

Integrity Matters Broadcast – *By Jim Bracher*

"Racer's comments sound like a threat"

Question:

NASCAR driver Jeff Gordon after having been rear-ended, causing his car to swerve out of control, knocking him out of the race said to Tony Stewart: "All I can say is that the next time Tony's holding me up, it won't be very long for him to be out of my way." How dangerous is a comment like that?

Response:

Threat of bodily harm from competitors in automobile racing can have legal ramifications. Jeff Gordon has now threatened a colleague; on the record. Obviously, his temper got the better of him and his reaction was inappropriate.

So, let's picture these two competitors in a future race. Gordon bumps Stewart and one or more cars crash causing a fatality. Jeff said he would get him out of the way, and causing a crash is not an accident. Intentionally causing a wreck at 200 miles per hour might be classified as vehicular manslaughter, or even premeditated murder. Jeff Gordon has set a disgusting example.

Could Mr. Gordon be charged with murder because he threatened to retaliate by getting the other person out of his way? Unfortunately, sporting events, games and entertainment are imitating life at its most gruesome level - brutality and mayhem. Athletic competition, at least early on, served to provide socially-acceptable forms of controlled combat, avoiding blood and death.

Today, career-ending cheap shots in hockey are matched in baseball with vicious slides into members of the other team. Pitchers purposely hit batters. Intensity becomes ferocity as frenzied fans devolve into modern-day "throw-backs" to a time when citizens asked for more lions to eat Christians in the coliseum. This acrimonious sporting atmosphere smells of gladiators, fighting to the death. Violence, in too many instances, has replaced finesse, professionalism, skill and sportsmanship. If maturity is grace under pressure, then Jeff Gordon (and lots of other high profile, spoiled athletes) has failed to live up to the best he could be.

So, what are the concerns raised by the Jeff Gordon threat?

1. Competition requires a level field.
2. Playing by the rules, all the time, is expected.
3. A sense of proportion needs to surround all sporting events. Mass hysteria and mob scenes confirm the immaturity of the culture that fosters and tolerates such actions.
4. Threats of violence are inappropriate in a civilized society, including the world of sports competition, especially when using a vehicle moving 200 miles per hour.
5. Professionals do not threaten one another - ever.

So, how might integrity-centered behavior be encouraged?

1. Boycott events and products that promote hate, hurt and mayhem.
2. Support "performers" who are positive role models, purchasing their products.

3. Communicate to sporting leagues and associations the kinds of behavior you approve for yourself, your children and grandchildren.
4. Cheer competence, sportsmanship and athletic skill.

Replace jeers and "booing" with deafening silence for those who behave inappropriately.

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