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5 Pages – Ray Rice

What does it take to be a “star” or “face of the franchise”? The NFL is full of players that span from rookies to five-year veterans to ten-year veterans. Each player comes into the league with a certain story and continues to build that story as they ascend up the ranks in the National Football League. Some of these players have the ability that allows for peers, media members and fans to consider them ‘stars’ of the game. That ability does not only come from the play on the field, but how they act off the field interacting with the fans as well how they portray themselves with the media pre and post game. The term star or face of the franchise seems to be thrown around quite a bit, but it is rare to actually have a legitimate one in today’s day in age. With so much media coverage, and with that comes members of the media asking incredulous questions, comes pressure to be a perfect citizen, and for many it is just too big of a burden to carry. Two players, Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson, have garnered the ‘star’ and ‘face of the franchise’ label due to numerous reasons. Those include their stellar play on the field year in and year out, the constant accountability with the media and fans when they play poorly and being a model citizen in the community. Greg Hardy is a man that led solely by his play, has reached a point in his young career that media members are starting to whisper about his place among the best in the league at his respective position.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jonathan Dwyer is a player that has not yet reached the level of these other players, let alone has an affect while on a roster. Each of these players endured their own journey to where they are right now and it is important to understand who is accountable for their actions, what may have caused the drastic turn of events and more importantly, why domestic violence has tarnished each of their careers.

Ray Rice grew up without a father. Growing up in New Rochelle, New York, Ray may have been to young to understand that he was without a father, being that his father was killed as a victim of a drive-by shooting.[[2]](#footnote-2) Luckily for Ray, his cousin was able to step in and provide that father figure role until Ray was 11, when unfortunately; his cousin was tragically killed in a car crash.[[3]](#footnote-3) The lack of a father figure, in a black household, is nothing new to society. For a fair amount of time, societal norms have seen many homes missing that father figure, specifically black dominated homes. It is a stereotype that has controlled out society, but when there are negative stories coming out, like Ray Rice’s, and their childhood comes into play, it is hard to disagree with the stereotype. For Ray Rice, one has to think if he would be in the position he is today if he had that father figure growing up and was able to witness how a grown man treats a women. The lack of a father figure for Ray most definitely plays a factor into why Ray is in the midst of a nasty domestic violence case.

Ray Rice was the first of four NFL players to have their names tied up in a domestic violence case. Ray Rice has been in the NFL since 2008 and ever since then, he has been the cornerstone of the Baltimore Ravens. His on the field play has been spectacular, leading him to several pro-bowl appearances as well as helping the Ravens to a super bowl championship in 2013. Off the field, Rice was everything that a team wanted in its superstar. He was always available for the media and took part in the league’s Play 60 campaign.[[4]](#footnote-4) Play 60 is a campaign that the NFL has had for several years that brings kids together for 60 minutes a day and entices them to participate in physical activity. It is the NFL’s top community outreach and players love to be a part of it. The NFL wants some of their top players part of this program, which is why Ray Rice is involved. However, it is safe to say that he is not going to be a part of the campaign in the near future. This past February, Ray Rice took it upon himself to change his career for the worst when he lifted his hand and struck his wife. However, the only information we had of this occurrence was a video released by TMZ, a video that showed Ray dragging his unconscious fiancée out of an elevator.[[5]](#footnote-5) TMZ is known for breaking news in the entertainment business with celebrities, but sports is something that they have only ventured into recently and are not usually breaking news like this. While the word had already spread of Ray being in a domestic dispute, nothing was shown to the public, until the media made the first play and essentially pressured all involved. Move forward several months and TMZ comes back and drops an even bigger hammer on everybody by freeing that can clarify the first one. On September 8th, TMZ released the full-length video from the night of the incident, and this time, we see Ray striking his wife across the face, her head hitting the rail in the elevator, and falling to the ground unconscious.[[6]](#footnote-6) For Ray Rice, the Ravens and the NFL, this video was the worst thing that could have happened.

When this video came out, Ray Rice knew he was in for a world of hurt; his wife was going to suffer even worse. Ray quickly went from a star in the NFL to a man nobody wanted to show his or her support for anymore. But what about his wife Janay and the effect this video has on her? While this video provided clear evidence on what happened inside the elevator, it never had to be released. A video of Ray dragging his fiancée out was more than enough for everyone involved to understand what occurred behind those doors. “The footage of Ray assaulting his partner doesn’t teach us anything. It just further degrades her humanity.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The media, especially TMZ, holds equal accountability for the pain that Janay Rice has dealt with because everyday, she has to deal with this video plastered all across the Internet. The NFL can deal with Ray any way they want, so can the judicial system, but that is not going to change the way women are viewed in our society and how much domestic abuse takes place. Janay is just another victim of this violence, but because her fiancée is in the NFL, it caught national media attention. We’ve become witnesses to the demise of a great football player, but even worse, we’ve become aware that domestic violence is not going to go away so easily. As Katie McDonough stated so eloquently, “But our culture’s disregard for women’s humanity – the fact that women can’t have a reasonable expectation of safety and privacy, remains the same as it ever was.”[[8]](#footnote-8) While Katie is talking about our culture as a whole, the NFL’s culture and its disregard for women’s humanity relates back to the concept of hyper-masculinity. The NFL culture is wrapped around masculinity and how hard you can hit your opponent; the amount of rage you build up each play.[[9]](#footnote-9) That rage and masculine side of these players is hard to just turn on and off when they step on and off the field. The running back position, played by Rice, endures the most contact out of any player because they are asked to carry a ball and run through defenders for the good of their team. Due to that, Michael Welch conveys through his study, there is a link between running backs and violence committed against women.[[10]](#footnote-10) The amount of violent rage a player like Ray Rice provides during games is not a normal amount for an individual, but for an NFL player, it is what’s expected of them. But what is not expected of them is bringing that rage home with them. Hyper-masculinity is a major concern for society, but because football is such a masculine driven sport, but that does not mean there can’t be some control for these athletes when they leave the athletic centers. When the second horrid video came out, Ray was at the center of the NFL universe, in large part due to the media, but what the NFL didn’t realize was that this was just the beginning of what was going to be the darkest time in the league’s history.

1. Joseph Person, “Kraken? That might be the real Greg Hardy, Panthers teammates say” *Charlotte Observer*, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2014/01/11/4602528/kraken-that-might-be-the-real.html#.VE-2zlPF_ma> (accessed October 28, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. David Picker, “Ray Rice – like mother, like son” *ESPN*, <http://espn.go.com/espn/e60/story/_/id/7147473/baltimore-ravens-ray-rice-maintains-special-bond-mother-e60> (accessed October 29, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Picker, *ESPN.com* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Baltimore Ravens*, “*Ray Rice Visits Play 60 Super School” *NFL.com*, <http://www.baltimoreravens.com/news/article-1/Ray-Rice-Visits-NFL-Play-60-Super-School/6C7430F5-A5FA-4A24-86B5-B02F0A0F88D4> (accessed October 29, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ray Rice – Dragging Unconscious Fiancée, *TMZ*, <http://www.tmz.com/videos/0_c5nk3w3n/> (accessed October 29, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ray Rice Knocked Out Fiancée, *TMZSports*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbwTMJroTbI&feature=youtube_gdata_player> (accessed October 29, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Katie McDonough, “Ray Rice video second horror: Why it should have never been published in the first place,” *Salon*, <http://www.salon.com/2014/09/08/ray_rice_videos_second_horror_why_it_never_should_have_been_published_in_the_first_place/> (accessed October 29, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. McDonough, *Salon* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Brian Phillips, “Tough Talk” *Grantland*, <http://grantland.com/features/ray-rice-domestic-abuse-nfl-culture/> (accessed October 30, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Welch, 393 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)