

Eye on Sports

Lion's Eye On The Ball: Evaluating the Ben Roethlisberger Suspension

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To the untrained eye, the NFL's six game suspension of Pittsburgh Steelers' QB Ben Roethlisberger on Wednesday, April 21 is utterly excessive and completely unreasonable. Sure, the two time Super Bowl winner has been the center of a few predicaments in his career, but ultimately he has only been convicted and never actually charged with a crime. Hey, if it's alright by law, it's alright by the NFL, right?

Absolutely not.

Facing his second conviction of rape in as many off seasons has deservedly brought forth such disciplinary actions. Commissioner Roger Goodell and the Pittsburgh Steelers organization, headed by the Rooney family, have had enough of the troublesome quarterback misrepresenting both the NFL's shield and Steelers' crest. Thus, Roethlisberger will miss over a third of the upcoming football season.

Trust me, this provides your typical "lose-lose-lose" scenario for Roethlisberger, the NFL and Steelers, and the fans. A verdict that leaves no individual involved with pro football happy, but the right choice nonetheless. For that, I unambiguously commend the decision.

From a national perspective, it could be said that Ben Roethlisberger is the Pittsburgh Steelers. He is the fearless leader of the gold and black that gives the team a chance of winning with every game he plays. The idea isn't too farfetched either.

Since being drafted in 2004, "Big Ben" has brought nothing but success to the Steelers and the city of Pittsburgh. From playing in fourteen games his rookie season (awarded Offensive Rookie of the Year) and winning a Super Bowl in his second season, early on Roethlisberger had been everything the Steelers could hope for. Racking up 139 total touchdowns in just six seasons, he is the type of player that opposing team's envy. His huge frame, accurate arm, and knack for winning make him a major weapon in the NFL. In addition, he has excellent toughness and determination, missing just three games in the last four seasons.

On the football field, he is everything you desire in a player. However, off of the field, he is the farthest thing from it.

Around town and even in his own locker room, citizens and teammates are disgusted with the way that he presents himself. According to ESPN's Outside the Lines, many bars and clubs around the city are tired of playing host to the superstar and his entourage, claiming that he is difficult to accompany and the he demands everything for him and his crew should be complimentary (because he obviously can't afford to treat his buds, right?). Even the Pittsburgh zoo has replaced a life size picture of him, with one of Mario Lemieux.

Inside the locker room is no different. Players are beginning to question Roethlisberger as a leader and role model. In that same ESPN report, the players within the Steelers' locker room have indeed turned on their quarterback, regarding him as unapproachable.

Former teammate Najeh Davenport insisted that over 60 percent of the Steelers team felt that Roethlisberger did not act like a true leader, dividing the locker room nearly in half.

Davenport went on to recall a team meeting in which Roethlisberger was called out by linebacker Joey Porter saying, "Last year you used to hang out with us. This year, it's like 'the Pittsburgh Steelers and Ben.'" He even questioned Roethlisberger's work ethic claiming, "He was the last one in and the first one out."

Outside of the game of football, "Big Ben" has had his fair share of controversial actions. All of which, have had an impact on his current suspension.

Following his immensely successful sophomore season, Ben Roethlisberger was injured in a motorcycle accident on June 12, 2006. An accident that occurred well after coaches, teammates and former players, such as Terry Bradshaw, encouraged him to give up riding until after his career. Roethlisberger failed to wear a helmet (as it was not required by law) and did not have a proper license. Strike one.

While in Nevada for a celebrity golf tournament on July 17, 2009, Roethlisberger was accused of sexual assault. He was said to be over aggressive and hostile towards one of the hotel's employees and a civil suit was filed. Strike two.

Most recently, Roethlisberger has been convicted of sexual assault inside a women's restroom at a nightclub in Georgia. The alleged victim is just 20 years old but was supplied drinks from Roethlisberger that night. Strike three and he's out six games!

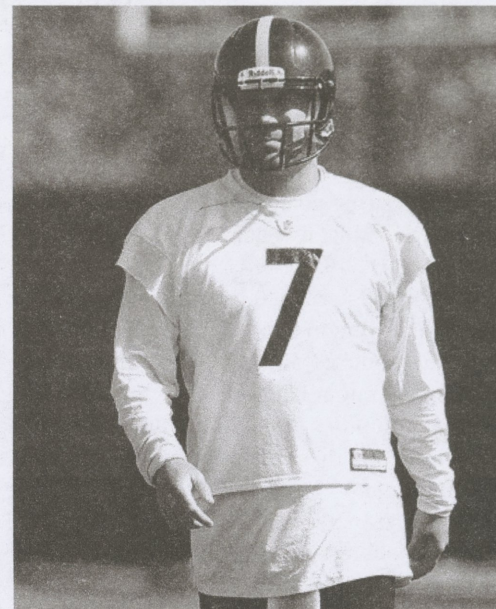
Following the most recent conviction, Steelers' president Art Rooney II was said to be furious. If the NFL did not suspend Ben Roethlisberger, it appears that the Steelers organization would have done so anyway. The team even brought back QB Byron Leftwich, in preparation of Roethlisberger's inevitable time off.

The Rooney family does not have a high tolerance for disorderly conduct. Former Super Bowl MVP Antonio Holmes was just about cut (traded to Miami for a 5th round draft pick) from the team following his conviction of sexual assault and substance abuse that has him suspended for four games next season.

The bottom line is that it's not like teams enjoy taking the best players off of the football field, but to protect their reputation they understand that it has to be done. Not many organizations like the Steelers' exist in sports today.

Even more impressive, in my opinion, is the fan base. They clearly stand behind their team, not their quarterback, and agree with the suspension. In a recent Pittsburgh Tribune Review online poll, over 80 percent of the voters thought the Roethlisberger deserved to be suspended or even moved off of the team. This says a lot about the people of Pittsburgh, suggesting that player conduct and morality take priority over team success. Fans around the city have shown their displeasure with the Steelers' quarterback, and many supported the rumor that Roethlisberger should be exchanged for a top ten pick in this past draft.

I believe that most teams would have swept this situation under the rug, and handed their Pro Bowl quarterback a slap on the wrist, only forcing him to make a public apology and suspending him for just one or



Ben Roethlisberger will start next season suspended

(Photo Courtesy of sports.yahoo.com)

two games. But that's not how the Rooney family, with help from Commissioner Roger Goodell, operates. They acknowledge the wrong doings and punish the player blindly. The team's MVP and the guy on the practice squad are held equally responsible for their actions.

This is not to say that the Steelers have completely given up on Roethlisberger. No one should question that they want more championship parades, but more importantly they want to be represented by someone with admirable characteristics.

"We can't defend the behavior and actions as an organization and we won't, but we do defend his opportunity to make right, and I think that's the right thing to do," Colbert, a team representative, said.

As a fan, it's hard not to appreciate the decision made by the Steelers and the NFL. It cannot be easy to keep your best players off of the football field in attempts to teach a lesson, but it's something that they are boldly willing to do. Right and wrong before win or lose is a concept that is difficult not to respect and understand. As a whole, Roethlisberger isn't getting suspended for his sexual assault accusation, but for the way he acts and represents himself, his team, his city and the NFL on a daily basis.

The point here is that pro athletes are not above the law and nor should they be. With the amount of suspensions given out by the NFL monthly, it is clear that players themselves are having a hard time understanding that. They parade around town the way that jocks stereotypically parade around a high school, thinking they can do what they want, when they want, with who they want. But Roger Goodell and team's like the Pittsburgh Steelers are tired of such charades and are putting forth their best efforts to end them for good. From owners down to the fans, people want to see change in athlete conduct, and suspensions like Roethlisberger's, I believe, are the first step.

Eagles Select 13 Players in NFL Draft, 9 On Defense

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With the 13th overall pick in the 2010 NFL Draft the Denver Broncos traded their pick to the Philadelphia Eagles for defensive end Brandon Graham from Michigan. We all saw that coming right? The Eagles time and time again make picks that we wonder about. Many got excited and figured we would pick safety Earl Thomas from Texas but once again the Eagles looked elsewhere. A little under six one, Graham provides the speed off the edge to get to the quarterback; something which the team needed to improve on last season. Only time will tell if the Eagles made the right move in selecting him. In the second round, with the 37th overall pick, i.e. Donovan McNabb pick, the Eagles selected Nate Allen. Allen is a free safety from South Florida. He is a solid safety who can cover as well as deliver hits. A safety was a priority of the Eagles and they decided to go with Allen who should be able to help immediately. After that move, the Eagles traded down three times with Dallas, Green Bay, and Cleveland and after about three hours selected defensive end/linebacker Daniel Te'o-Nesheim out of Washington. The Eagles piled up their picks going into the final day with a total of nine picks.



The Eagles Drafted DE Brandon Graham with the 13th Overall pick of the NFL Draft

(Photo Courtesy of sports.yahoo.com)

When looking back at the 2010 NFL Draft for the Eagles, trading describes what the Eagles did throughout the whole draft. At the end of the draft the Eagles ended up with a total of 13 picks, 9 of which were defensive players. Though the Eagles will

never use the word "rebuilding," that's what they did. They cut numerous players to start the youth movement in Philadelphia. Only time will tell if all of the trading down in the draft will benefit the Eagles with all of the players selected. The Eagles have been known to find stars in the later rounds and they are hoping some of these picks pan out for them.