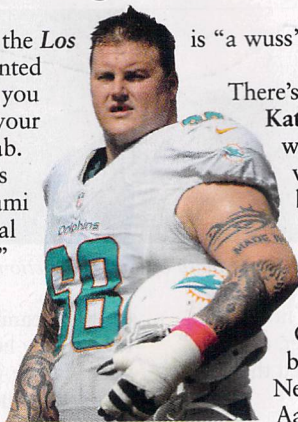


NFL bullying scandal: Taking the measure of manhood

Imagine you started a new job, said David Horsey in the *Los Angeles Times*, and learned that you'd be ritually taunted by your co-workers, who might at any moment grab you and shave your head, or threaten to sexually assault your sister, or force you to pick up a \$10,000 restaurant tab. You'd tell them to "take this job and shove it." That's what Jonathan Martin, offensive lineman for the Miami Dolphins, effectively did last week, sparking a national debate over "the NFL's juvenile version of manhood." The hazing of Martin—a soft-spoken classics major from Stanford—was led by thuggish veteran lineman Richie Incognito, who bombarded Martin with abusive messages, in one addressing the biracial Martin as a "half-nigger" and threatening to kill him, as well as defecate in his mouth. Perhaps most disturbing, said Christopher Gasper in *The Boston Globe*, is that most of Martin's teammates—including the African-Americans—have since publicly sided with the suspended Incognito. By "the Cro-Magnon canon of pro football," it's Martin who deserves contempt, "for breaking the locker room (man) code of silence" and failing to "act like a man."



Incognito: Tough guy

The NFL isn't a genteel accounting firm, said Samuel Chi in *RealClearSports.com*. Like the military, "it has its own culture," in which "only those who are willing to inflict and absorb bodily harm can survive and thrive." Is it really so shocking that "competitive alpha dogs" who are paid to engage in "legalized mayhem" for the public's entertainment build their camaraderie in ways the rest of us find extreme? No one forced Martin to join this exclusive and well-paid club, said Stu Bykofsky in *Philly.com*. In the NFL, hazing is a universal rite of passage, toughening the rookies and bonding players into a cohesive unit. Clearly, Martin

is "a wuss" who's "not mentally tough enough for the NFL."

There's football's throwback culture in a nutshell, said Kate Fagan in *ESPN.com*. To be a man, you must be willing "to absorb pain at all costs." You must never walk away from conflict. To admit weakness is to be female, and to be female is...contemptible. Is it any wonder that bullying and sexual assault are rampant in a society that glorifies jocks? Look at what these attitudes are doing to the players themselves, said Frank Bruni in *The New York Times*. Coaches and players have been caught offering cash bounties to teammates who injure opponents. The New England Patriots had to release star tight end Aaron Hernandez this year when he was charged with murder. Former players once praised for their "toughness" in shrugging off multiple concussions are now suffering an epidemic of degenerative brain disease. Sadly, those of us who grew up loving this brutal sport can no longer "turn a blind eye to the wreckage."

For that reason, the Incognito/Martin bullying scandal may have done the country a favor, said Dave Zirin in *TheNation.com*. It's openly raised the question, "What makes a man?" Under the "man code" that prevails in both football and the larger society, a man cannot ever admit he's in psychological pain. He must respond to problems with either stoic silence or aggression. Trapped in this emotionally stunted role, men are "far more likely to be alcoholics and abusers" than women, and three to four times as likely to take their own lives. Do we really want our sons to think a real man is a "bar-fighting, woman-groping" block-head like Incognito? Now's a good time to talk about it.