provided an instant connection between endorser and product. The next step then in the process was to secure sports figures, notably but not exclusively baseball players since that was by far the dominant sport of the early to mid 1900's. The cereal was able to accomplish with stars such as Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, and Bronko Ngurski (McGhee, 2012). This approach of having multiple stars endorse the same product creates an increased level of credibility in the consumer's mind because they saw different athletes in the media all telling them to eat this cereal, so the audience is likely buy into this group mentality and purchase the cereal. Wheaties was able to secure such a dominant share of the athlete endorsement market that in the 1939 Major League Baseball All Star game, 46 of the 51 players in the game endorsed the cereal (McGhee, 2012). This overwhelming association between the 'Breakfast of Champions' cereal and the on-field champions themselves proved to be a powerful influence in people's minds that saw the two as one cohesive image.

The Emergence of Modern Sport Culture

After the invention of the television and its introduction into the American household in the 1950's and 1960's, sport became even more entrenched in society. Whereas before print, still images, and radio served as the primary sources of information and entertainment for sports fans, television brought with it the visual motion element that people had been missing (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). People now had the opportunity to see for themselves the athletes and games that they had heard so much about, and the drama and unpredictability that is so enticing and crucial to sport could be experienced by the fan in their own home. A new wave of sports stars emerged during this time including Mickey Mantle, Joe Namath, and Arnold Palmer (Andrews & Jackson, 2001).

It was this time frame that really brought sport and entertainment closer together as the characters and story lines of sport took on a life of their own. This more complete connection with sport allowed individuals to develop a more personal relationship with the teams and their players as the structure and experience lent itself to that system (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Whannel describes this mixture of sport and story by saying, "Sport is presented largely in terms of stars and narratives: the media narratives the events of sport, transforming them into stories with stars and characters; heroes and villains" (as cited in Jackson & Andrews, 2001, p. 7). This gave companies even more marketing options to work with as players became more humanized in the media and their personalities and attributes could be used to build connections between them and consumer products.

This all lead to the modern sports culture that we have in our society today. Sports can be found on a variety of television channels, radio stations, and in all forms of print media. In 2001, the value of the global sports industry was an estimated \$324 billion dollars (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). This dollar value demonstrates just how big of an influence sport has in modern society as a large number of people spend money on sport in a variety of ways. While the role of sport in culture today may not be markedly different than it has been in recent past decades, “what is new about contemporary culture is the scale and scope with which variously celebrated individuals infuse and inform every facet of everyday existence (Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 2-3). Sports figures serve as role models and powerful symbols for many people due to the stories and personality that are attached to them through the media. In this sense, their importance goes much farther then their play on the field. Jones and Schumann articulate this concept by saying, “they are not viewed simply as sports entertainers, but are often expected to engender strong values and morals that conform to societal and cultural norms” (2000, p. 65). This additional layer of meaning is a result of people’s fandom and enthusiasm for the teams and athletes that they grow to hold so dearly. The fans see them as their heroes and push the values and attributes that they associate with the hero role onto their favorite athletes.

As sports figures continue to permeate all facets of pop culture, such as talk shows, movies, books, music, video games, and the Internet, their power as marketing tools increases as well. This power is unique for sports because of the emotional connection that people have for sports teams that they don’t have for brands or other companies. Hofacre points out this dynamic of marketing that utilizes sports by saying

that it “is unique because of the way sports fans follow their teams. They identify with and gain allegiance to sports teams and individuals. People don’t have the same enthusiasm for Holiday Inn” (as cited in Burnett, Menon & Smart, 1993, p. 22). Much of the difficulty in advertisements is being able to capture the audience’s attention, but if there is a popular athlete in that advertisement, their presence alone is going to grab the attention of people that follow that player or team. In that regard, businesses utilize the relationship already established between athletes and fans as a transmission method for their message.

However, companies that align themselves with sports are also forced to accept the unpredictability that is inherent in sport itself. On-field performance, health, and location of the player all affect the value of the athlete as an endorsement tool. An athlete’s present success is no guarantee of future high-level play down the road, and companies must realize this going into an agreement. McGhee (2012) points out that when discussing athlete endorsements it is important to keep in mind “the risks involved with using an athlete to promote a brand’s products. A player being benched or traded can diminish his marketability, as can an injury — even one that is not career threatening” (2012, p. 83). This is unique to the sports world because when you look at a highly successful actor, for example, it is safe to assume that that actor will continue to produce praiseworthy work down the road and their performance will remain at a high level. Actors don’t have to directly go up against other competitors, battle through injuries, or fall victim to old age. Athletes, on the other hand, can be at the top of their game one-year and then be struggling to find work just a few years later.

One example of this is former NBA player Gilbert Arenas. Arenas was an early second round draft pick in 2001, but quickly proved to be far better than his team projected. After winning the NBA Most Improved Player award in 2003, Arenas was selected to the all-star game in 2005, 2006, and 2007 and had an endorsement deal with Adidas. However, Arenas' next three seasons were plagued with injury problems, inconsistent play, and off the court issues. After being dropped by Adidas in 2009, Arenas bounced between teams for the next three seasons and failed to produce at a high level to the point where no team would sign him for the 2012 season, and Arenas was forced to play overseas instead. This rapid decline in his playing career highlights the risk that companies face when investing in athletes that they do not face with other pop culture personalities.

While the risks may be higher, the reward can be a game-changer. Getting an athlete early on who develops into a larger-than-life sports figure can pay huge dividends for a company, and there's no better example of this than Michael Jordan. Starting with Ruth, celebrity athletes of the past had gained prominence and star power in society, but no one ever reached the heights that Jordan was able to both as an athlete and a brand. For this reason, he serves as the ideal example of a celebrity athlete marketing success.

Chapter Three: Air Jordan

The Living Legend

Throughout the history of sports, there have been numerous athletes to gain national, or even global, fame. Some of these athletes have already been mentioned in this, and they have been able to reap large financial benefits from their notoriety both within sports and in the advertising realm. But few athletes before or after Michael Jordan have reached the level of stardom in the sports world that the Chicago Bulls basketball player has been able to. Athletes endorsing various products, both sports related and non-sports related, was not a new phenomenon, but Jordan went further than that. Jordan's partnership with Nike created the Air Jordan brand. A brand based off, designed, marketed, and centered around one man. As of 2001, Jordan related products were estimated to have made more than \$3 billion dollars over the course of his 15-year relationship with Nike (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Numbers like this just scratch the surface as to how big of marketing and advertising tool an athlete of Jordan's caliber can be for a brand and a company.

Jordan grew up in North Carolina, and emerged as a star in his later high school years. The story of Jordan not making his high school basketball team is often brought up when people discuss his determination and work ethic. Jordan did not make the varsity squad when he tried out his sophomore year of high school, and was put on the junior varsity squad instead. However, Jordan would end up being selected to the McDonald's All-American team as a senior and got a scholarship to play basketball at North Carolina. Jordan played there for three seasons and acquired numerous accolades such as twice

being selected to the All-American First Team, winning a national championship, and receiving the Naismith and Wooden player of the year awards in 1984. Jordan decided to forego his senior season and enter the National Basketball Association (NBA) draft in 1984 where the Chicago Bulls selected him as the third overall pick.

In his first season, Jordan was selected to the all-star team, won the Rookie of the Year Award, and appeared on the front cover of *Sports Illustrated* with the title “A Star Is Born”. Already, Jordan’s fame was gaining national attention as his on court success and personality were greatly admired by fans all across the country (Lear, Runyan & Whitaker, 2008). It would take Jordan seven seasons before winning an NBA title, but he would end up winning the next three in a row in 1991, 1992, and 1993. Jordan then retired from basketball and decided to play minor league baseball for two seasons before returning to basketball and the Bulls in 1995. Jordan picked up right where he had left off leading the Bulls to three more championships in 1996, 1997, and 1998. With six NBA championships, six NBA Finals Most Valuable Player (MVP) Awards, five NBA MVP Awards, 14 All-Star game appearances, and 10 All-NBA First Team selections, Jordan retired from basketball again in January of 1999.

Jordan also gained international attention during the 1984 and 1992 Olympics where the USA took the gold medal in basketball. The 1992 team was nicknamed “The Dream Team” because of its star-studded roster, and Jordan was one of the premier players on the team. He would later go on to work for the Washington Wizards front office, and then played for a stretch of 2001-2003 for the team before retiring for a third time. At his last game in Chicago, while Jordan was playing on the Wizards, the fans gave Jordan a four-minute standing ovation when his name was announced for the

starting lineups to show their love and appreciation for him. Jordan stayed involved in the Wizards organization for a short time, and later on became a part owner and executive of the Charlotte Bobcats where he still works today. Many people believe Jordan was the best basketball player to ever play the game, and he has certainly become one of the most famous to ever play (Melnick & Jackson, 2002).

The Nike and Jordan Team

This on the court success served as the basis for success in the business world that was unparalleled to any athlete before him. The list of companies that Jordan has worked with includes Gatorade, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Chevrolet, Hanes, Ball Park Franks, and Wheaties, but none were as prominent and lucrative as his partnership with Nike. From his first days in the league, Nike worked to associate Jordan's image with their brand by signing Jordan to a \$2.5 million five-year contract in his rookie year of 1984 (Ruihley, Runyan, & Lear, 2010). His success in college made him a highly desirable target for companies, and Nike would end up setting a new standard for athlete marketing with Jordan.

The duo created the Air Jordan brand that focused mostly on basketball shoes, but also included a variety of athletic apparel. Jordan wore the shoes himself from the start of his career, and the shoes became available to the public in 1985 (McGhee, 2012). To this day, the Air Jordan brand has continued to release new models of the shoes with the most recent ones being the AJ XX8, which was released in February of 2013. The widely recognized "Jumpman" logo, a silhouetted image of Jordan with a ball raised in one hand and his legs spread wide in the air as he goes in for a slam dunk, has become the image closely associated with this highly popular brand. This outstretched picture of Jordan

dunking was unlike anything before in that it was a hybrid between an athlete and a company. McGhee points this out when he says, “Jordan is so entwined with Nike that they have created a standalone brand — Air Jordan. This is the ultimate level of endorsement: the endorser not only lends his name to the product, but his name is the product” (2012, p. 82). Jordan was so iconic that he wasn’t just used to endorse a brand, but to create a whole new brand that survived on his star power.

Through television commercials, magazine ads, billboard images, and a variety of other media channels, Michael Jordan, as demonstrated by the earlier study by Andrews and Jackson (2001) in California shopping malls, has become one of the most well recognized public figures in modern society. This stardom stretches beyond the borders of America as well. A study in New Zealand surveyed 510 students with an average age of 14.5 from a variety of countries about their heroes and role models, and students across the board responded that Michael Jordan was at the top of their list (Melnick & Jackson, 2002). British students put Jordan at the top spot of celebrities who influence their values, Chinese students said that Chou En-Lai and Jordan were the two greatest men in history, and overall, students picked Jordan as their number one hero five times more often than New Zealand native Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to reach the summit of Mt. Everest (Melnick & Jackson, 2002). Clearly, by aligning with Michael Jordan, Nike was connecting with the entire global market.

The connection between Jordan and Nike was an obvious one, and not just because they both were involved with sports. Companies such as Nike push the idea of hard work, perseverance, and a burning desire to win, and that’s what Jordan stood for in many people’s eyes. He was obviously athletic like all NBA players, but natural

athleticism was not his strong point. His desire to win and willingness to do whatever it took to win was the message that Nike wanted to capture and communicate to their fans (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). What Nike wants their customers to think is that if they work hard and put in the time to improve their game as an athlete, that they too can achieve greatness. This is when they step in and show how their products will help athletes in practice, training, and all around performance. Jordan's marketability was more than just basketball success; it was also built on the ideals and qualities that people admired within Jordan's career and game. The Air Jordan brand has worked to embrace this identity and exemplify the characteristics in their products that match the characteristics of Jordan. Many believe that "the pairing of Michael Jordan and Nike set the standard for athlete/product endorsement matchup, and one can argue that Nike's success is rooted in that partnership decision" (O'Donnell as cited in Simmers, Damron-Martinez & Haytko, 2009, p. 59).

A Marketer's Dream

More than anything else, Jordan was always known for being a competitor who wanted to win. Even opposing teams admired his desire to beat you no matter the circumstances. He had a reputation of going harder than anyone else in practice, always pushing his teammates, and would use little things that opponents said to him as motivation to dominate them on the court (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). This killer instinct and desire to win above all else helped propel Jordan just as much as the trophies did. One example of this that is widely discussed is Jordan's "flu game". The game took place in Game 5 of the 1997 NBA Finals in Salt Lake City against the Utah Jazz. The series was tied 2-2, and the day of the game Jordan was very sick. The team didn't know if he

would be able to play, but Jordan declared he would play in the game. He would finish the night with 38 points, 7 rebounds, 5 assists, 3 steals and 1 block in 44 minutes of action, and the lasting image of Scottie Pippen having to physically hold Jordan up and help him off the court because he was too weak to do it himself stuck in people's minds. This heroic performance, along with many others throughout his career, was what made Jordan special to many people. His personification of a list of highly admirably qualities such as work ethic, dedication, skill, will power, and the ability to overcome any obstacle made him a role model for people of any age.

Michael Jordan as a symbol carries with it multiple cultural and commodified meanings for people (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). What he does on the court is only part of the equation, as what he represents to people plays a huge role in terms of whether or not they will buy into what he stands for. Andrews and Jackson state:

It is not surprising then that Nike has built Jordan's image in accordance with the dominant structure of the feelings that are continuously affectively rearticulated in relationship to American consumer culture, including those of the American Dream, rugged individualism and the value of personal perseverance. (2001, p. 23).

Nike has framed Jordan in such a way that his values align with those that American society promotes as well. He has been symbolically encoded with characteristics that not only apply to sport, but also to people in their own individual lives such as tenacity, determination, teamwork, humbleness, and a traditional moral code. This allows for his brand to cross between different industries and products since they aren't specific to one market. As a result, "Jordan now exists within an economically lucrative intertextual scenario in which each Jordan commercial helps to promote the other commodity signs in a considerable promotional arsenal" (Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 24). A commercial he

does for Nike could align with a magazine ad for Hanes, which could align with a web ad for Coca-Cola. The cross industry reinforcement of his brand image allows for a unique synergistic affect between his different endorsement campaigns.

One of Jordan's most well known campaigns was the Gatorade "Be Like Mike" commercials. This tag line encouraged people, mostly young people, to try to embody the traits that Jordan's brand stood for. Jordan's character off the court was respected as much as his play on the court. While many athletes today may receive negative publicity for certain behavior or incidences, Jordan was considered a family man with respectable values (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). Jordan first signed on with Gatorade in 1991, and the company reaped the benefits of his celebrity status in their very first year. Annual revenues jumped from \$681 million to over \$1 billion (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). In a sense, Nike had already done all the marketing work for them by helping Jordan build up his brand image that people believed in and bought into, and all Gatorade had to do was create their own angle on the Jordan brand and let his stardom do the rest of the work. Jordan's brand power in the economic world was evident when he returned to basketball in 1995. Related firms saw an increase in their stock value of \$1.016 billion in that year alone (Cunningham & Bright, 2012). Even after leaving basketball in a very abrupt fashion and for reasons many didn't understand, Jordan was still able to have an immediate impact on the companies he had aligned himself with as soon as he returned to the game.

Even now having been retired from basketball for ten years, Jordan is still used as a product endorser in a variety of mediums in the mass media. From June of 2007 to June of 2008, Jordan did not play a single professional basketball game, but made \$45 million

in endorsements (Simmers et al., 2009). Numbers such as this go to show just how powerful of a brand Jordan has because it has been able to outlast his professional career. Symbols retain their power far longer than a basketball player may be able to perform on the court if the symbol is continually marketed and reinforced to the public through the mass media. Jordan still appears in commercials for companies such as Haines, while his role within sports endorsements has gone down since he is no longer playing professional sport.

This element of his brand ensures long-term sustainability because his significance went further than just the basketball world. The respect that people had for his character made his ferocious on the court attitude an appealing contrast because people could see the best of both sides in him. Andrews and Jackson highlight this two-sided nature of his image by saying, “Yet just as he is celebrated for being the embodiment of mythic masculinity as forceful, talented, and assertive on the court, so too is Jordan represented as an affable and approachable athlete away from the game” (2001, p. 29). The Jordan brand was able to encapsulate both raw power and force on the court as well as friendliness and high character off the court. His basketball success gives him high credibility when endorsing sports related products, and his character and attitude give him high credibility when endorsing products outside of sports because people like him as a person and see him as someone they can trust (Jones & Schumann, 2000).

Jordan’s unparalleled stardom and unique symbolic meaning came at a large price tag. While Jordan was earning tens of millions of dollars a year in basketball contracts, he also had tens of millions of dollars coming to him from the various endorsement contracts he had with various businesses. Jordan’s contract with the Chicago Bulls in 1998 was for

\$34 million dollars (the highest paid player currently in the NBA is Kobe Bryant who will make \$27.8 million this year), but the majority of his income that year came from the \$45 million he made in endorsements, \$16 million of which came from Nike (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Over the course of the 1990's, Jordan won all six of his championships and earned more than \$240 million in endorsement deals (Jones & Schumann, 2000). While this may seem like an absurdly high amount, the amount of profit he has brought in for many of these companies is what allows him to charge such a high price for them to associate their brand with his.

Jordan took product endorsement and mass marketing to a whole different level from the time he entered into the NBA. Almost twenty years after his rookie season, Jordan is still a prominent endorsement figure and can be seen in the mass media on a regular basis. Companies learned that not only is success and notoriety within the game extremely important, but that this success had to be properly utilized and marketed to align with a message that the company could use to connect with the audience. If the symbol of the Jordan brand only went as far as being a championship basketball player, than his endorsement abilities would be equally limited to basketball and other sports related products. However, by establishing an identity and meaning that people admired and believe in, Jordan's marketability expanded into a variety of different products. Andrews and Jackson explain this versatile marketing ability by saying, "a critical analysis of American commodity signs such as Jordan illuminates transnational influences on local cultures, revealing that these meanings are contingent on their perception within an array of diverse national contexts" (2001, p. 39). This model ensures

long-term success and profitability, and would serve as the goal to strive for in the future for athletes and companies alike.

Chapter Four: The Recipe For Success

A Perfect Blend

Each athlete brings their own story and personality to the table when negotiating an endorsement contract, and the business has to figure out what attributes are important to evaluate if they want the marketing campaign to be a win for all the parties. While there is no set checklist of items that is required for a campaign to increase profits for the company, there are certain aspects that the company may want to focus on based on the product they are trying to sell and the message they are hoping to communicate to their audience. Picking an athlete that embodies the features that the company wants to emphasize can make their message more clear to the audience simply by having that certain athlete as the endorsement figure. Whether the athlete may be a decorated veteran, a young but promising rookie, a role player, an outspoken leader, or a quiet hard worker, their image carries with it meaning that the audience will interpret, and hopefully, for the company, it is interpreted in such a way that lines up with the companies core values and beliefs.

These attributes will be explored and discussed in this section including how important they are to convey, how they affect the audience's feelings toward the advertisement, and some examples that exemplify this attribute in real world athlete endorsement advertising. Performance, credibility, likeability, charisma and charm, attractiveness, power, and uniqueness are all factors that will be further expanded upon. While some of these may have some cross over with one another, there are still

distinguishing features of each that influence the overall effectiveness and success of the athlete as the endorser of a product.

Performance

Without a doubt, performance serves as the foundation for the athlete's fame and possible marketing potential. While other factors may not necessarily be required for an athlete to have a successful marketing appeal through the media, on field performance in whatever their sport may be is the first and most inseparable factor in the equation. After all, it's the performance of the athlete that garners them local, regional, and national attention, and without that initial recognition of the athlete by the audience, there is no advantage to using the athlete in the first place. "In the field of sports, athletes acquire most of their credibility through their on-field performances taking place in real time... For many athletes, this exposure is what helps define them as a celebrity" (Koo et al., 2012, p. 50). While a movie star is defined by their performances on screen, or a musician defined by their music on an album, an athlete starts their stardom in the game that they play. As shown in this quote, this performance is what leads to other factors being present in the athlete, such as credibility, but that next step can not be achieved without the in game success first.

This factor also aligns with the competitive nature of American culture. Athletes who are successful in their sport are athletes who are winning. Whether it's winning awards, divisions, conferences, or championships, performance is ultimately measured by whether or not the athlete wins. "One of the most important factors...is the image of being a winner. In our capitalist society, where competition is viewed as good, we reward brands that seem to be winners through the image of athletes" (Kahle & Kahle, 2006, p.

193). This is an important association for a customer to make when deciding between different products that are similar to one another. Companies want their product to stand out as the winner, the best of all the products, so having an athlete that signifies this same thing to the consumer becomes critical. The meaning that the athlete holds is channeled to the product and then to the consumer. In other words, “the favorable meanings generated by celebrities through...athletic achievements can be transferred to products in compatibility between celebrities and products” (Kim & Na, 2007, p. 312). So not only is performance important for the simple sake of getting the athlete’s image disseminated by the mass media so he becomes a celebrity, but their performance is what engraves meaning into them as a symbol to society at large.

At the same time, poor performances can negatively affect an athlete’s endorsement ability in the mass media, even if the athlete had success in the past. This susceptibility to the unpredictability of sports makes the athlete’s ability as a marketing tool a fluid state (McGhee, 2012). If the athlete struggles to produce during their games, the brand will simultaneously struggle to maintain it’s same meaning and appeal with the general public. Similar to how performance is the first step towards the athlete gaining credibility, poor performance can have the opposite affect. Put simply, “poor athletic performances by an athlete endorser will signal a negative shift in consumers' perceptions of this individual's level of expertise, thereby detrimentally affecting his or her overall source credibility” (Koo et al., 2012, p. 150). From the start and all the way through to the end, performance is the most important element of a successful celebrity athlete endorser. It serves as the launching point for all the other factors to build off of and gives the athlete the notoriety they need.

Credibility

Once that athlete has established their name within their sport, their success lends credibility to their name. A person who is credible is someone who would be considered a knowledgeable source or expert on a certain topic. Nothing makes someone more of a trustworthy and reliable source than becoming a champion at whatever it is that they do. “Essentially, the better an athlete performs, the stronger the consumers' perception of that athlete's trustworthiness and expertise becomes” (Koo et al., 2012, p. 150). This is a fairly simple formula and companies realize how strongly related the two factors are. This especially plays a significant role in product advertising when some may automatically assume a defensive position if they believe companies are trying to scam them and force a consumerism mindset onto them. To counter this, companies want a spokesperson that has a high level of credibility so consumers will trust what they are saying and believe that they are being honest with them (Martin, 1996). If companies want people to receive their message in its intended form, they are going to have to get someone to send the message that the receiver sees as a credible and trustworthy source. The athlete's ethical image comes into play here, as people need to believe that the athlete is being sincere in what they are conveying to the audience.

An example of this that Kahle and Kahle (2006) use to illustrate this point is racecar driver Jeff Gordon endorsing Pennzoil motor oil. The consumer believes that since Jeff Gordon has had a successful racing career, he must have a high level of knowledge about a product like motor oil. “The receivers make the connection that Jeff Gordon uses Pennzoil to help him win auto races, and they believe that it could help them, too” (Kahle & Kahle, 2006, p. 193). While the average consumer may not be

participating in car races like Gordon, they could still “win” in the sense of choosing a quality motor oil, and thus take better care of their engine so it lasts longer. This illustrates the idea that successful athletes have a higher credibility amongst the public, and their endorsement of a certain product will lead the public to trust in the product as well be its association with the athlete celebrity.

Likeability

Likeability is another key component in the mix because a company wants an athlete that when they appear in the media, people have an initial positive reaction solely based off their previous attitude towards the athlete. If the consumer is a fan of the athlete in the advertisement, they will be more willing to listen to what the athlete is saying, and thus, more likely to purchase the product that is being endorsed (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). This attribute is often not something that companies need to look for specifically because most celebrities and athletes are already well liked by the public, unless they have previous bad behavior or play for the rival of a certain fan’s team. However, for the most part, famous athletes that have had successful careers or that people find exciting early on in their career will be athletes that people already like and look upon in a favorable light. Some people may even like an athlete for reasons outside of sports such as charity work they are involved, how they carry themselves in a professional manner, or be attracted to their personality (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). Likeability can come in a variety of ways, but the more people that like an athlete, the more people there are that will listen to what they have to say.

An athlete’s likeability also enables that athlete to be an effective marketing tool outside of products that he may have strong credibility for. Simmers, Damron-Martinez,

and Haytko note this concept by saying, “If the image of a celebrity is focused on likeability, then he/she can endorse a much broader range of products, since the image transfer is based on personality feature rather than a particular area of expertise” (2009, p. 57). While the athlete’s specific area of expertise might only apply to a certain grouping of products, their likeability as a person can be attached to any brand or product allowing for more opportunity for the celebrity athlete.

An example of an athlete with a high level of likeability that has been able to leverage into endorsement deals is National Football League quarterback Peyton Manning. Manning, a longtime member of the Indianapolis Colts who now plays for the Denver Broncos, is admired throughout the country for a multitude of reasons. First of all, Manning has proven to be a terrific football player throughout his fourteen-year NFL career. While he only has one Super Bowl Championship, Manning has been in 12 Pro Bowls, named to the All-Pro team six times, won four NFL MVP awards, and was the fastest player ever to reach 50,000 passing yards, 4,000 completions, and 400 passing touchdowns. Aside from all those who like Manning for his achievements on the field, he has also gained the reputation for being a funny and friendly guy in his commercial and television appearances. Manning’s commercials for companies such as Gatorade, Reebok, Sony, and Papa John’s have been well received by the public, and his performances on talk shows and Saturday Night Live have also increased his likeability in the public. On top of all that, Manning is seen as a family oriented and moral person. He has never been in the media for poor behavior or incidences with the law, and people have a high level of respect for him as a person. All these different facets work together to make Manning a highly likeable celebrity athlete that people want to listen to.

Charisma and Charm

A celebrity athlete endorser is going to be appearing in commercials, in print advertising, on the radio, and in multiple other media channels. This means that companies are going to want someone who has some personality to them and will come off to people as friendly and comforting (Kim & Na, 2007). If they look nervous or uncomfortable in the advertisements, then that is what the audience will pick up on, and the athlete and product will not be as attractive to the consumer. Finding an athlete with a favorable personality that the public feels like they can connect to is important for creating a relationship between the brand and the customer. This requires a skillset that goes beyond sports. “The sender needs to have acting skill if the advertisement is on TV. The receiver wants an interesting personality, someone who is articulate in delivering the message (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). An athlete could have any number of championships, but if they are dull in their advertisements and uninteresting to the audience, then people won’t respond to the company’s message.

One athlete that has used their charisma and personality to elevate himself outside of the sports world is former NFL defensive lineman Michael Strahan. Strahan holds the single season record for the most sacks, and was a leader for the New York Giants with his loud and passionate personality. Strahan is one of numerous professional athletes to serve as a spokesperson for Subway, but he has gone further than that. After appearing as a football analyst on *Fox NFL Sunday* for several years, Strahan’s charismatic personality landed him a co-host position on ABC’s morning talk show titled *Live! With Kelly and Michael*. Strahan’s personality allowed him to expand his media personality career outside of sports, connect with a whole new audience on his morning talk show, and thus

open him up to a greater portion of the public. This accessibility on a larger level of sports means that an even larger segment of the public will recognize his image, and companies see that as a significant benefit.

Attractiveness

While attractiveness may not always be a factor in successful celebrity athlete advertisements, there are undoubtedly situations where having an attractive athlete be part of the advertisement is advantageous for the company. Consumers are going to be more attentive when the person on the television or in the picture in the magazine is an attractive person (Simmers et al., 2009). This is the same concept that explains why companies use models and attractive people in their commercials. People are more likely to pay attention and look at the advertisement if the people in it are physically attractive. Researchers have taken the time to see if this idea actually rings true when put to the test. Kahle and Kahle found in their study that consumers had a “higher purchase intent if [they] believed the source was attractive, in contrast to less attractive sources.

Consumers follow this trend both for products designed to enhance their appearance and for products virtually unrelated to appearance” (2006, p. 194). Kim and Na (2007) found a similar importance in the attractiveness factor, especially when the product was not directly related with sports. Their research concluded that, “in the high compatibility condition, the credibility and attractiveness had significant effects on the endorsed product, whereas only the attractiveness had a significant effect on the endorsed product in the low compatibility condition” (Kim & Na, 2007, p. 318). As the connection between the athlete’s credibility and the product decreases, the influence of their attractiveness increases.

Kahle and Kahle (2006) point out a strong example of this in female tennis player Ana Kournikova. At one time, she had never won a singles Grand Slam title and was ranked 19th in the women's professional tennis tour, yet Kournikova was first among female tennis players in endorsement money. This gap between her success as a tennis player and her success as an endorser was due to her attractive physical appearance, as further evidenced by her website being in the top five most-visited amongst athlete websites for all sports in the world (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). While Kournikova is obviously still a very good tennis player and playing in professional tournaments around the world, her attractiveness is her most appealing feature to marketers.

Power

One of the final factors that marketers may look for is power. While this can mean physical power if that is what the product calls for, power also has to do with having the power to persuade people and convince them your message is the truth, and they should act based off of it (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). This attribute, in a way, is the ability to take all of the other factors and channel them successfully into an effective message that the audience will truly internalize and understand. The desired result is having the receiver act according to the message, and this is known as compliance. "Compliance is the influence a powerful source has on the receiver. If the receiver is persuaded by the source's message, this concept is known as compliance through power" (Kahle & Kahle, 2006, p. 194). As noted earlier, Jordan exerted a huge amount of power by combining his success on the court, his personality, his confidence, and his smooth demeanor that made people both believe him and want to follow him.

Uniqueness

There are other times when an athlete comes along where, above all else, his biggest appeal is his uniqueness (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). Whether it is an unusual backstory, a mold unlike others in their sport, or just an all around strange personality, sometimes being different pays off. Unique athletes may not be able to sustain their success long-term, but their unusualness can intrigue audiences and spark curiosity for stretches at a time. During last year's NBA season, a unique athlete took over the headlines with his unusual background and breakout performances for the New York Knicks. Jeremy Lin, an Asian-American Ivy league graduate from Harvard, is not what most people picture when they think of NBA player. After going undrafted in 2010, Lin had to prove that he deserved a spot on a NBA roster. Lin saw limited minutes with the Golden State Warriors before getting cut. He was then picked up for the 2011-2012 season by the Houston Rockets, but was waived before the regular season even started.

The New York Knicks picked up Lin later that year, and the team found themselves struggling to win games two months into the season. Lin, who had a hard time getting any minutes in an NBA game, got his big opportunity on February 4th, and finished with 25 points, five rebounds, and seven assists in 36 minutes. In just one game, Lin went from bench warmer to starting point guard. The Knicks rattled off seven straight wins while Lin set the record for most collective points by any NBA player in his third, fourth, and fifth career NBA starts with 89, 109, and 136 points, respectively. "Linsanity" was born, and Lin quickly garnered national fame for his incredible performances after being a no-name player just a few days earlier. Lin's unique basketball past, cultural heritage, and Ivy league degree in the biggest market in America were a story that made

him stand out and helped turn him into a celebrity in a matter of weeks. While Lin was given a multi-year deal this past off-season worth \$25 million, he is still far from being considered one of the best players in the NBA. However, his uniqueness led to endorsements deals with Nike, Volvo, and Steiner Sports. In this case, being different really pays off.

Each of the aforementioned factors plays a role in the ultimate success or failure of a celebrity athlete endorser in the mass media. While some may be more influential than others, they are all critical when a company considers what athlete to align themselves with and what the message to the audience should be. Researchers have used these attributes to create multiple different theories through which athlete marketing can be further examined. These theories will be the focus of the next section in an attempt to better understand the interplay between the various characteristics of the athlete and the consumer.

Chapter Five: The Theory Behind The Message

Finding A Fit

The numerous attributes and characteristics that factor into an athlete's ultimate success or failure as an endorsement tool are the pieces that theorists have worked with to try to better understand how it all fits together. Different theories have arisen that place emphasis on different areas and approach the process in a variety of ways. The level of success of celebrity endorsements in general fluctuates between researchers and theories. While there may still be debate on what distinct elements lead to the results that advertisers are looking for, there is general consensus on what advertisers hope the results will be. Menon, Boone, and Rogers summarize this by saying:

The general belief among advertisers is that advertising messages delivered by celebrities provide a higher degree of appeal, attention and possibly message recall than those delivered by non-celebrities. Marketers also claim that celebrities affect the credibility of the claims made, increase the memorability of the message, and may provide a positive effect that could be generalized to the brand. (n.d., p. 1).

This holds true for athletes from any background or industry. From what has been discussed concerning specific attributes earlier, it can be understood that those elements tie into and are connected with these desired outcomes.

The emergence of theories provides a lens through which celebrity-marketing campaigns can be better analyzed and evaluated. Using these theories allows for a closer look into how these advertising messages, coming from celebrity athletes, function in a consumer context. The main theory that researchers use on this topic is Match-Up Hypothesis Theory. However, this section will also include the Model of Meaning Transfer, the Source Credibility Model, the Source Attractiveness Model, Assimilation

and Contrast Effects, and Schema Congruity Theory. Some concepts within these theories and models cross over into one another, as many of the main points are applicable to multiple ways of understanding. They also serve as the basis of studies that have been carried out by researchers throughout the years who hope to further our knowledge about the relationship between the consumer and the athlete celebrity (Kim & Na, 2007). While not all of the theories ring true in all cases, and some may even conflict with one another, they are rooted in logical observations, analyses and research. These theories will now be described in detail and applied to various celebrity athlete endorsers to demonstrate how they come into play in modern society.

Match-Up Hypothesis Theory

As one of the main theories for celebrity endorsement, Match-up Hypothesis Theory looks at the connection being made between the specific product and the individual that is endorsing that product. For the endorsement to be successful in the marketplace, there needs to be a match, or an amount of congruency, in the consumer's mind between the celebrity that is featured in the advertisement and the product that is being advertised (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). The two parties have congruency if they are "similar on the basis of their image, such that even though the products may only be congruent with a few features, the similarity within their images may cause the participants to perceive that the product is similar (Kim & Na, 2007, p. 312) If the audience does not see that link between endorser and endorsed product, then their message will not be as strong or convincing for their audience. While some messages may be very clear in their connection between the two parties, there are others where it may not be as evident. However, this theory emphasizes that the match is key for the

overall message to have its intended affects on the audience. Martin describes the main contention of this theory by saying, “an endorsement will be more credible and will enhance the image of the product to the extent that the salient characteristics in the image of the spokesperson match up with the perceived characteristics of the product” (1996, p. 30). An athlete’s symbol represents certain elements to people, and these elements need to be consistent from that athlete through to the product that they are endorsing.

For example, a star basketball player could endorse a pair of basketball shoes because he represents athleticism and success within the sport, and that’s the attributes the company will want people to associate with their shoes. This same principle would also hold true for products outside of the sports realm such as a strong, hard-hitting linebacker endorsing a powerful truck because both parties project a tough, mighty image so the consumer could see that match. An Olympic sprinter could endorse a sports car that is hoping to draw in consumer for it’s speed and quickness on the road like the athlete displays on the track. These examples reach outside of sports because there are characteristics that are transferable into other industries. In this regard, athletes are able to create matches in a much wider market than the just the sports world.

A real world example where the lack of a match became problematic was with Tiger Woods and Buick. Even though Woods is one of the most famous and wealthy athletes, his partnership with Buick was unsuccessful (Simmers et al., 2009). “People always shook their head as to why he did the deal anyway with Buick. If [Woods] is going to do a deal with [General Motors], you would have thought Cadillac more than Buick” (Thomaselli as cited in Simmers et al., 2009, p. 53-54). Thomaselli is pointing out

that the image of Tiger Woods would match-up with a Cadillac automobile much better than a Buick because golf is a high-end, luxury, classy sport.

This theory relies heavily on the qualities of credibility and athletic success. When an athlete is able to perform consistently at a high level, they will begin to gain both recognition and meaning in the public for what they have done and how they have done it. Their style of play influences what specific characteristics that athlete is going to represent. For example, a hockey player that gets into fights frequently, is very physical in the game, and is constantly in the middle of scrums will be known for different reasons than a player who is fast up and down the ice, handles the puck extremely well, and can get around his defender as he attacks the net. Because of this, these two players would not be as successful in some endorsements as they would in others because their performance within the sport gives them credibility in different facets. While they would both still be considered knowledgeable or credible in terms of hockey and athleticism, their styles of play would apply to different products. The bruising, physical player could be used for products that want to be seen as strong, tough, or indestructible. The speedy, finesse player could be used for products that want to be seen as smooth, efficient, or fast. These situations would create the connection that Match-up Hypothesis Theory says is crucial for the message to be effective with the audience. Put simply, “messages conveyed by the celebrity image and the endorsed product should be congruent for persuasive effectiveness” (Kim & Na, 2007, p. 310).

However, not all research backs this theory. Ding, Molchanov, and Stork published a paper on their research in 2010 where they looked at 101 announcements that were made by US businesses between 1996 and 2008 in order to analyze how those

announcements affected the company's financial success. The group explains in their conclusions that "despite an array of previous studies documenting the importance of endorsers' characteristics, our data lends only weak, albeit positive, support for the match-up hypothesis between the celebrity and the endorsed product" (2010, p. 160). Even though this theory may hold-up in some cases and make sense logically, it is by no means a binding law of celebrity endorsements that the connection alone will make or break the success of the advertising campaign.

Model of Meaning Transfer

This next theory focuses on a concept that has been discussed earlier, which is transferring the meaning of the celebrity athlete to the product that they are endorsing. Grant McCracken was the first theorist who proposed this theory as he saw that athlete's symbolic meaning in society as a primary piece in the overall success of the marketing campaign (Simmers et al., 2009). McCracken broke this model into three distinct stages, which are, "the formation of celebrity image; transfer of meaning from celebrity to product; and the transfer from product to ad recipients" (Kim & Na, 2007, p. 312). In this process, the meaning is passed from its origin in the celebrity athlete all the way to the audience of the endorsement with the hope that the meaning will cause the desired effect of the message. As a comparison, the celebrity athlete is the sender of the message and the consumer is the receiver, and the receiver has to be able to understand the meaning of the advertisement in order for them to be affected by it. The product then takes on the qualities of the celebrity through this transfer. "Rather than developing a brand personality for a product, a celebrity endows his/her clearly defined, existing personality to the product through endorsement. Therefore, a celebrity endorser can be considered the

epitome of a brand personality” (Simmers et al., 2009, p. 59). By using the celebrity, the product is bestowed with a brand image right from the start instead of the company having to create this themselves. This theory relies less on the actual match in terms of attributes between the two parties, and instead emphasizes that whatever the meaning may be, it needs to successfully make its way all the way down the chain.

If operating under this theory, a company would want to first look at the meaning that perspective athletes hold in the public eye before choosing whom to be their endorser. This must be established first outside of the endorsement campaign.

McCracken describes this symbolic construction process by explaining that:

Numerous cultural meanings exist in the world, and that celebrities draw meanings from the culturally constituted world when developing their images, which are accumulations of meanings from the roles they assume in various aspects of their careers, both in media and in the public eye. (as cited in Simmers, et al., 2009, p. 54).

Athletes’ performance, personality, demeanor, and actions all work to attach certain characteristics to their person that they come to represent then for the public. What the athlete does in their respective sport is only one small part of the meaning they carry in the public eye (Kim & Na, 2007). Friendliness, trustworthiness, morals, and attractiveness are all unrelated to any sport, but all play a part in turning an athlete into a meaningful symbol for the public.

After Lance Armstrong won his seventh consecutive Tour de France in 2005, his symbolic meaning had grown to a far higher level than any athletic accomplishment could take him. Armstrong is a survivor of testicular cancer and the founder of the Livestrong Foundation, which raises money for cancer research and cancer patient care. His story of overcoming the disease and winning a record seven Tour de France’s

endowed him with a symbolic meaning of triumph, determination, invincibility, and the belief that any obstacle can be overcome. He stood as a symbol to many to never give up on oneself, and to keep on believing in oneself and pushing forward. This heroic meaning was what endorsers such as Nike, Anheuser-Busch, and RadioShack Corp, hoped to transfer from him to their own products. In recent years, however, it has come out that Armstrong used performance-enhancing drugs during his cycling career, and was stripped of all his medals. With this twist in his legacy, his meaning to the public also was affected. Many of Armstrong's sponsors decided to terminate their contracts with him, as they did not want his symbolic image of cheating, doping, or deceit to be associated with their products. What the athlete represents to the people is what the company hopes the people will see in their product as well.

Source Credibility Model

This model sees the credibility of the athlete as the most important factor in determining how successful they will be as an endorser. Rather than looking at what specific meaning an athlete may have or trying to find a match between the athlete and the product, this model contends that as long as the athlete is of a high level of credibility and expertise in their sport, they can successfully endorse any related product (Simmers et al., 2009). Credibility alone allows them to elicit trust from the audience so that they believe what the celebrity athlete says and will act according to that message. While other factors such as the athlete's likeability, their moral values, or charm may still have some degree of influence on the audience, their importance to the overall success of the message is not as influential as the athlete's credibility.

Studies have shown that source credibility can be a crucial component for an advertisement to be effective such as a 1999 study done by Laffery and Goldsmith where “they manipulated the level of credibility and found that participants in the high credibility condition showed a higher level of persuasive effectiveness than those in the low credibility condition” (Kim & Na, 2007, p. 312). In this case, credibility alone was able to change the success of communicating the message to the intended audience. Compared to other models or theories, this one is a basic one based on logical assumptions. Koo, Ruihley, and Dittmore simplify this theory by saying, “the underlying principle of paying millions of dollars to celebrity athlete endorsers is that the source of the message will add credibility to an advertisement” (2012, p. 147). This makes sense as higher profile more successful athletes are paid a higher dollar amount by companies. The athlete’s fame and notoriety alone means there is a higher chance that a consumer will recognize the athlete and believe what he’s saying because they know who they are already.

Credibility can arise and be compromised of numerous factors. It is built foremost from what the athlete is able to accomplish on the field. After all, there is nothing that will make the athlete look more knowledgeable and trustworthy than results within the game itself. Koo, Ruihley, and Dittmore explain the connection between victories within the game and credibility by saying, “successful athletic performances signified by winning or consistent successful finishes fabricating overall source credibility would foster the endorser's effectiveness to positively influence consumers' brand attitude, attitude toward the advertisement, and purchase intentions” (2012, p. 150).

Credibility can be broken down into more specific categories as well that researchers believe play a role such as knowledge or expertise, trustworthiness, and appearance or attractiveness (Menon et al., n.d.). An athlete such as Derek Jeter of the New York Yankees, who has been around the game of baseball for a long time and had a successful career, would be considered a highly knowledgeable source or expert in his sport. Athletes that are seen as having high ethical standards, such as Drew Brees of the New Orleans Saints, are athletes that people trust and feel comfortable with. David Beckham of the L.A. Galaxy is known for being a very attractive athlete aside from his success in professional soccer, and this has boosted him to a high level of stardom and credibility. Clearly, the most powerful factor, according to this theory, is the athlete's credibility. "Consumer perception of athlete credibility is one of the critical factors mediating the relationships among perceived on field performance, attitude toward the advertisement/brand, and purchase intentions" (Koo et al., 2012, p. 155). With purchase intentions being the desired final outcome of the message, this theory contends that credibility is the piece that companies need to pay attention to the most.

Source Attractiveness Model

Attractiveness, in the case of this model, is not being used exclusively in the sense of physical beauty. The Source Attractiveness Model looks at similarity, familiarity, and liking of the celebrity athlete in question (Simmers et al., 2009). This theory contends that an endorsement figure that people see that is physically relatable, healthy looking, and somewhat similar to the average person, is going to be able to connect better with the consumer. By having athletes that people do not see as vastly different than himself or herself, the consumer is going to trust the athlete more because they feel that they have

something in common with them (Simmers et al., 2009). What the company hopes the consumer takes away from the message is that the endorser is someone like them, and if the product works for the endorser, then it should work for the consumer as well. Research has emerged showing that a sense of familiarity may be beneficial because “Savvy marketers are discovering that...consumers identify more with a "chunky Joe Six-pack than a buff Fabio. Regular guy marketing" is replacing the age-old notion that supermodels and beefy athletes are a necessary part of the advertising phenomena” (Menon et al., n.d., p. 1). While traditional beliefs might push a company towards having a model in their commercials so viewers would be more likely to watch the ad, new studies indicate that having a more average spokesperson is what will make the message actually stick in the consumer’s mind since they will relate to it better.

Certain athletes have been used in marketing campaigns to exemplify exactly that; the common man image that the general public can easily relate to. One example would be Brett Favre and Dale Earnhardt Jr. who both have endorsement contracts with Wrangler. These two athletes give off an all-American image of a simple, hard working lifestyle, and their work with Wrangler emphasizes those same areas by presenting them as normal guys in basic clothing, playing sports, and hanging out with their friends, while telling the audience about the comfort and reliability of Wrangler jeans. Wrangler hopes to present these famous, recognizable athletes as average males who enjoy the simple things in life just like any other person. By focusing on the familiarity between the celebrity athlete and the consumer, the company hopes that the consumer will trust and relate to them, and thus absorb the message they are sending.

Assimilation and Contrast Effects

This lesser known theory, called Assimilation and Contrast Effects Theory, looks at the advertisement evaluated based on what the consumer already knows or perceives about the product. According to this theory, “consumers evaluate the information about an athlete, including the athlete’s sport, and if the information appears to fit with the consumer’s prior perception of the product then the information from the ad would be accepted” (Martin, 1996, p. 29-30). This new information from the advertisement is assimilated into the person’s understanding of the product and thus changes how they view it. This theory goes deeper than simply finding similarities between the athlete and the product, but rather claims that the consumer analyzes each of the two parties in terms of their knowledge structure of each to see if they fit together (Martin, 1996). Also, while the message of the endorsement is obviously important for communicating the message, the athlete’s entire body of work and symbolic meaning are also being taken into account in this situation. The consumer is looking at the athlete not in a vacuum, but as a multi-faceted commodity that they must evaluate and attempt to assimilate with their preexisting understanding of the product that they are endorsing.

On the other hand, if the consumer finds that the information surrounding the athlete is in contrast with the product that they are endorsing, then they would have a negative evaluation of that product (Martin, 1996). The match, in terms of this theory, involves their view on the athlete and the product in their entirety rather than picking out individual characteristics that the two may have in common. In this regard, the athlete’s symbolic meaning, similar to how the meaning described in the Model of Meaning Transfer, is inseparable from the message being communicated. However, the difference is that in the Model of Meaning Transfer, that meaning is being channeled

through the athlete and being given to the product, while in the Assimilation and Contrast Effects Theory, the athlete and the product each already have their own meanings, and the consumer must decide whether or not those two meanings fit together and assimilate with each other. Companies must take a close look at both the athlete's and their product's perception amongst the general public.

Schema Congruity Theory

Building off of Assimilation and Contrast Effects Theory and Match-up Hypothesis Theory, Schema Congruity Theory shares features of both in its attempts to evaluate the interaction between athlete endorsements and the consumer. This theory starts with structured schemas, which are basic understandings and set associations of how a certain domain operates (Martin, 1996). In this case, the domain would be sports and consumer products. A person's schema acts as their evaluation form that allows them to process and analyze a message or object. Martin describes how schemas come into play with product endorsement saying:

When a consumer evaluates a product, a comparison is made between the characteristics of the product and the characteristics of the schema with which the product is being associated. In the case of an endorsement, schema theory would suggest that the evaluation process is a comparison between the schema for the product and the schema for the spokesperson. (1996, p. 30).

The similarities between this theory and the two mentioned earlier can be seen in this quotation as the preconceived knowledge of the parties are used to find matches between the athlete and the product in order to determine whether there is a positive evaluation of the endorsement.

For example, Oklahoma City Thunder forward Kevin Durant, who has landed endorsement deals with Nike, Sprint, Gatorade, Panini, General Electric and 2K Sports,

carries with him a certain schema. Durant is a young player, only 24 years old, who has already become an elite NBA player. He has become a star in a small market while being recognized for his humble personality and high character. Those surrounding factors help to create a structured understanding of Durant that people then use to compare to the characteristics of whatever product he may be endorsing. Products that are creative, ingenious, targeted to a younger audience, and show potential in the future could possibly be seen as a match with Durant.

All of the aforementioned theories have been shown to hold truth in various cases, yet no theory can be considered the one correct theory. They are merely lenses through which celebrity athlete product endorsements can be better understood and evaluated. However, there are some areas of the celebrity athlete advertising market that require a separate discussion to better comprehend, and that will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Odds and Ends

It's Good To Be Bad

There are a few other areas of celebrity athlete marketing that may not be the most significant, but are still worth examining in order to fully understand how the industry operates. This includes marketing an athlete with a bad-boy image, female athletes, as well as dealing with athletes with legal or behavioral problems.

While choosing athletes that exude a high moral image and ethical character is often one of the factors that companies look for, not all famous, successful athletes fall into that category. Whether it is for in game behavior, trouble with law enforcement officials, or overall poor personality and negative attitude, some athletes attain a bad-boy image that, when marketed the correct way, can become an asset for companies that want that athlete to endorse their product (Ruihley et al., 2010). For some companies who want to advertise their product as rebellious, edgy, or defiant, having an athlete that is known for breaking the rules and going against societal norms can transfer those same characteristics to the product (Simmers et al., 2009). It all depends on the message that the company is trying to send to the consumer and where they want to position themselves within the market.

A strong example of this phenomenon is former NBA player Allen Iverson (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). Iverson spent the majority of his career playing for the Philadelphia 76er's. Iverson was only 6 feet tall, but was a four time NBA scoring champion, played in 11 all-star games, and was named the NBA MVP in 2001. However, Iverson was also known for his rough and tough personality, extensive tattoos, and bad-boy attitude.

Throughout his life, Iverson has had numerous legal troubles, the earliest of which occurred when Iverson was a 17-year-old high school student and was involved in a bowling alley brawl with a group of his friends. Iverson and his friends were given prison sentences, but Iverson was able to get out after four months because the governor of Virginia granted him clemency due to insufficient evidence. Iverson's background, physical appearance, and rude, brash personality would initially classify him as a highly undesirable athlete for companies to use in endorsements.

However, some people admired Iverson for his abilities on the court, brutally honest character, and ability to compete in a league where he was considered undersized. Because of this, Iverson was able to land endorsement deals with companies such as Reebok, whom he signed a lifetime contract with. Reebok has to compete with dominant companies such as Nike in athletic apparel and shoe industry, and while signing Iverson as one of their spokesmen may seem like a questionable decision, it can also be seen as a move to increase publicity and distinguish themselves in a competitive market (Kahle & Kahle, 2006). Athletes who associate with the bad-boy image of Iverson may choose his products over the more traditional ones. In situations such as this, using a more controversial athlete can be beneficial for the company. "It seems that some marketers have seen advertising potential in even the negative media attention bestowed upon their brand's celebrity endorser... it is the actual bad behavior that seems to be attractive to particular consumer demographics" (Ruihley et al., 2010, p. 134). If the market is there for this type of advertising, then companies will strive to find an athlete that can connect with that market.

For smaller companies who are not as well known, a very famous athlete, even if they do have a poor public image, can, at the very least, increase brand awareness. Athletes are often in the media, especially for behavioral incidences, so a lesser known company will still be able to get exposure from their endorsement deal with a well-known bad-boy athlete. Pokrywczynski and Brinker are researchers who have taken note of this phenomenon saying, "brands enjoying high awareness suffer from negative publicity, while brands that are relatively unknown to consumers, or with low top-of-mind presence, benefit from increases to these purchase predictors (awareness and availability) despite the associated negative assessment affect" (2012, p. 281). It is important to remember, as they point out, that the potential harm or benefit is based off of the company's current place in the consumer landscape. Companies who already have a high level of brand awareness amongst the public will not want to associate with these same bad-boy athletes. While it may not always be the case, companies may profit from their deals with controversial celebrity athletes.

Female Athletes as Endorsers

Another type of athlete that has not been mentioned up to this point is the female athlete. Compared to what has been discussed so far, the female athlete shares some similarities, but is also starkly different in other ways. Many of the same characteristics are desirable including performance, credibility, likeability, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Companies want female athletes who have proven themselves as athletes, are popular amongst the public, and will be believable and relatable amongst the public. On the other hand, there are some significant discrepancies when comparing male and female athlete endorsement deals. The biggest one being that females are used far less by

companies in advertisements than males are. Grau, Roselli, and Taylor (2007) performed a content analysis on a sample of magazines and found that female athletes make up only 12% of celebrity athlete endorsement ads. The female athletes that are featured are much more likely to appear in women's magazines than male or teen magazines, and three quarters of them play individual sports rather than team sports (Grau et al., 2007).

Much of this is due to the fact that women's sports are not as popular or watched in the U.S. as men's sports are. While men's sports generate billions of dollars in revenue, women's sports struggle to make any profit at all (Grau et al., 2007). For example, according to the WNBA's collective bargaining agreement, the salary cap for an entire team in the 2013 season is \$900,000, while the average NBA player alone made more than five times that amount (Schburner, 2011). Clearly, male professional sports have a much larger dollar amount attached to them, and this is because they are more popular and create more revenue through ticket sales, television contracts, and merchandise sales. Therefore, if a company wants to pick an athlete that a large sector of the population will immediately recognize upon seeing them, they are most likely going to pick a male athlete since their sport is far more publicized and well known.

At the same time, there have been a few female athletes that have signed lucrative endorsement deals. Professional female golfer Michelle Wie made only \$39,000 in prize money between June 2007 and June 2008, but she earned \$12 million in endorsement contracts. Wie became a professional as a teenager and was quickly a highly desirable target for marketers because of her "blossoming talent, personality, and desire to compete with male golfers. Marketers felt that Wie could do things for women's golf comparable to what Tiger Woods has done for men's golf" (Koo et al., 2012, p. 148). In Wie's case,

she was an extremely unique talent, and because of her age, marketers were investing in her early on with the hopes that it would pay off in the long run more than the immediate future. Not only were they paying for her talent, but also Wie's role in developing the sport of women's golf that could make her an even greater iconic figure and powerful marketing tool.

For female athletes, physical attractiveness can also play a much bigger role than it does for males. The sex appeal in female advertising is almost always a factor as shown by the fact that in the magazine study mentioned earlier, 81% of the women featured were shown "suggestively or partially clad" (Grau et al., 2007, p. 55). Since the female athlete may not be recognizable to consumers, companies may try to get the consumer's attention by featuring the female in a sexually provocative manner. A study of *Women's Sports and Fitness* magazine confirms the advertising world's emphasis on using physically attractive females as almost 45% of the females that appear on the cover of the magazine are models and not athletes (Grau et al., 2007). Clearly, companies are going with the attractive female over the athlete female.

One trend that has emerged starting in the mid 1990's was women's increased role in the consumer purchasing process and the resulting increased percentage of money being spent by women (Grau et al., 2007). This was important for companies who wanted to target that demographic more and had to consider incorporating females athletes more as a way to better connect with the female population, and Reebok was one of the first companies to do just that (Grau et al., 2007). The unique landscape of female celebrity athletes in the endorsement industry presents it's own challenges and opportunities for companies.

Crisis Control

The reward of a partnership between a brand and a company can be extremely profitable for a company, but with that comes the risk of negative publicity or tarnished brand image if the athlete gets arrested, becomes part of a scandal, or engages in other inappropriate behavior. Companies are then put in a difficult position where they want to demonstrate their support and loyalty to the athlete that has helped them, but they also do not want that athlete's transgressions to be associated with their company. Many decisions need to be made concerning the companies statements to the press, their current contractual obligations, and how to handle the partnership going forward. The risk has been backed up by research, which concluded that:

As negative information is circulating about an athlete, a negative impact can be directed toward the endorsed brand or organization. With "a strong associative link between the celebrity and the brand, negative information about the celebrity will lower brand evaluations. (Till & Shimp as cited in Koo et al., 2012, p. 147).

Because of this, companies may temporarily not feature a certain athlete in endorsements, or they make terminate their contract with that athlete completely. They can't risk having the poor perception of the athlete in the public being linked to their company. Their reaction will depend on what the offense is as well as the severity.

Two of the biggest examples of this phenomenon in modern society are Tiger Woods and Lance Armstrong. They serve as good examples because of their similar high level of fame while being involved in totally different types of scandals. In late 2009, Woods' was in a one-person automobile accident on the street outside his house two days after an article in *The National Enquirer* claimed that Woods had been engaged in an extramarital affair. Over the next few months, Woods' family and the public learned that

Woods' had been involved in multiple adulterous relationships over his career as a professional golfer. Woods' took an indefinite leave from professional golf, and his public image was significantly damaged since many had viewed him as a true gentleman and a model athlete. Gatorade, AT&T, General Motors, and Accenture all terminated their endorsement contracts with Woods, while other companies that he was partnered with stopped featuring him for a period of time (Koo et al., 2012).

On the other hand, Nike, along with other companies such as Electronic Arts, continued their partnership with Woods. Woods ended up admitting to and apologizing for what had happened, and returned to golf in 2010, but the incident left its mark on Woods and the economy. A study from the University of California Davis Graduate School of Management estimated that shareholders of companies that Woods was under contract with lost a collective \$5 to \$12 billion because of the scandal ("Correcting and," 2009). Clearly, the public's view of Woods changed significantly, and this was reflected in the economic losses for companies that partnered with Woods. However, as evidenced by some major companies choice to hold on to Woods, his fame and powerful marketing ability was able to keep him from becoming completely worthless as an endorsement tool.

As mentioned earlier, Armstrong had become one of the most decorated cyclists of all time before the truth came out that Armstrong had used performance-enhancing drugs that were banned within the sport. After having his titles taken away from him, Armstrong lost sponsorship deals from Oakley, Trek bicycles, Giro helmets, 24-Hour Fitness, FRS, Anheuser-Busch, and even Nike (Rovell, 2012). This raises the question of why Nike would stay with Woods through his scandal, but terminated their contract with

Armstrong. In other words, why did Nike decide to support someone who cheats on their wife, but not someone who cheats on their sport? One argument is that because Armstrong's transgressions directly involve sports and affect his credibility within the sports world, so companies in the sports industry could not be seen supporting someone who cheats their own industry. On the other hand, while Woods' actions are seen as poor behavior and looked upon negatively based on modern societal values, they are not related to his sport, and thus would not affect his level of expertise or abilities as a golfer. This comparison illustrates the importance of understanding the relationship between a company and their endorser and the varying dynamics that relationship can entail. Creating a successful endorsement partnership with a celebrity athlete is a very complicated and multi-faceted process that requires a company to be both creative in their marketing strategies and adaptable to the unpredictable world of sports.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Poised for Success

The path to a successful endorsement campaign entails much more than just picking a famous athlete, giving them the product, and sending it to the masses. Companies must look at the athlete in terms of their performance in the game, their personality, their symbolic meaning, and how the public views them. Each advertisement message must be curtailed to the connection between the athlete and the product (Kim & Na, 2007). With the rise of baseball in the early 1900's came the rise of the celebrity athlete, and companies attached themselves to these stars early on. This was taken to a whole new level with Michael Jordan, as he was one of the first global sports brands that carried powerful meaning amongst people and was "the ultimate athlete endorser" (Kahle & Kahle, 2006, p. 198). Companies have been able to zero in on a group of especially important attributes to look for in choosing a celebrity athlete endorser, and this has led to the creation of multiple theories by researchers. At the same time, there are situations that don't follow the rules as much and require companies to be flexible and approach marketing campaigns in different ways.

The athletes that have proven to be the most successful tend to hold a more significant meaning than purely their athletic success. They stand for or represent more than victories or championships to people and being able to draw on that can be crucial. As a result, the context surrounding an athlete plays a vital role in deciding how people view that athlete. A simple example would be that if Jackie Robinson, the first African American professional athlete, started playing baseball today instead of the mid 1900's,

his story and significance would be vastly different. The environment around him had a huge impact on what he represented to people and the meaning that he held in their eyes. Stanley points this out by saying, “icons are made not born. Since icons are repositories of meaning, what contributes to the making of an icon varies from time to time and from place to place” (2008, p. 19). These external factors and culture in the present moment cannot be left out of the equation if a company wants their endorsement campaign to connect with the public.

One common theme in all the theories and examination of attributes is creating a connection between the athlete and the consumer. Whether this is through transferring meaning from the athlete, to the product, to the consumer, finding a match in attributes between the athlete and product that the consumer recognizes, or presenting the athlete as a knowledgeable and trustworthy figure to the consumer, there must be a relationship between the two for the desired purchasing decisions to occur. Hsu and McDonald discuss the vital connection between endorser, product, and consumer by saying, “empirical studies have shown that endorser-product congruity positively affects consumers' perceptions of spokesperson credibility, attitudes, recall, recognition, purchase intention, and willingness to pay higher prices” (2002, p. 21). Athletes fame and popularity can be hugely influential in the business world, but only if companies can leverage it in the proper way.

Perfecting The Game

Despite all the research that has been done on this topic, there is still much that can be learned. With advertising being a billion dollar industry, finding more effective ways to utilize athletes and other celebrities in marketing campaigns could prove

extremely valuable for companies. One of the biggest difficulties with this is trying to determine how much of a direct affect putting an athlete into an endorsement has on the revenue that product makes for companies. A study that chose a few specific products and analyzes how many are sold over a set period of time both before and after a celebrity athlete campaign is put into place would provide a better picture of the cause and effect relationship between the two. However, the multitude of factors that play a part in the constantly fluctuating marketplace make it difficult to isolate a single variable, such as an athlete endorsement, for analysis.

The incorporation of social media has also had a huge impact on how companies market themselves and get their message to consumers, and the use of social media sites is rapidly growing. In 2010, 59% of companies used Twitter and 71% used Facebook, which was a 61% increase from the previous year (Cunningham & Bright, 2012). The relationship between the athlete and their fans is transforming as social media gains popularity. “Social media has revolutionized the way people interact with athletes by providing direct access and removing the middleman, i.e., traditional media. This gives athletes the freedom to promote themselves or their sponsors directly to fans at anytime” (Cunningham & Bright, 2012, p. 73). With these dynamic changes happening, more studies would be beneficial that focus on the social media marketing of celebrity athletes. While advertisements on television or in newspapers can be very expensive, social media is free for a company. Further research may be able to determine how effective this style of marketing is compared to traditional marketing, and how celebrity athletes specifically can be used as endorsement tools through social media since many of them are very active on it already. With the rapidly changing advertising landscape, there will always

be opportunity for more research and a richer understanding of how celebrity athlete marketing functions in society.

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