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## "I Wanna Be Like Mike:" A Synthesis of Sports Marketing from Babe Ruth to Michael Jordan

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# “I Wanna Be Like Mike:” A Synthesis of Sports Marketing from Babe Ruth to Michael Jordan

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Language & Literature  
Of Bard College  
By  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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## Dedication & Acknowledgement

Maybe it's my own fault. Maybe I led you to believe it was easy when it wasn't. Maybe I made you think my highlights started at the free throw line, and not in the gym. Maybe I made you think that every shot I took was a game winner. That my game was built on flash, and not fire.

Maybe it's my fault that you didn't see that failure gave me strength; That my pain was my motivation. Maybe I led you to believe that basketball was a God given gift, and not something I worked for every single day of my life. Maybe I destroyed the game. Or maybe you're just making excuses.<sup>1</sup> – Michael Jordan<sup>2</sup>

In 2014, I came to Bard College as a Photography Major – I walked into the meeting for intended majors on the first day and left it lost and confused. Although my interest was high, it quickly became apparent to me that the Bard Photography program was not for me. The requirements would not allow me to invest in my other major time-consuming passion, baseball. My freshman year continued with failure as I withdrew from my first semester math class (a requirement for my new intended major - Economics). Over winter break, I felt really discouraged - I did not know my major and felt lost. I looked through possible majors and nothing felt right. I always have had a strong curiosity regarding the intricacies of society and in discussion with my mom about my future everything started to look up. The major that was at first unknown to me, became the perfect one as it allowed me to broaden my educational opportunities and take a range of classes, which kept me engaged throughout. Towards the end of Spring semester of my freshman year, I met with the professor of Introduction to American Culture and Values, Professor Donna Grover, and the rest is history. As Michael Jordan said, failure gave him strength: failure gave me an opportunity to reassess my interests and my goals, and it turned into the best decision of my college career. I would like to thank my parents for always supporting me through my ups and downs, for helping me whenever I needed it and for coming to support my teammates and me at the baseball field. I would also like to thank Professor Donna Grover for supporting me throughout my time at Bard College, as well as Professor Miles Rodriguez and Professor Thomas Keenan for giving me valuable advice and support during my midway board and being on my final Senior Project board. You played a major part in making Bard not only a place for me to think, but also a place to learn and to grow.

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<sup>1</sup> From the 2008 Commercial: "Maybe It's My Fault" for the Air Jordan XX3.

<sup>2</sup> Nike/Jordan Brand. "Maybe It's My Fault" Jumpman23Productions, 19 Apr. 2008.



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## Introduction – A Glimpse into the Origins of Marketing and Sports Marketing

Competitive sports have been an integral part of society for centuries. On an international stage, the Olympics (first held in 776 BC) and the World Cup of soccer (first held in 1930) continue to garner-world attention. These events showcase the best athletes from each nation as they represent their countries in an event that brings likely and unlikely nations together because of a communal passion. Sporting events may attract and mesmerize audiences for a wide range of reasons: passion for a game, loyalty, and entertainment value. Sports play an undeniably significant role in daily life and society in the United States. The evolving and expanding roles of media and sports marketing have spurred enormous economic growth in the business of sports and the place of athletes as celebrities in American society. Media and technology have made it possible for some fans to go from enthusiasm to possible obsession in the face of 24/7 media coverage. In addition, personal participation in sports is no longer limited to those who might physically play. The audience (and economy) related to those playing virtually with video games, fantasy leagues, the television, and the internet is enormous. Still, it started simply but powerfully with athletes like Babe Ruth -- made even more famous and popular through advertising on billboards, in newspapers and on the radio for common products. This kind of exposure remained the norm and expanded to include other athletes and other sports until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that point, Michael Jordan and Nike literally and figuratively changed the game, revolutionizing and redefining sports marketing – and making it a multi-billion-dollar industry.

Like any activity or form of entertainment, the “rise” of sports is tied to media exposure. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sports were covered on a single page of a local newspaper;



now whole sections of local, city and national publications are dedicated to sports along with thousands of websites and cellular apps to regularly-update fans-on their favorite athletes and teams. Television stations like ESPN are completely dedicated to sports, and major networks battle to cover every major sporting event knowing the massive viewership and advertising expenditures associated with carrying these events. Sports' immense influence on culture and society is undeniable and is continually rising higher. They provide society with a shared story that is capitalized on by marketers globally. As a result, media exposure and marketing dollars are everywhere. YouTube has revolutionized the viewing of sports, as millions follow and view YouTubers playing video games – with these personalities making thousands of dollars and gaining support both from the video game creators and the sports leagues themselves – as well as through advertising deals. Electronic Sports leagues are also on the rise with the championships of these tournaments televised live and streamed on the internet.<sup>3</sup>

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As always, history provides important insights to the present and what really are – or not – new ideas. One might think of marketing as a relatively modern concept; *marketing* did not come into use to describe the advertisement of the selling of products and services until the late nineteenth century. However, marketing has been in practice for millennia. The term *marketing* first appeared in the dictionary in the sixteenth century where it referred to the process of buying and selling at a market. The contemporary definition – first appearing in 1897 -- is “a process of moving goods from producer to consumer with an emphasis on sales and advertising.”<sup>4</sup> Ever since there has been something to sell, there has been marketing. Marketing emerges as we see it

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<sup>3</sup> Schultz, E.J. “Behind the Rise of Esports and What It Means for Brands.” Advertising Age News RSS, 3 Apr. 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Marketing. Dictionary.com. The American Heritage® Dictionary of Idioms by Christine Ammer. Houghton Mifflin Company.

today in conjunction with the rise of consumer culture and the Industrial Revolution in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The Industrial revolution was the driving force behind the need for marketing as production increased, markets expanded, and competition grew. Changes in media and communications revolutionized the opportunities and styles of marketing. The Industrial Revolution was a period during which predominant agrarian and rural societies in Europe and America became mechanized and urbanized. Before the Industrial Revolution, manufacturing was done in people's homes using hand tools and basic machines. Most people lived in small rural communities where their daily habits revolved around farming. Life for the average person was difficult, due to low income, malnourishment, and widespread disease.<sup>6</sup>

Industrialization marked a major shift as tools and machines were replaced by powered machinery, factories, and mass production. The development of the steam engine helped facilitate the improvement of systems of transportation, communication and banking. Marketing was very important during the Industrial Revolution as the inventions and innovation created a global market, where products created in factories were transported domestically and internationally. Horse-drawn wagons were replaced by the steam engine, and communication became easier with the invention of the telegraph. With more widespread communication and easier transportation, word-of-mouth was no longer the major form for the spread of information. Marketing and advertising was the clear next step to promote and sell the new mass-produced products during the Machine Age.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hollander, Stanley C., et al. "Periodization of Chinese History." *Macromarketing*, 1 June 2005, pp. 32–40.

<sup>6</sup> "Industrial Revolution." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Hollander, "Periodization of Chinese History." 32–40.

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Modern marketing practices began in England and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As trade between countries and regions grew, consumers required information on which to base their purchasing decisions. Early advertising in France, Italy, and Britain showed a high level of sophistication in its execution and ability to reach mass audiences. These now considered *modern* marketing techniques included product differentiation, sales promotion, and loss-leader pricing. Loss leader pricing is the concept of selling goods below cost in order to attract customers who will, hopefully, purchase additional profitable goods from the same producer. English industrialists, Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795) and Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), are portrayed as pioneers of modern mass marketing methods.

Josiah Wedgwood [Figure 1] – an English potter and entrepreneur – used the marketing techniques of direct mail, travelling salesmen, and catalogues to sell his products. His financial and production management methods were sophisticated and showcased his overall business savvy. Wedgwood carried out serious investigations into fixed and variable costs of production and recognized that increased production would lead to lower costs. He also recognized that selling at lower prices would lead to higher demand and recognized the value of achieving scale economies in production. By cutting costs and lowering prices, Wedgwood was able to generate higher overall profit. These financial and general business management concepts are a pivotal part of success today for producers as they mass produce products in a method that mirrors those of Wedgwood from close to three centuries ago.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795).” Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 19 June 2013.

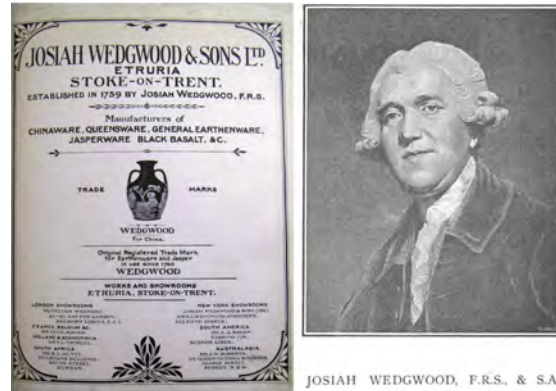


Figure 1: Josiah Wedgwood and one of his advertisements for his pottery.<sup>9</sup>

Matthew Boulton [Figure 2], a British engineer and manufacturer, was also a pioneer in the early mass production techniques and product differentiation. Product differentiation, the root of modern advertising campaigns, is the process of distinguishing a product or service from others, to make it more attractive to a particular target market. In addition to product differentiation, Boulton was one of the first manufacturers to use *planned obsolescence* and understood the importance of *celebrity marketing*.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 2: Matthew Boulton featured on the British Pound, showing that his significance is still felt to this day.<sup>11</sup>

Boulton's celebrity marketing was characterized as supplying the nobility their products at a lower price in order to obtain royal backing and support. This, in turn, created a positive image for the product, increased sales, and was a powerful form of publicity. Modern marketers

<sup>9</sup> Wisp, La Fae. "Wedgewood & Jasperware." Houseappeal, 15 Oct. 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, E. "Eighteenth-Century Commerce and Fashion: Matthew Boulton's Marketing Techniques." The Economic History Review, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 11 Feb. 2008.

<sup>11</sup> "England 50 Pound Sterling Note 2011 Matthew Boulton and James Watt." World Bank Notes Coins, 8 May 2011.

have continued using Boulton's tool by paying celebrities and athletes millions of dollars to advertise and wear their products in order to create differentiation and distinguish their products. In addition to celebrity marketing, modern producers practice planned obsolescence almost religiously. Consider alone the value to Apple of changing their charging connectors from one model to the next. These marketing concepts established by Wedgwood and Boulton centuries ago are pivotal to today's marketing strategies. The practice of marketing has been carried out for millennia, and the concepts and methods used through history have changed little over time – although their adaption to modern opportunities has been creative and exciting. Marketing as a professional practice emerged and became an undeniable force post-Industrial Revolution during the rise of capitalism as the major economic force in Europe and the United States.

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The establishment of marketing post Industrial Revolution and the concepts of Wedgwood and Boulton are the basis of marketing in the twenty-first century. Today, a dominant example in the world of marketing is centered around marketing through sports.<sup>12</sup> Widespread success of sports marketing is mainly due to the sport fans as they are dedicated to supporting their city and team(s) that represents it. Fan loyalty makes sports different than other forms of entertainment. This is evidenced by the millions of dollars player contracts are worth as well as the massive deals and partnerships they make with companies. Fans are faithful and sports marketers capitalize on their behavior and how to motivate them.

In creating support for their brand, companies understand the importance of cost effectiveness, target demographics, and company fit. By creating partnerships, companies can increase awareness and appeal to specific target market(s) with demographic and psychographic

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<sup>12</sup> "Sports Marketing." Sports Marketing | AdBidtise, 15 Oct. 2017.

characteristics. The marketer has to understand the relationship between the product and the brand and the association with the team or individual, so as to create what will be a strong positive image with the target market. As an example, Rolex associates itself with golf due to the fact that it is an expensive sport. Rolex targets and positions within a high-end market segment – hence targeting the right customers, rather than a segment that may not be able to afford the luxury watch brand.

The sports marketing world has exploded into one of the biggest businesses in the United States and the world. Currently, companies spend more than eighteen billion dollars annually into leagues and teams as well as paying athletes, coaches, and sports personalities billions to endorse their goods and service.<sup>13</sup> Athletes provide several important benefits to advertisers as they increase brand name recognition, create a positive association and likeability, and aid in developing a distinct brand personality. *Fit* and *match-up* are supremely important in the success of the relationship between athlete and brand. When an athlete has success in his/her respective sport, it strengthens both the image of the brand and the athlete. Athletes excite and motivate the consumer to purchase a product by increasing credibility and popularity. This makes the connection between athlete and product successful and profitable for both sides. Sports marketing and the income attached is worth upwards of \$600 billion.<sup>14</sup>

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In modern society, the television and the internet dominate the sports world as its method of spread. This was not always the case though, as the radio, invented in 1895 and popularized by the mid 1900s, became the first technology where sporting events were shared live and advertisers associated themselves almost instantly. The power of the radio accelerated the

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<sup>13</sup> Crupi., Anthony. "Sports Now Accounts for 37% of Broadcast TV Ad Spending." Ad Age, 10 Sept. 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Kearney, A.T. "The Sports Market." AT Kearney, 2011.

process of creating a shared national culture that had started when railroads and telegraphs created a more connected United States. With the radio, Americans from coast to coast could listen to the same or similar programming. This had the effect of smoothing out regional differences and created a national identity and unity in ways never before achieved in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Before the radio, details of sporting events and activities filled the pages of newspapers, magazines, and books, but information could never be obtained live without attending a game. Attendance of games was a family event -- an opportunity that was available to all no matter their social standing in the United States. The cost was low to attend and, as a family outing, viewing the game was secondary in a sense. Today this has become almost impossible as the prices of attendance has skyrocketed to a level unaffordable to the majority of the US population. The viewing of a live professional sporting event in most major markets has become a luxury opportunity. Ironically, the radio and mass media which originally enabled the sharing of these events, sparked the beginning of this shift.

In 1920, the era of commercial radio began, and sporting events were prominent. Millions of Americans would crowd around their radios at home to listen to the game *live* for the first time -- fixated on the voice of the announcer to recount the action. Radio transformed the way Americans enjoyed sports as it popularized sports figures and their accomplishments for mass consumption. Radio allowed for the sports world's most talented athletes to become household names.<sup>16</sup> Just as the celebrity marketing proposed originally by Boulton, these athletes now began to become celebrities and the marketer knew to capitalize. Most owners of professional sports teams saw the advantages of game broadcasts, though it took New York City

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<sup>15</sup> Lane, Lisa. "Prosperity and the Production of Popular Entertainment." OpenStax, 7 Jan. 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Covil, Eric C. "Radio and Its Impact on the Sports World, by Eric C. Covil." American Sportscasters Association.

until 1938 to adopt daily game coverage as they feared that fans would not attend games if they could sit at home and listen. It took General Mills' cereal sponsorship of games to change their minds. With General Mills' sponsorship, radio entered into the realm of marketing and advertising – never to look back.<sup>17</sup> The positive relationship between radio and sports would flourish for decades to come, despite the introduction of television.

No other form of media has had a greater impact on sports than the radio. Even today, radio continues to covers every level of athletics – from high school basketball to the World Series. The radio also has the ability – in the broadcast of sports -- to form a powerful connection and relationship between broadcaster and audience. Former Major League baseball player and long-time announcer Bob Uecker says of the radio: “You paint a picture in the mind. It’s a kick to make baseball come alive to a guy hundreds of miles away who’s never seen your home park” (267).<sup>18</sup> Radio gives the listeners the opportunity to use their imaginations and visualize the game the way they want to, while still giving them live commentary. Jimmy Dudley, the voice of the Cleveland Indians for 20 years, recounts a letter he received from a young fan, who was blind and wrote the letter in Braille: “[He] signed off by saying, ‘Remember, Jimmy, you are my eyes. Don’t ever let me down.’ It taught me never to forget my obligation as a representative of the fan.”<sup>19</sup> The power of the radio is undeniable and the relationship between listener and announcer is one of trust. The radio was the first to have the unique ability to be consumed where others cannot. In addition to being able to listen to the radio at home, people were also able to listen at work, as they exercise, or drive in the car. Four out of five adults are reached by radio each week.<sup>20</sup> Early on, advertisers quickly capitalized and immediately paid large sums to

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, Curt. *The Storytellers: from Mel Allen to Bob Costas: Sixty Years of Baseball Tales from the Broadcast Booth*. Macmillan USA, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, “The Storytellers.”

<sup>19</sup> Miller, J. David, and Ron Kule. *Carolina Baseball: Pressure Makes Diamonds*. J. David Miller and Ron Kule, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Hendricks, John Allen. *Keith's Radio Station: Broadcast, Internet, and Satellite*. Focal, 2015.



run advertisements during radio broadcasts. Radio completely changed the way that sports were experienced by Americans.

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Celebrity shifted as generations' fascination went away from those in politics to the more modern celebrity – actors, actresses, artists, models, musicians, and athletes. Daniel Boorstin, an American historian, details the uniqueness of a celebrity: “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.”<sup>21</sup> In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, multiple sports become popular as baseball became the national pastime in the United States. It did not take long for these athletes to become celebrities as well. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the trend toward big business endorsements began.

In 1905, Hillerich and Bradsby, the makers of Louisville Slugger baseball bats, agreed to what is thought to be the first endorsement deal with future Hall of Famer Honus Wagner. This deal was not for money, but Louisville Slugger provided Wagner with bats that had his name engraved on them. In 1908, Hillerich got the rights to use another baseball superstar's signature as Ty Cobb signed a similar agreement. Coca-Cola later made Ty Cobb [Figure 3] one of its leading spokespeople early in Cobb's career (1905-1928) hoping that his early success would continue. After a Hall of Fame career as a player and manager, it was clearly a good decision.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Andrews, David L., and Steven J. Jackson. *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity*. Routledge, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> “Hillerich & Bradsby Company, Inc.” History of Hillerich & Bradsby Company, Inc. – FundingUniverse, 2003.



Figure 3: Ty Cobb and Coca Cola represented one of the first partnerships between an athlete and a product not directly related to sports itself.<sup>23</sup>

During this time, many athletes did not earn enough from their playing contracts and needed to work during the offseason in order to make ends meet. Honus Wagner and Ty Cobb opened the door for all future athletes. Sports marketing was a way for early athletes to enhance success and prosper. No athlete of the time was able to become as popular and successful through the new venture as George Herman “Babe” Ruth. As Tom Stanton, a baseball historian and author, said, “It’s difficult to convey to people today just how popular a sports figure Babe really was in American history. He’s the most mythologized figure in American sports history – a huge icon. Of all the colorful figures that existed during the 20s and 30s, Babe was at the front of the line.”<sup>24</sup> The concept of athlete endorsements had not been popularized at this point in American culture. There was no Nike or Reebok to take pro sports stars to this heightened status. Even so, Babe was already there, as evidenced by the advertisements in which he appeared and how Ruth has transcended time.

This project is an examination of the rise and development of modern sports marketing, as well as its impact on the economy, society, culture and professional sports. The timeline and path of what follows explore sports marketing through the lens of two legendary athletes – Babe

<sup>23</sup> Ty Cobb, [pinterest.co.uk](https://pinterest.co.uk).

<sup>24</sup> “The World’s First Celebrity Athlete.” Babe Ruth Central, 2013.

Ruth and Michael Jordan. Ruth and Jordan are two pivotal figures that were major catalysts for elevating the role of sports and sports marketing to new levels in each of their time periods. Chapter 1, *Babe Ruth: The Man that Began It All*, investigates the various factors that came together to elevate Babe Ruth to international prominence, how he became the figure that embodied his generation, and how the rise of sports marketing changed the game and the role of athletes forever. As the first major athlete to sign lucrative endorsement deals, Ruth opened the floodgates, fostered the rise of the sports agents and changed the sports economy. Chapter 2, *Michael Jordan: Taking It to the Next Level*, delves into the shifting age of sports marketing, which began in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. The historical context is particularly important in this phase as Michael Jordan was a black athlete arguably as popular as Babe Ruth -- playing in a league that wasn't integrated until 1950. As a result, this chapter explores the history of basketball, the Civil Rights movement, the Harlem Globetrotters, and how Jordan's persona made him so popular and bankable. Chapter 3, *Michael Jordan Reinvents the Sports Marketing Playbook*, looks further into Michael Jordan's impact on sports marketing and how the range of his brand and related activities have set new and expanded standards. This chapter delves deeply into the range of advertisements and other products associated with Michael Jordan as he, with the help of his agent, David Falk, redefined the image and role(s) of the athlete and branding. The Conclusion, *Past and Present*, examines current advertisements and analyzes them in terms of the elements discussed in this essay.

## Chapter 1 – Babe Ruth: The Man that Began It All

George Herman “Babe” Ruth was born into post Industrial Age United States. His rags to riches story holds up even today as a spectacular example of fulfilling the American Dream. As a legendary baseball performer, he inspired and motivated millions during his career, after his retirement, and still to this day. However, beyond the baseball records, Ruth also led the way for a new and expanded role for professional sports and athletes -- as celebrities and key figures in American culture and the economy. Ruth was not an archetypical American defined by class and race; as a result, almost anyone could identify with his story. This flexibility drew marketers directly to him, and he became the top target to align with their brands. This established a new kind of celebrity, beyond the famous political or business leaders of the time. He set a precedent for democratic and equal-opportunity success – albeit, it should be recognized, without a racial component. He was the most photographed man in America during the 1920’s. Ruth helped lay a foundation for anyone -- regardless of ethnicity, financial status, or origin -- to participate in society and thrive. Admittedly, the diversity in baseball at the time was limited to white immigrants or their descendants; it would still be a decade before racial barriers would be broken in professional sports. Still, Ruth laid a groundwork for individual “performers” – outside of politics and business – to have major roles and influence in America.

Ruth was born on February 6, 1895 in Baltimore, Maryland. Although he came to represent for Americans greatness, success and passion, his early life was far from privileged. Ruth’s parents were hard working, lower-middle class individuals, which left them little time for the family. Ruth was unruly as a child; consequently, at the age of seven, his parents sent him to a Catholic school -- St. Mary’s Industrial School for Boys. It became the

disciplinary atmosphere Ruth needed as he not only learned occupational skills, but also developed a passion and love for the game of baseball. One individual from St. Mary's had a particularly important influence on Ruth -- Brother Matthias. He became a father figure for Ruth and helped refine his baseball skills by working with him on hitting, fielding and pitching. At the age of 19, Ruth had improved so much that Brother Matthias invited Jack Dunn -- owner of the Baltimore Orioles -- to watch Ruth play. Dunn offered Ruth a contract in February of 1914.<sup>25</sup>

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Ruth was a shining example of achieving the American Dream, of what can be accomplished when there is equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative. Ruth was a star, and a perfect hero for the time period. He rose to fame against a backdrop of a nation that was undergoing great changes and facing political, economic and social turbulence and adversity: "Ruth's life story comforted and reassured those who feared that the United States was no longer a nation in which a poor boy could rise from lowly origins to fame and fortune" (Rader, 123).<sup>26</sup> He played during the turmoil of American involvement in World War I, through the Roaring 20s, Prohibition and the crash of the stock market. He was the grandson of immigrants, born with no social or financial advantages. Ruth's family background, upbringing, and personality made his success in this time of social injustice and disorder in America more significant and allowed him to become the hero that Americans could embrace. He had the background, personality and charisma that people were attracted to and admired, which made him the target and catalyst in the beginning stages of modern sports marketing.

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<sup>25</sup> "Babe Ruth -- Teen to Adult." Babe Ruth Central, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Rader, Benjamin G. *Baseball: A History of America's Game*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1992. Print.

Ruth's visibility, influence, and stamp on society at the time was ubiquitous. Newspaper columns, "How to Play Baseball" guides and even a children's book, were ghost-written in his name. Ruth became a regular on talk shows and his voice became synonymous with dozens of products. The media, advertisers, and radio stations used Ruth's antics, humor, and larger-than-life personality to attract large audiences. America accepted Ruth as a symbol of an era. Ruth's popularity was based on his ability to move from the sports pages into the mainstream of American consciousness. As a mainstay on radio programs he was featured on "The Adventures of Babe Ruth," produced by the Blue Network, in 1934: a series of 15-minute programs that featured Ruth telling fully dramatized episodes from his career. His star power also extended to "Here's Bath Ruth," the comedy-drama "Alibi Ike," and "Baseball Quiz" [Figure 1].<sup>27</sup> His celebrity was a product of a number of factors, not the least of which was Ruth's own enormous talent on the diamond, his innate sense of showmanship, and the luck of being in New York just when the great media boom of the 1920s was taking place.

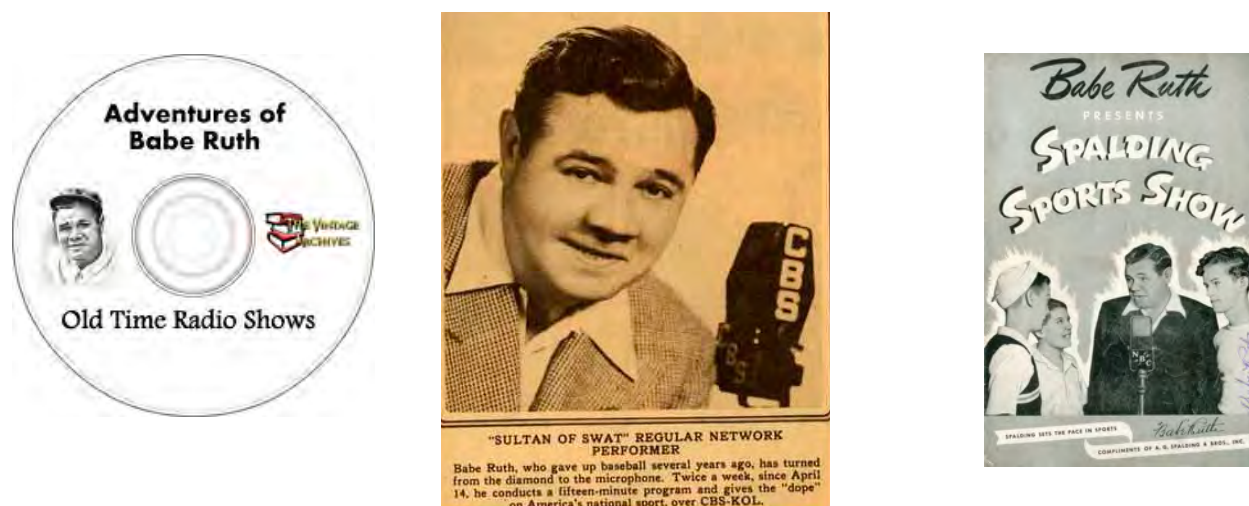


Figure 1: Babe Ruth maintained his popularity by being featured on the radio and advertisements during and after retirement.<sup>28 29 30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Dunning, John. *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> "1944 Babe Ruth Signed 'Spalding Sports Show' Radio Program." Lelands, 23 Mar. 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Dylan, Paul. "The Adventures of Babe Ruth." One for Five, 10 Aug. 2012.

<sup>30</sup> "The Adventure of Babe Ruth – MP3 OTR – Old Time Radio Show." EBay 6 Apr. 2018.

The social, political, and media environment created a type of “perfect storm” for the marketing power of Babe Ruth at the time. Three major editorial trends affected newspaper content: (1) to reach the mass audience newspapers decreased hard news stories and placed more emphasis on sensationalism; (2) standardization became the norm of the editorial process, which reduced cost; (3) newspapers deemphasized, for the most part, political partisanship, which dominated the nineteenth century. These trends led major newspapers to mass production, where they offend few and sell as many newspapers as possible. Sport, and thus Babe Ruth, became the ideal content for the dailies as the Hall of Famer, despite his often-questionable behavior, was never politically or culturally controversial. He presented a safe ideology that antagonized few, and, most importantly, gave New Yorkers and Americans everywhere a sense of national pride.<sup>31</sup> Babe Ruth’s role in the media expanded ever further as he was also at the center of film as he appeared as himself. In film, audiences came to believe that character and performer were one and the same. The movie star Babe Ruth had a larger-than-life presence, yet he never appeared to take his roles too seriously. Ruth appeared in nearly a dozen movies, making his acting debut in 1920 in “Headin’ Home.” Ruth also appeared in “Speedy,” “Perfect Control,” and “Over the Fence.” Each character he played fit his own personality, and his air of self-deprecating humor added sincerity to his performances.<sup>32</sup>

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Ruth’s celebrity and the role of baseball in the American society and psyche continued to set a new precedent for an athlete’s marketing power. As Ruth’s fame as the face of baseball flourished, baseball became a connector and assimilator for masses trying to Americanize – a

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<sup>31</sup> Trimble, Patrick. “Babe Ruth: The Media Construction of a 1920’s Sport Personality.” *Colby Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, ser. 6, Mar. 1996, pp. 45–57. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Trimble, “Babe Ruth: The Media Construction of a 1920’s Sport Personality.”

result of the “open borders” immigration policies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century which had drawn millions from Europe.

Americans of different ethnic backgrounds and across all levels of society could relate to the game as ethnicity became a major issue. Baseball was a core component in society: “nothing more than baseball spoke to and of the nation. That baseball and America were, by the early part of the twentieth century, gloriously entangled was summed up by Albert Spalding in 1911 when he concluded that the connection was obvious: it was like saying two plus two equals four” (24).<sup>33</sup> Baseball provided a method to better understand American culture, and people bonded over playing and watching the game. The marketing of Ruth created an image that transcended time and created a legend.

The appeal of baseball in America transcended age, income, social standing, ethnic background and race. However, it must be noted the baseball world in which Babe Ruth thrived was limited to white players. In 1876, the professional National League of baseball owners adopted a white players-only “gentleman’s agreement.” In 1920, Rube Foster launched a Negro National League which enjoyed success in some of years overlapping the career of Babe Ruth. Jackie Robinson became the first black player in Major League Baseball (MLB) in 1947, a little more than a year before Babe Ruth died.<sup>34</sup>

As a marketing dream, Ruth offered more than baseball celebrity; he was a reflection of the values that almost any product or company would want to be associated. Ruth symbolized hard work, determination, and social mobility. He had great power as a celebrity figure -- leading companies and brands to flock to him to attach their product with his image. Sports companies

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<sup>33</sup> Nathanson, Mitchell. *A People's History of Baseball*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 2012. Print.

<sup>34</sup> Alvarez, Mark, editor. “National Pastime.” *A Review of Baseball History*, 1997.



could draw from his athletic power and skill, but also capitalized on his image off of the field. His image was just as influential for an American car company, as it was for a sports related product. Marketers managed the story by using his home-grown story to emphasize taking pride and believing in the hard work of Americans. Every business, no matter how connected they were to the image of Ruth, could benefit from his endorsement. People would recognize him, and his presence would evoke a positive reaction and hence a positive image toward the product advertised. As Babe Ruth excelled at the game like no other player before him, he captured the attention and hearts of America – at a time when Americans were open and receptive, trusting, and intrigued by advertising and changing communications. He dominated the game, amassing numbers that were unprecedented by combining extreme power and consistency at the plate and in the field. Ruth became a superstar and enjoyed popularity previously unheard of in professional baseball. He elevated the role of baseball -- and the image of athletic star performers -- to new heights.

Ruth's success and influence, though, went way beyond his *personal* accomplishments in baseball. His dominance and competitive success pushed both him and professional baseball to the forefront -- elevating the role of baseball in American society and its economy. Major League teams barely broke even during the early years of baseball. With Ruth at the helm, star players began to be seen as larger-than-life by their fans, and their status could be used to not only break even, but also make huge profits. Ruth helped change baseball from a grind-it-out style to one of power both on and off the field. All teams improved financially. Ruth became a sort of "national curiosity" – with the public falling in love with his persona and power: "each day, millions turned to the sports pages of their newspaper to see whether Ruth had hit another

home run” (Rader, 131).<sup>35</sup> Ruth helped to transform baseball from simply a pastime to a major force and financial player in the modern entertainment and advertising industry.

Before Ruth, the salaries of players, for the most part, were not enough to subsidize life, and most baseball players needed to work a second job in the offseason in order to survive. In 1914, when Ruth entered the MLB, the largest contracts were for \$15,000 (the equivalent of around \$180,000 today) – secured by Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker. In 1922, just eight years later, that number almost tripled with Ruth earning \$52,000 – the equivalent of around \$759,000 today. The previous year the highest contract was \$25,000. In the height of Babe Ruth’s career, he was earning \$80,000 (a contact worth over one million dollars today) from the New York Yankees. Ruth’s earnings and his recognized role in generating fans and attendance changed Major League Baseball contracts changed forever [Figure 2]. Ruth, as a player, a celebrity and a businessman, changed sports, ushering in a new system of high salaries and ultimately enormous revenue and growing business models for franchises and the league. Ruth made baseball exciting – attendance increased and, because of this, baseball’s financial upside shifted into one of the most profitable businesses in the world.<sup>36</sup>

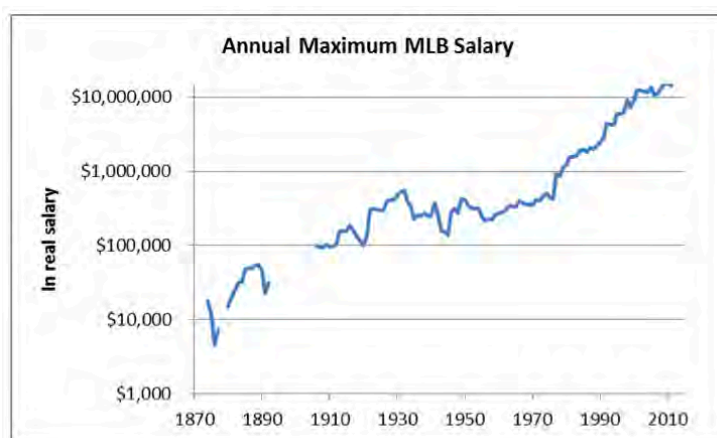


Figure 2: Annual Maximum MLB Salaries from 1870-2010.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games*.

<sup>36</sup> Hauptert, Michael. "MLB's Annual Salary Leaders, 1874-2012." *Baseball Research Journal* 40, no. 2. 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Hauptert, Michael. "MLB's Annual Salary Leaders since 1874." *Society for American Baseball Research*, 2011.

Ruth set the stage for the acceptance and marketing power of the star athlete. There is an acceptance of behavior – starting with Ruth -- when the athlete is exceptional. Ruth lived largely and publicly – gaining a reputation as being a partier, jokester, and clown. People were drawn to his liveliness, easy-going attitude and generosity. Everything about Ruth was astonishing – his size, strength, personality, and appetite for success. Babe Ruth’s image was often plagued by “bad” behavior as he was known for his excesses -- eating, drinking, womanizing, and partying. Although American social or moral attitudes were still conservative in many ways, Ruth’s actions were accepted and even embraced. Advertisers and marketers did not shy away from Ruth. Walter “Christy” Walsh (1891-1955), an American writer and cartoonist best known as Ruth’s sports agent, helped market Ruth’s image both during and after his playing career ended. Ruth and Walsh changed the face of players’ potential earnings through sports marketing.<sup>38</sup> Walsh’s role created a new power position – the sports agent – in the shaping of a celebrity image, the earning power of that individual as well as the team and products that surrounded him.

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The role of the sports agent came to be pivotal for individual athletes and in developing the industry. Christy Walsh was an ambitious person – not afraid of a challenge -- who created a highly successful syndicate of ghostwriters for baseball’s biggest stars. He represented many of the major baseball figures in the Golden Age of the sport including Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Knute Rockne, John McGraw, and Ty Cobb. Walsh was a pioneer in the public relations field.<sup>39</sup> He developed a mission drawing upon his diverse background of training (as an attorney),

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<sup>38</sup> "Christy Walsh — Baseball’s First Agent." Books on Baseball RSS. N.p., 4 Aug. 2010. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

<sup>39</sup> "Christy Walsh — Baseball’s First Agent."

talents, and experiences. Walsh was determined to meet Ruth when he was attempting to put together the group of ghost aided columnists and wanted Ruth as his star. At first, Walsh had no luck in his attempts to meet Ruth. In 1921, though, he staked out the Ansonia Hotel in New York City where Ruth was staying; when he ordered a beer to be sent up to his room, Walsh used this as an opportunity to talk to his future business partner. Walsh discussed his ghost writing proposition with Ruth, and they agreed on February 21, 1921. Walsh made Ruth the face of his new enterprise: Syndicating Sport Cartoons and Features. The contract stated as follows [Figure 3]:

Dear Mr. Ruth:

In line with our conversation, I agree to syndicate a series of baseball articles and interviews to be signed – "By Babe Ruth."

I will prepare or have prepared by qualified sporting writers such material as you furnish or we consider interesting baseball news.

I will endeavor to sell this series to the greatest possible number of newspapers in the United States. While we cannot prevent other newspapers from obtaining special interviews or other features about you- we will, however, offer this series as the only authorized and exclusive series of articles signed "By Babe Ruth".

I will communicate with you at once, after careful inquiry, regarding the number of articles we will syndicate per week. The service to the newspapers will start with the opening of the 1921 Baseball Season and terminate after the 1921 World Series.

I agree to pay you Fifty (50) Percent of the gross receipts, a special consideration. My profit and all office and syndicating expenses, including printing, postage etc. will come from the balance.

Very truly yours  
Christy Walsh<sup>40</sup>

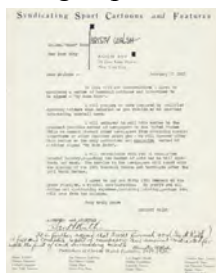


Figure 3: The contract signed between Christy Walsh and Babe Ruth on February 21, 1921.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ruth/Walsh contract, February 21, 1921, viewed from Heritage Auction House, New York City.

<sup>41</sup> "1921 First Partnership Between Babe Ruth & Christy Walsh | Lot #80001." *Heritage Auctions*.

This contract was the start of a highly profitable and one of the most important business relationships in sports and sports marketing history. Jonathan Eig, in *Luckiest Man: The Life and Death of Lou Gehrig*<sup>42</sup> wrote about Walsh's ghostwriting syndicate: "The athletes and writers were happy. The readers were happy. Objective journalism was the only casualty. By making the jocks and reporters partners, Walsh compromised a lot of solid reporters, turning them into fawning propagandists. As baseball soared in popularity, thanks largely to Ruth, Gehrig, and the news media, baseball writers were in demand. Newspapers, magazines, and even motion picture producers were clamoring for baseball stories." Walsh placed articles for Ruth for fifteen years and used four different sports writers as Ruth's ghosts, including future Baseball Commissioners Ford Frick and William J. Slocum. Frick alone earned a reported \$10,000 ghostwriting for Ruth.<sup>43</sup>

Ruth was sought after at a time when celebrity endorsements in America were not a finely tuned marketing strategy, involving heavy analysis of consumer attitudes or celebrity exposure and overexposure. Instead, association with Babe Ruth was considered almost universally appealing. 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 [Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9, Figure 10]. Ruth's role in the marketing and endorsement industries ushered in an important concept: that an athlete's image and success can be "transferred" to a product. Additionally, Ruth's endorsement appeal created broader marketing interest and potential demand for other superstar athletes – as companies and brands wanted to capitalize on their stories.

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<sup>42</sup> Eig, Jonathan. *Luckiest Man: The Life and Death of Lou Gehrig*. Simon & Schuster, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Creamer, Robert W. *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life* Simon & Schuster, 1992.



Figure 4: Babe Ruth's Big-League bubble gum baseball card, which became a collectible item.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 5: A huge visual tribute to Babe Ruth, where he advertised for Old Gold Cigarettes.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 6: Advertising kept Ruth on the public's mind. This advertisement for Murphy-Rich Co. Soap emphasizes his homerun hitting ability as a sure thing just like the quality of the soap.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 7: Advertisement sign featuring Babe Ruth encouraging kids to join "Babe Ruth's Baseball Club" open to any child who sent in a box top from their Quaker Oats cereal.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> "Top 10 Babe Ruth Cards of All-Time." *The Cardboard Connection*. N.p., 07 Sept. 2015. Web. 09 Nov. 2015.

<sup>45</sup> "1930s Babe Ruth Tri-Fold "Old Gold Cigarettes" - Spectacular Advertising Display!" *Legendary Auctions*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Nov. 2015.

<sup>46</sup> "A Marketable Commodity Selling Babe Ruth to America," *Babe Ruth Times*.

<sup>47</sup> "A Marketable Commodity Selling Babe Ruth to America," *Babe Ruth Times*.



Figure 8: Advertisement featuring Babe Ruth and his wife Claire praises White Owl Cigars from the LA Times in December of 1938. And Ruth selling cigars outside a bodega.<sup>48</sup>

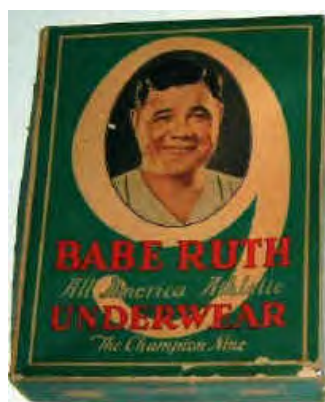


Figure 9: Babe Ruth's very own "All American Athlete" underwear.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 10: Ruth's endorsement for Red Rock Cola: "It's the Finest Cola Drink I ever tasted."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Jack Doyle, "Babe Ruth & Tobacco, 1920s-1940s," *PopHistoryDig.com*, September 25, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> "Babe Ruth All America Athletic Underwear." KeyMan Collectables.

<sup>50</sup> Morris, Brian. "50 Incredible Vintage Baseball Advertisements." PsPrint Blog, 28 June 2012.

Public acceptance and interest in seeing sports figures off the field was also exemplified by Ruth when the slugger signed, with the help of his then new agent, onto a vaudeville tour in 1921. Baseball had a huge fan base, and they flooded stadiums and theaters to see their favorite athletes perform. Vaudeville and baseball reflected the urban diversity of America at this time. It paid Ruth three thousand dollars weekly [Figure 11]. In the days before television and radio, baseball and vaudeville dominated entertainment. Individuals like Babe Ruth realized that, since they were among the most popular public figures at the time, it was a natural choice to capitalize on their fame; the vaudeville circuit offered supplementary income and an easy role. Many athletes – not just baseball players – took to the vaudeville stage rather than returning to their hometowns and getting blue-collar jobs. Catchers were common as they had the reputation as raconteurs and were known for their banter with batters during games. Baseball players told amusing anecdotes and answered questions about their time in the big leagues, as well as doing skill demonstrations. Some even sang, danced, played the piano, and told jokes. Many famous people of this era used their star status to work the vaudeville stage. Agents knew that a star baseball player or athlete in general would be a draw and would make them money – an early and distinct form of capitalizing on interest in sports to market their brand.<sup>51</sup>



Figure 11: Poster for 1926 vaudeville tour, where Babe Ruth told stories and the insider view into life in the MLB.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Yuko, Elizabeth. "When Baseball Players Were Vaudeville Stars." The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 6 Apr. 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Lull, David. "Babe Ruth Visits Duluth." Vintage Duluth, 11 Dec. 2013.



Prior to Babe Ruth, baseball salaries were such that many baseball players needed to work blue-collar jobs in the offseason, or, as described above, join vaudeville tours. Christy Walsh was instrumental in ending this trend and giving Babe Ruth a sustainable life mainly through baseball and marketing his prowess on and off the field. Many of the branding strategies and advertising campaigns associated with Ruth are still familiar and used today, even if styles and technology have drastically changed. Sports marketing created an image for Ruth as he associated with hunting and fishing equipment, Modish Men's Wear, Big League bubble gum, alligator shoes, cigars, baseball gear, and sporty automobiles – all products for the man's man. Ruth – may it be through his reputation or the legacy he created – was an almost universally recognized and admired figure. His face, bat, and voice could be used to sell anything. He also received anywhere between two hundred fifty dollars and ten thousand dollars for appearances at banquets, grand openings, smokers, boxing and wrestling matches, and celebrity golf tournaments.<sup>53</sup> The Curtiss Candy Company created the "Baby Ruth" candy bar, originally called "Kandy Kate." The Curtiss Candy Company changed the name in 1921 to "Baby Ruth" and claimed it was named after Ruth Cleveland, the daughter of President Grover Cleveland, who had passed away 17 years earlier. It was surely convenient that the new name coincided with the time when Babe Ruth was emerging as a baseball superstar. The Curtiss Candy Company capitalized on Ruth's success without having to pay the slugger royalties, an early example of ambush sports marketing.<sup>54</sup> All paved the way to an explosion of promotion and marketing – specifically sports marketing – first with Ruth and then with other athletes at the center. One of the most famous and long running examples of these explosions came from the cereal brand

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<sup>53</sup> Dylan, Paul. "The Adventures of Babe Ruth." One for Five, 10 Aug. 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Klein, Christopher. "Babe Ruth v. Baby Ruth." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 25 Sept. 2014.

Wheaties which sought to build a strong bond with the sports world and appeal to a wide range of cereal eaters [Figure 12, Figure 13].

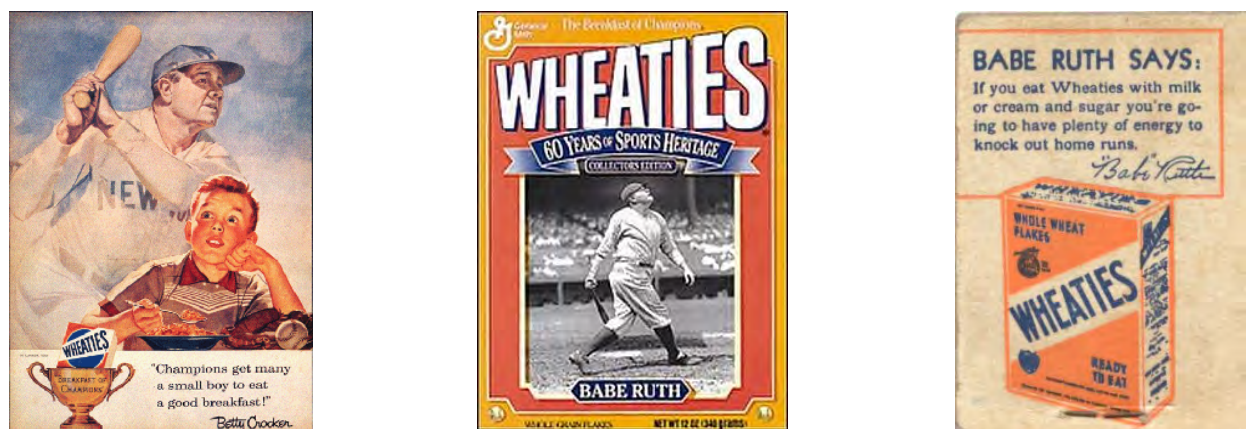


Figure 12<sup>55</sup>: These Wheaties advertisements cater to Ruth's admiration for and by children. Ruth was featured on radio spots and print ads in the 1930 and 60 years later, in 1992, on the sports heritage Wheaties box.<sup>56 57</sup>

The advertisement is titled "46 ALL-STARS out of 51 tell you 'it's WHEATIES for me!'". It lists 46 players from the 1939 All-Star team, categorized by league. The text also includes a testimonial from Red Barber and a small image of a Wheaties box.

AMERICAN LEAGUE	
• Pitchers:	• Catchers:
Adair	Delaney
Allen	Hansen
Briggs	Henderson
Conrad	Hubert
Greene	Johnson
Leary	Killebrew
Marshall	Lyons
McCall	Shaw
• Outfielders:	• Infielders:
Case	Adair
Conner	Allen
Johnson	Briggs
Killebrew	Conrad
Lyons	Greene
Shaw	Leary
• Pitchers:	• Catchers:
Adair	Delaney
Allen	Hansen
Briggs	Henderson
Conrad	Hubert
Greene	Johnson
Leary	Killebrew
Marshall	Lyons
McCall	Shaw
• Outfielders:	• Infielders:
Case	Adair
Conner	Allen
Johnson	Briggs
Killebrew	Conrad
Lyons	Greene
Shaw	Leary

Figure 13: Advertisement for Wheaties celebrating their support for baseball as they had 46 of the 51 1939 All-Stars under contract. During the game, announcer Red Barber advertised by pouring himself a bowl of the cereal.<sup>58</sup>

Wheaties, introduced to the market in 1924, coined the tagline of "Breakfast of Champion" in 1927; the slogan is still in use and highly recognized. Wheaties began its association with sports in 1927 through the advertising on the wall of a minor league baseball stadium in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Nicollet Park). In addition to this, Wheaties sponsored the

<sup>55</sup> "A Marketable Commodity Selling Babe Ruth to America." *Babe Ruth Times*.

<sup>56</sup> "1934 Babe Ruth Quaker Cereal Store Advertising Display." *Robert Edward Auctions*, 1934.

<sup>57</sup> Doyle, "Babe Ruth Days, 1947 & 1948."

<sup>58</sup> Thielman, Jim. "Wheaties Is Big League." *A Taste of General Mills*, 9 Apr. 2012.

radio broadcasts of the minor league baseball team (Minneapolis Millers). At the stadium, Wheaties was provided with a large billboard in the park, which introduced their new slogan. Throughout the 1930s, Wheaties increased in popularity with its sponsorship of baseball broadcasting as nearly a hundred radio stations carried Wheaties sponsored events.<sup>59</sup>

Lou Gehrig, in 1934, became the first athlete gracing the front of the box. It has now become a tradition for generations of athletes. Wheaties and athletes have created a credibility for the brand in the consumers' mind. The heyday of Wheaties came in the 1930s and 1940s as the cereal brand associated itself with every sport imaginable – including baseball stars, managers (and coaches), broadcasters, football stars, circus stars, rodeo and livestock breeders, jockeys, hunters, automobile racers, aviators, speedboat drivers, explorers, and parachutists. They saw that different athletes in the media endorsing Wheaties lead more types of consumers to buy in. Wheaties was able to secure such a dominant share the athlete endorsement market that in the 1939 Major League All-Star game, 46 out of 51 players in the game endorsed the breakfast food. Wheaties found their sales climbing throughout the 1930s – facilitated by its endorsements on the radio, in magazines, and in newspapers.<sup>60</sup>

Wheaties' association with athletes has become a marketing institution, embracing a wide range of sports, individuals, and teams over more than 80 years. Babe Ruth was featured on the Wheaties cover in 1992 in a special vintage collection series. To this day, the bright-orange Wheaties box remains a visual representation for athletic achievement. The athletes featured on the boxes reinforce this idea that the product can propel the consumer toward achievement. The Wheaties boxes thrust these athletes into the position of national role models. General Mills marketing manager, Dave Oehler, explains the brand's selection process: "We look for athletes

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<sup>59</sup> Jack Doyle, "Wheaties & Sport, 1930s," PopHistoryDig.com, March 29, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Doyle, "Wheaties & Sport, 1930s."

who represent their respective sports... They're selected based on their athletic achievements and how they personify being a champion, both on and off the field of competition."<sup>61</sup> Appearing on a Wheaties box provides a major boost for their personal brands. When an athlete appears on a Wheaties box, even if the endorsement does not pay a lot, it is a signal to the world that the athletes have ascended to the top of their game, that they represent true champions.

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Babe Ruth also heavily influenced the role and power of professional athletes in American *culture*. He was a trendsetter as he carried himself well and taught people to see new aspects of life. Babe Ruth created the image of a celebrity athlete: "None of [the other baseball giants] occupies a place equal to that of Babe Ruth. Ruth pushes aside all contenders; he is the Paul Bunyan of baseball history" (Rader, 123).<sup>62</sup> He was larger-than-life but also approachable; he would take time to talk to average people, and he redefined the meaning of "jock" by becoming more than just the legend on the field but also a citizen that others could look up to. He rarely took his fame and fortune for granted. He gave back to the community especially to children – who were his biggest fans. One legendary example involved young John Dale Sylvester, in 1926, who was suffering from a serious infection of the forehead caused by a kick from a horse. Sylvester, who did not die from the infection, wished he could see Ruth hit a homerun. His family sent a telegram to the New York Yankees; in return they received two baseballs, one containing a note from Ruth himself -- "I'll knock a homer for you on Wednesday." As promised, Ruth not only hit one homerun, but smacked three out of the ballpark.<sup>63</sup> Ruth was regarded as a role model as he was known for his generosity toward young

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<sup>61</sup> Filloon, Whitney. "How Wheaties Set the Gold-Medal Standard for Sports Endorsements." *Eater*, Eater, 19 Aug. 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game*.

<sup>63</sup> "Sick Boy Promised Ruth Homer Dies at 74." *Los Angeles Times*. January 11, 1990. Accessed November 25, 2015.

fans. His mentality set the stage for the widespread activities today conducted by athletes who give back to children via major organizations and events.

Along with Ruth's incredible athletic ability, the intensity of Ruth's popularity and influence was also shaped by the key historical factors of the 1920s and 30s. He was a young star as baseball became a visible symbol of American democracy during World War I and afterward. Baseball was promoted as more than just a game, but also a way of bringing people together, to promote patriotism and help people escape from the depressing realities of the time. The role that baseball had in the national psyche was demonstrated by National League president John K. Tener in May of 1918 speaking in favor of keeping baseball operating during the war:

“This is a war of democracy against bureaucracy. And I tell you that baseball is the very watchword of democracy. There is no other sport or business or anything under heaven, which exerts the leveling influence that baseball does. Neither the public school nor the church can approach it. Baseball is unique. England is a democratic country, but it lacks the finishing touch of baseball.” (Light, 1022)<sup>64</sup>

Baseball, though seen by the US government as a distraction from the war effort, was a welcome diversion from the horrors of the war. The troops also followed baseball as a reminder of home.<sup>65</sup> Though Ruth registered to be drafted, like many other players, his number was not called. However, Major League Baseball and the players made other contributions. Players and owners donated money to the war effort and gave baseball gear to the soldiers for them to play during time off. In 1918, teams donated a percentage of each week's profits to the Red Cross. Along with this support to the war effort, baseball helped keep stateside spirits and patriotism high.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Light, Jonathan Fraser. *The Cultural Encyclopedia of Baseball*. 2nd ed. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1997.

<sup>65</sup>Light, *The Cultural Encyclopedia of Baseball*.

<sup>66</sup> “1918 All Work or Fight and No Play.” *Baseball History in 1918: All Work or Fight and No Play*. 1918. Accessed September 20, 2015.

Babe Ruth was a perfect fit for the post-War media, technology and attitudes. Mass media (radio and newspapers) was increasingly accessible and followed by the American public. Babe Ruth was a dream for the media -- from his athletic performance and high profile to his social antics and generosity with children. His face, voice, and personality could be found in newspapers, on billboards, in advertisements, on the radio, and on the television. Ruth represented every working person's dream. From growing up on the streets of Baltimore to being the biggest celebrity in America, he lived the rags-to-riches fantasy. He was a huge source of entertainment, hope and inspiration and was widely beloved. He lost his battle with cancer, tragically, on August 16, 1948. For two days, his body lay in state at the main entrance of Yankees Stadium, and hundreds of thousands of people came to pay their respects.<sup>67</sup> Even though he passed away almost 70 years ago, Ruth is one of the greatest and most memorable figures in baseball history and remains a true icon in American history. Ruth revolutionized baseball -- changing the way it was played and established it as a lucrative and highly marketable business. He continues to be a benchmark by which all other players are measured.<sup>68</sup> He is both a man and athlete that has transcended time and culture: "Of all America's legendary individuals, Ruth remains the country's preeminent athletic hero" (Rader 135).<sup>69</sup> Ruth was an exceptional performer, and a product of the time period; America looked to him through the ups and downs of the early twentieth century.

Marketers want the power, the history, the inspiration, and the dependability that comes from the connection with baseball legends.<sup>70</sup> Ruth's legacy lives on not only through his

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<sup>67</sup> "Biography." Babe Ruth. Accessed November 25, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> "Babe Ruth Central." Babe Ruth Central. Accessed September 20, 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game*.

<sup>70</sup> Sandomir, Richard. "Legacy of Earning Power: Babe Ruth: Dead 41 Years, He Lives on in Endorsements That Bring Heirs Hundreds of Thousands." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 22 Dec. 1989.

posthumous presence and ongoing inspiration, but also through the roles of sports and players in promoting products, building franchises and expanding careers. Ruth's blueprint for marketing himself on and off the field shapes the way that athletes today approach product endorsements. His fame was born on the baseball field, but his celebrity and financial prosperity flourished with his off-field success. Athlete following Ruth support and endorse brands that not only relate to their on-field success, but also those that will allow them to sustain success after retirement. Businesses now invest over two billion dollars into athletes for them to wear and support their products. Babe Ruth and the athletes of his generation were the building blocks of sports marketing and sports celebrity.

Babe Ruth was the primary catalyst, who laid the foundation for the pivotal role of sports in culture and society and sports marketing. He embodied his generation and, as the first major athlete to sign lucrative endorsement deals, Ruth opened the door for the future. Michael Jordan represents this future as he led the way to a new age of sports marketing. He became the first African American athlete to receive huge endorsement deals. Race was a huge issue during this time period, so this exploration also includes the history of basketball and the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

## Chapter 2 – Michael Jordan: Taking It to the Next Level

Babe Ruth unquestionably changed the nature and business of American baseball, established precedents for a new and revered position for athletes in American society and set the stage for modern sports marketing. He stands in a class by himself – in baseball and American history. Michael Jordan created another class -- influencing, growing and creating seismic shifts in the game of basketball and the relationship between celebrity and brand marketing. Reggie Miller, a five-time All-Star, who played his entire eighteen-year career with the Indiana Pacers and ranks second all-time in three-point shots made discussed Michael Jordan's significance:

[Michael Jordan] got a lot of us paid: his marketing, television rights. He got us out of the tight, tight shorts, which was good. He's the one who went with the baggy shorts and the short socks because before then it was the John Stockton shorts and everyone wore socks up to the knee. So, he's the one that did short socks, black shoes during playoffs. That was Chicago. And the Jordan [shoes] went through the roof; everybody wanted to have them. He is a cultural icon. I guess you would put him in the same category as Muhammad Ali, Babe Ruth... People talk about Mt. Rushmore of the NBA, the greatest players. But all sports. Maybe you could put Bill Russell in there. Does Michael trump Bill Russell? If you put Bill Russell and his achievements in the 1990s – certainly yes. Michael just came around when television was huge and the internet was just starting. I guess Jackie [Robinson], Babe, Muhammad, and maybe Michael. I would say that's the Mt. Rushmore of sports icons of the last hundred years. (1)<sup>71</sup>

No individual, through basketball or any sport for that matter, achieved a greater level of success both on and off the court than Michael Jordan. Flying on the court, he showcased a new level of drive, energy and athletic prowess. Off the court he flew through the air in television advertisements and sold millions of basketball shoes and clothing under the Nike brand [Figure 1].

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<sup>71</sup> Smith, Sam. *There Is No Next: NBA Legends on the Legacy of Michael Jordan*. Diversion Books, 2014.





Figure 1: From 1988 Slam-Dunk Contest at Chicago Stadium of Jordan's infamous "Free-Throw Line Dunk."<sup>72</sup>

Never a contender for America's pastime (as is football), basketball has nonetheless become a significant fixture in American, as well as international culture. A fast paced, exciting game populated with exceptional athletes requiring both skill and endurance, basketball has also become a visible representative of capitalism and the modernization of sports marketing – at never before seen levels. Transnational corporations have exploited American sports profitably and with far-reaching social consequences. Michael Jordan is the reason for this. His wildly successful endorsement success lead to the creation of the Jordan brand within Nike -- making Jordan the first athlete to have a shoe brand named for him. Jordan and his many advertising campaigns traveled around the globe, and all brands associated with Jordan revolutionized advertising and communication, creating awareness, interest, and a global market for Nike and for the National Basketball Association.

Michael Jordan stands as an All-American original; one of those rare, astonishing figures whose creativity, resilience, competitiveness, and unmatched success embodied all the best of American individualism. He was both larger than life and relatable to all. He did things that astonished the world, but his actions off the court related him to the common man. Jordan became a "one-man corporate conglomerate" and transformed the NBA into a popular culture

<sup>72</sup> "Best Free Throw Line Dunks of All Time!" Dunkademics, 25 Feb. 2016.

force with an unparalleled cultural, societal, and world impact. Sports marketing prior to Jordan was defined by advertising that was connected to existing products – not creating a brand for the athlete. However, Jordan could do both; over time it was recognized that he could sell anything, under his own brand, or could take his pick and be connected with products that would enhance his image and theirs.

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Jordan played in the NBA from 1984-2003 with a break in 1993-94 to play professional baseball. During that time, Jordan won the Rookie of the Year, was a six-time NBA champion (winning the Finals Most Valuable Player after each win), a five-time season MVP, and fourteen time All-Star just to name a few accolades. Jordan parlayed his basketball fame into incredible short and long-term financial gains. In 2015 Michael Jordan (52 at the time) became the first billionaire athlete as founder of the Jordan Brand under Nike, which had amassed over \$2.25 billion that year, earned him \$90 million dollars. It was Jordan's ownership of the Charlotte Hornets that catapulted him to the billionaire's circle. In 2014, the NBA renewed its television partnership with ESPN and TNT with the new deals (2016-2025) paying the NBA \$24 billion over the course of nine years.<sup>73</sup> Michael Jordan's influence on the league during his playing career and after has been huge and is reflected in the massive deals signed by the NBA. A few decades prior, Jordan joined the NBA and, like Babe Ruth, transformed the game culturally, socially, and financially:

...even before [Jordan] became an NBA star, [he knew he] was that player who [was] viewed as special [and] owed an obligation to the fan, the community and the game. In many respects, it's what also made Jordan like Babe Ruth...he was proud of his abilities and eager to...show them off to simply put them on display. Like Ruth, whose feats became prodigious and generic home runs of a long distance became Ruthian, it's similar with Jordan. (47)<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Pallotta, Frank. "NBA Renews Television Deals with ESPN, TNT." CNNMoney, Cable News Network, 6 Oct. 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, "Michael Jordan's Debut, 30 Years Ago."

Jordan is the representative of twentieth century sports in the modern and digital age. He changed the sports world on and off the court, and his ability to do what others could not set a new bar for the new NBA.

Ruth changed Major League Baseball into a game of power, while Jordan changed the game of basketball into one of extreme athleticism and extreme human feats. Jordan entered the NBA in 1984, 70 years after Babe Ruth began playing in the MLB. Professional sports and the nation were in a very different place due to the events, vast issues, and changes that had occurred related to the Civil Rights movement in America. A focus on Michael Jordan's impact on sports and marketing – and as an African-American athlete – requires an exploration of racial issues/history surrounding him and professional basketball.

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Dr. James Naismith, who was born in 1861 in Canada, came up with the concept of basketball based off of a game known as duck-on-a-rock, where players attempted to knock a “duck” off the top of a large rock. In 1891, Naismith began work at the YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, where he was faced with finding a sport that was suitable for play inside during the winter. He wanted to create a game of skill for the students instead of one that relied solely on strength. The first game was played with a soccer ball and two peach baskets [Figure 2].<sup>75</sup> The spread of the sport across the nation happened quickly as many YMCAs across

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<sup>75</sup> Laughead, George. “History of Basketball.” Basketball History: Dr. James Naismith, Basketball Inventor, Founder, KU Basketball: Kansas History Web Sites, 16 Nov. 2017.

the country began playing basketball as early as 1893. By 1906, the game had become more like the one we play today as metal hoops, nets, backboards, and basketballs were introduced.<sup>76</sup>

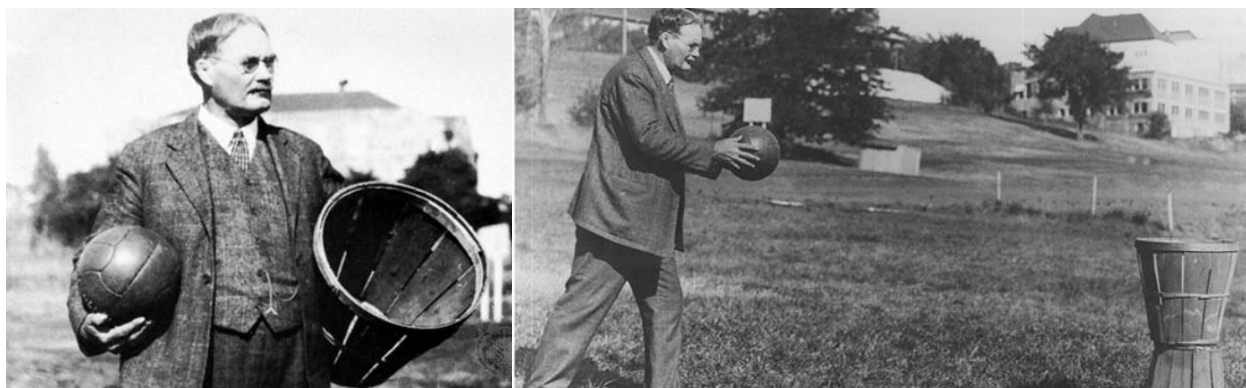


Figure 2: On December 21, 1891, 18 men at the School of Christian Workers played the first game of basketball in Massachusetts. Features inventor Dr. James Naismith and the original peach bucket and soccer ball.<sup>77</sup>

Though the YMCA activated the spread within the United States, basketball became a worldwide sport with the outbreak of World War I as the troops took basketball wherever they went. The war spread the game globally, but the *Original Celtics* (considered the “father of basketball”) helped it become ubiquitous as the barnstorming professional basketball team moved throughout the United States going from town to town to play exhibition games. The greatest activity level of early basketball, though, was seen in American colleges. Basketball began as a college sport, and its professional counterpart followed. The growth of basketball worldwide reached its peak when the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) was founded on June 18, 1932 and coordinated tournaments with teams from Argentina, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, and Switzerland. The league’s work was fundamental to the inclusion of basketball in the Berlin Olympics Games in 1936.<sup>78</sup> Naismith’s game transformed from a game for school children to play in the cold months to a worldwide success in less than forty years.

<sup>76</sup> Eitel, Joseph. “The Basketball Hoop: A History.” *Livestrong.com*, Leaf Group, 11 Sept. 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Cox, Savannah. “This Is What Basketball Looked Like 124 Years Ago.” *All That’s Interesting*, 17 Jan. 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Patrick, Darren. “History of American Basketball.” *Homefield Blog*, 23 May 2014.

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Jordan was one of the most prominent and successful African-American figures in a society still obsessed with race and marked by both persistent racial inequalities and robust anti-black attitudes. Jordan rarely talked publicly of race as his family had raised him to be color-blind and to focus on success despite racial obstacles. Jordan's skin color is only rarely mentioned and this could be interpreted as a positive development in society; however, it really only reflects a lack of racial association for an individual – an athletic superstar -- not a cultural shift. Although professional sports were fully integrated (with black players already dominating the NBA) when Jordan played, racism remained a major issue in America. Jordan is also a unique case as he is an athlete that has dedicated himself to create an image where he can appeal to all and avoids connection to anything that would put his image in jeopardy or draw attention to his skin color. He was a Hall of Famer on the court and a marketing genius off the court. Jordan is an illustration of the progress and accomplishments in post-Civil Rights United States, but this is a reflection of his efforts to disconnect his image from race and less a reflection of sweeping progress. Jordan was not a racial pioneer as his narrative created an ideal, while anti-black stereotypes continued in the post-civil rights period.

Even in the realm of integrated teams, exploitation persisted, and discrimination and prejudice remained problematic, especially in terms of coaching, management, and ownership. There has yet to be a non-White owner and African-American coaches have been few and far between throughout the history of the NBA. The association of Jordan to race relations seems to stem from the fact that whites felt that their backing of him helped solve the problem of racism in America. Instead, their support simply showed how Jordan was portrayed in glowing and race-

less terms (306).<sup>79</sup> The formula associated with Jordan serves as a deflection of attention away from the more general, persistent problems of race in America or, worse, legitimizes the racial status quo by making it seem as if there are no barriers standing in the way of African-American opportunity, assimilation, and mobility. The fact, though, that Jordan did not discuss race publicly should not be taken as evidence of a lack of understanding, but rather a deliberate choice on the part of a very successful, self-conscious African-American man. Jordan's "racelessness" can be directly connected with his economic success as he was able to escape the binds of skin color and appeal to all.

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During the time period of integration for the NBA and MLB, African-Americans struggled with racial inequality. This battle mostly surrounded the Jim Crow laws enacted in the southern states of United States. The laws enforcing racial segregation in the South were passed in 1877 and created a racial caste system, which separated societies into two categories -- one black and one white. They could not ride together in the same rail cars, sit in the same waiting rooms or theatres, attend the same schools, eat in the same restaurants, or access the same beaches, swimming pools, parks, picnic areas, and hospitals. Prior to this, during Reconstruction, blacks had begun to take on leadership roles -- including holding public office. In 1868, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment granted blacks equal protection under the law, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, added in 1870, granted them the right to vote. Whites unhappy with this equality began to marginalize African-Americans shortly after the passing of the Amendments. These changes kept the races separate and erased the progress made during Reconstruction. Jim Crow

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<sup>79</sup> Wiggins, *Out of the Shadows*.

laws were adopted almost universally in the South; in northern states African-Americans experienced discrimination in their jobs, education, and the attempt to purchase a house.<sup>80</sup>

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court struck down segregation in the nation's public schools. A year later, Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat to a white man sparked intense protest and, with her actions, she became the "mother of the modern day civil rights movement." In 1956, boycotts in support of the desegregated buses in Montgomery occurred; in Greensboro, North Carolina, black college students went to a white-only restaurant. This led to many other similar protests throughout the South, which sparked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. These protests by both blacks and whites led to the Civil Rights Act of 1957 (signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower), which responded to the nearly impossible required voter literacy tests and allowed federal prosecution of anyone who prevent universal voting rights.<sup>81</sup>

The culmination of the Civil Rights movement occurred on August 28, 1963 with the March on Washington [Figure 3]. More than 200,000 people, black and white, congregated in Washington D.C. for the peaceful march in an effort to force Civil Rights legislation and job equality. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech became a catalyst and symbol for the movement and the striving for equality and freedom. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was signed as a response to the March on Washington, guaranteed equal employment for all, limited the use of voter literacy tests to extreme cases, and the assurance that public facilities were integrated. The actions during the Civil Rights Movement by activists and protesters of all races brought about legislation to end segregation, black voter suppression, discriminatory employment and housing practices. Though issues still persist, this time period was a precarious

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<sup>80</sup> Urofsky, Melvin I. "Jim Crow Law." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 19 July 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Schmidt, Christopher W. "Why the 1960 Lunch Counter Sit-Ins Worked: A Case Study of Law and Social Movement Mobilization." *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1 May 2017, pp. 281–300.

one for African-Americans, and their dedication to the cause created a United States that (at least legally) expanded opportunity for liberty and prosperity.<sup>82</sup>



Figure 3: Martin Luther King Jr. speaking to more than two hundred thousand at March on Washington (August 28, 1963).<sup>83</sup>

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Prior to integration in professional basketball, the Harlem Globetrotters were the primary representation of African-Americans in the sport. The creation of the Globetrotters came as a way for African-Americans to play a sport they were excluded from playing as a profession. They became the epitome of entertainment, athleticism, and came to represent African-American culture, mass media, and popular culture. They were highly marketable as they combined athleticism, theater, and comedy to their style of play.<sup>84</sup> The turning point for the all-black team came in 1948 when they beat the Minneapolis Lakers – one of the best white basketball teams in the United States. African-Americans, as shown by this victory, were just as talented as their white counterparts, and the highly publicized game put the Harlem Globetrotters on the map. The Harlem Globetrotters were one of the most famous teams in the country; after the NBA integrated in 1950, the Globetrotters shifted their style of play to become a unique product that could still thrive.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Hansan, John E. "March on Washington, D.C. August 28, 1963." Social Welfare History Project, Virginia Commonwealth University, 13 Dec. 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Balcerzak, Ashley, and Katherine Burkhart. "March on Washington Events: 50th Anniversary Celebrations Kick Off in D.C." The Huffington Post, 20 Aug. 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Bosley, Kirsty. "Barclaycard Arena Show Set to Be a Slam Dunk for Harlem Globetrotters." Birminghammail, 13 Apr. 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Grossman, Ron. "How the Harlem Globetrotters Integrated the NBA." Chicago Tribune, 14 Feb. 2015.



The Harlem Globetrotters signed their first female player, Olympic gold medalist Lynette Woodard in 1985 [Figure 3] and would feature thirteen other female athletes throughout their history. The Globetrotters celebrated the success of both African-Americans and women.



Figure 3: Lynette Woodard was the first female member of the Harlem Globetrotters in 1985.<sup>86</sup>

The team and its players still drew criticism during the Civil Rights era because some felt that their style of play was making a mockery of the race and gender.<sup>87</sup> Prominent civil rights activist Jesse Jackson, though, came to their defense: "I think they've been a positive influence... They did not show blacks as stupid. On the contrary, they were shown as superior."<sup>88</sup> The Harlem Globetrotters [Figure 4] have given African-Americans a platform to showcase their skills, but also create an environment and product suitable to all and help to change the mentality toward the oppressed race and sex. They were not shown as stupid and inferior, but as equal. The Harlem Globetrotters have worked for over nine decades to break down barriers, while, in the process doing many acts of goodwill as they have supported charity causes for generations.

<sup>86</sup> Globetrotters, Harlem (Globies). "RT to help wish a happy birthday to the 1st female Globetrotter ever, Lynette Woodard". 12 Aug 2014, 23:00 UTC. Tweet.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, Sharon. "The Harlem Globetrotters Were Often Victims of Racism off the Court and behind the Scenes." *The Undeclared*, 13 Feb. 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Berkow, Ira. "Ball Hog Heaven." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 24 July 2005.



Figure 4: The Harlem Globetrotters (formed January 30, 1927) allowed African Americans to entertain and showcase their basketball skills. Racism can create powerful results.<sup>89</sup>

Despite their popularity throughout the United States and around the world, the Globetrotters struggled with racism even after the Civil Rights movement. Eloise Saperstein, the daughter founder Abe Saperstein, said of the Chicago based team: “Their only acceptance came on the court...People didn’t realize how horrible the Jim Crow laws were. The early Globetrotters stood tall...against the racism they faced throughout the country.”<sup>90</sup> Until the 1970s, players were denied entry to many hotels, restaurants and even water fountains. As a child in the early 1950s, Eloise experienced and witnessed the struggles for these African-Americans. She was often asked by the players to buy groceries from stores catering only to whites and, while she traveled with the team, she was often told to go with her own kind.<sup>91</sup> Tex Harrison, a member of Globetrotters for 18 years, describes an incident in Jacksonville, Florida, where the team was not allowed to stay at a hotel or eat at the restaurant. After being turned away, Harrison describes what followed: “So we went back across the [other side of the] tracks. Later we found out that a performing chimpanzee was in town, sponsored by a bowling alley.

<sup>89</sup> Frazier, William. “Looking Black on Today in 1927, The Harlem Globetrotters Were Formed.” Black Then, 30 Jan. 2016.

<sup>90</sup> Marcus, Steven. “Harlem Globetrotters Faced Racism for Years in U.S.” Newsday, 30 July 2014.

<sup>91</sup> Marcus, “Harlem Globetrotters Faced Racism for Years in U.S.”

That chimpanzee was allowed into the hotel and given a big suite. Here we were, human beings, and we couldn't get into the hotel or get anything to eat. But 18,000 people came to watch us play, and 98 percent of the audience was white.”<sup>92</sup> During this time, the only people that did not see race were children, who just saw the joy associated as they had not yet learned or been taught to hate. The Harlem Globetrotters understood the issues – whites struggled to understand and identify that what they were doing was wrong. That was the way the world was and the Globetrotters attempted to combat and do their part in changing this mentality by doing things in the proper way and hoping they could influence future change in the world.

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The Harlem Globetrotters have been a major presence in marketing and advertising throughout their history [Figure 5]. They have been featured extensively in films and television series – as well as in their own productions. Like Michael Jordan, the Globetrotters have advertised for many of the major products in the United States. Companies used the Globetrotters' connection with children and the support they receive from adults – no matter the color of their skin -- to increase brand exposure. The infamous team has also used their product on the court to make positive change socially by increasing awareness during the Civil Rights movement, sparking joy in children around the globe, as well as advertising for major companies. They have created a powerful product that has changed basketball, but also made

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<sup>92</sup> Madani, Doha. “No One Is Impressed with This French Soccer Star's Blackface 'Homage'.” The Huffington Post, 18 Dec. 2017.

major changes in the ways entertainment, sports, and marketing have been combined to make a lasting product that brings people together for generations.



Figure 5: Advertisements both local and international featuring the Harlem Globetrotters.<sup>93</sup>

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In 1950, Earl Lloyd, Chuck Cooper, and Harold Hunter made their NBA debut, making them the first African-Americans to play in the league [Figure 6]. It took great courage by these individuals as they faced their fair share of racism. Lloyd, though, did not receive the extreme pushback and racism that Jackie Robinson<sup>94</sup> received when he entered the MLB. They entered the league around the same time period, with Robinson entering baseball in 1947. Despite this, the traditions surrounding the leagues were much different. Baseball had a tradition of racism that went back almost a century longer than that of basketball. Fans, owners, and players were much more stuck in their ways and struggled greatly against eliminating extreme whiteness in baseball. The sport of basketball, though, was already associated with African-Americans with the success of the Harlem Globetrotters and other leagues. Still at times fans displayed horrible racism toward the pioneering players – asking to see their tails, telling them to return to Africa,

<sup>93</sup> Frazier, “Looking Black on Today in 1927, The Harlem Globetrotters Were Formed.”

<sup>94</sup> A little over seventy years ago Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier when he was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers. Unlike Michael Jordan, African Americans have long ago stopped following Robinson’s love for the game of baseball. John Young, a former professional baseball player, says of Robinson that he may be the only person who could prevent the trend that African-Americans no longer play baseball in relation to the other major sports. Yes, baseball has had players like Ken Griffey Jr., who is arguably baseball’s most popular, recognizable, and marketable star, but, today, less than seven percent of the MLB is African American. Baseball used to reflect society, but, today, that is no longer the case. Jackie Robinson still has a huge social impact, but his lasting effect on African-American in the baseball realm has almost disintegrated.

and some even spit on them.<sup>95</sup> The challenges and the huge, long term impact of Robinson and the three original trailblazers for the NBA cannot be denied or underestimated



Figure 6: The 21-year-old Earl Lloyd became, on October 31, 1950, the first African-American to play in an NBA game when he took the court for the Washington Capitols.<sup>96</sup>

On February 26, 2015, Earl Lloyd passed away and during a speech during TNT's *Inside the NBA*, Charles Barkley summed up everyone's feeling: "The older black guys, I have so much admiration and respect for them because...just playing basketball is hard enough...But I couldn't imagine all the mental stress that those guys were under. Then, to go black that out and actually play basketball...whenever I see them, I just want to say 'thank you.'"<sup>97</sup> Those first African-Americans who broke the color barrier helped teach the nation that athletes should be identified by their talent, not their race. At first, the NBA was an all-white league, but this changed quickly. Similarly, it was stated that black athletes could never get a commercial endorsement, but their talent on the court quickly made them the centerpiece.

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Michael Jordan was born on February 17, 1963 in Brooklyn, New York, but grew up in Wilmington, North Carolina. Michael Jordan was one of five children of James and Deloris Jordan (Figure 7). His father worked at General Electric plant as a supervisor and his mother

<sup>95</sup> Martinez, Jose. "Chuck Cooper and the Little-Known History of the NBA's First Black Players Ray Felix." *Complex*, *Complex*, 20 Oct. 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Frazier, "Looking Black on Today in 1927, The Harlem Globetrotters Were Formed."

<sup>97</sup> Martinez, "Chuck Cooper and the Little-Known History of the NBA's First Black Players Ray Felix."

worked at a bank. James and Deloris taught their children hard work and determination, while helping them avoid the draw of street life. Jordan was an extremely talented athlete, but, as a sophomore in high school he did not make the varsity basketball team. After being cut, he played two successful years and accepted a basketball scholarship to the University of North Carolina.<sup>98</sup> Michael Jordan's passion for greatness and winning pushed his success after failure. His father had a similar competitiveness and stated: "what he does have is a competition problem. He was born with that...the person he tries to outdo most of the time is himself" (209).<sup>99</sup> He never wanted to be second and, for the most part, he was not. This competitive side of Michael Jordan pushed him to become one of the greatest basketball players and businessmen in the history of sports. Ruth embodied the American dream, of rags to riches. Jordan had a comfortable and loving upbringing, but he had an unrelenting competitive fire that was a perfect match for American sports and capitalism.



Figure 7: Jordan family picture (from left to right) – Larry, James Sr., Michael (behind), Deloris (Michael's sister), Deloris (Michael's mother), and James Jr..<sup>100</sup>

Unlike Babe Ruth, Jordan came from a close-knit upper-middle class family. Michael and his siblings attended integrated schools and did not experience a significant degree of racial violence. He had friendships with both African-Americans and whites. His mother taught

<sup>98</sup> Shaw, Charles E. *The Untold Stories of Excellence: From a Life of Despair and Uncertainty to One That Offers Hope and New Beginnings*. 2011.

<sup>99</sup> Shaw. *The Untold Stories of Excellence*.

<sup>100</sup> Botnar, Katy. "Acquaintance with Michael Jordan and His Superior Birth Family." *Bodyheightweight*, 27 June 2017.

Michael to judge others on their merit rather than their skin color. Recognizing that Michael was born at the height of Civil Rights unrest in the US, one would think that his mother's teachings were carefully considered. Because of his situation, Jordan claims to have rarely experienced racial discrimination. Jordan responded brashly when he encountered racism reportedly crushing a Popsicle into the head of a white girl who called him a "nigger" (2).<sup>101</sup> He was suspended from school. This was one of the few racially related incidents Jordan actually faced head-on. In areas of potential controversy, he maintained an image of neutrality. His neutrality is conscious; throughout his career Jordan has been known for putting his personal brand above everything else as he avoids situations that jeopardize it. As a child, when a neighbor refused to let him use his swimming pool, Jordan left without a response. He later described his response to racism: "Don't worry about race unless somebody slaps you in the face" (2).<sup>102</sup> When Jordan had gained fame, he was asked many times to take political stances towards racism and other issues, but Jordan rarely took a position that would risk his unblemished, neutral image. This is consistent with the environment in which was raised; his parents taught him to be color-blind when it came to race and to rise above it.<sup>103</sup> Jordan appears to followed these teachings on and off the court and the success that this mentality brought is clear.

Jordan's upbringing was an almost picture-perfect example of developing a fierce competitor and a marketer's dream. His parents instilled in him a strong work ethic and the will to strive for excellence. James Jordan developed in Jordan an outgoing personality, sense of humor, and a focus on order. Michael Jordan describes James Jordan: "[he] is a people person...He can talk to someone for five hours and have any conversation you could imagine"

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<sup>101</sup> Porter, David L. *Michael Jordan: A Biography*. Greenwood Press, 2007.

<sup>102</sup> Porter, *Michael Jordan: A Biography*.

<sup>103</sup> Porter, *Michael Jordan: A Biography*.

(2).<sup>104</sup> Michael often watched his father work around the house and yard. During this, Michael picked up a trait that has become legendary: “My father used to stick his tongue out when he worked...I took it up and made it a habit” (14)<sup>105</sup> [Figure 8].



Figure 8: Father and son after Michael won his first NBA Championship with the Chicago Bulls in 1991. James Jordan's murder on July 23, 1993 was a huge blow to Michael.<sup>106</sup>

This simple habit came to represent commitment and dedication for the Hall of Famer and a method of honoring his father. Even after Jordan's retirement, this habit has become a symbol for Michael and a part of society as a whole. Deloris also had a huge influence on Michael as she taught him key values of motivation, a perfectionist attitude, competitiveness, and drive to win: “My mother has always been more of the business side of the family...She had a kind of [get up and get it] attitude” (132).<sup>107</sup> These characteristics from his mother and father gave Jordan the tools to succeed as an athlete, but also made him a marketer's dream (Figure 9). He was confident, talented, charismatic, but also a little cocky – making him a figure that could prosper on and off the basketball court.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Porter, *Michael Jordan: A Biography*.

<sup>105</sup> Raber, Thomas R. *Michael Jordan: Returning Champion*. Lerner, 2004.

<sup>106</sup> Banks, Alec, “The Death of Michael Jordan's Father: A Tragedy of Senseless Violence.” *Highsnobiety*, 10 Feb. 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Jordan, Michael, “The Michael Jordan Nobody Knows.” *Ebony*, 1 Dec. 1993.

<sup>108</sup> Jordan, “The Michael Jordan Nobody Knows.”





Figure 9: Michael Jordan with his mother and father at a black-tie event. Jordan's parents were extremely supportive throughout his life in his ventures on and off the basketball court.<sup>109</sup>

Michael Jordan played during the explosion of the television and mass media age from 1984 until his retirement in 2003. More people would see Michael Jordan in one night than had been able to see a figure like Babe Ruth in twenty years. Jordan used his easy charm to influence millions of children and adults worldwide. He not only grew the game of basketball but also create a style – young people shaved their heads, wore his sneakers, and shot with their tongues hanging out -- all to “Be Like Mike” (Figure 10). No athlete was more representative of the nation and the world's collective hopes, dreams and ambitions. His personality and prowess both on and off the court reflected and represented the cultural trends and transformation in the United States.



Figure 10: 2015 commemorated relaunch of the “Be Like Mike” campaign made famous in 1991.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Shanke, Marvin R. “The No Bull Interview” Like Mike Clothing, 29 Sept. 2008.

<sup>110</sup> Rubino, Paul. “2015 Gatorade Be Like Mike POS.” Behance, 2 Feb. 2015.

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Michael Jordan is highly criticized by activists for not doing more to combat the issues that face the race in America. Jordan, though, still has had impact without being the vocally demanding presence common with advocates during this time period. Earl “Magic” Johnson, a Hall of Famer turned investor and entrepreneur, was diagnosed with the HIV virus in 1991. Johnson talks of Jordan’s response in 1991:

...I called [Michael Jordan] and he was right there. He was right there to write a check. He was the first one to write a check to the foundation and be a part of it. Embracing me at the 1992 All-Star game and signaling it was OK to embrace those with the disease. Because it was his league. Everything was centered around Michael and what Michael thought, what Michael did. When he came over that just relaxed everyone else. He opened the door for the world to accept. Not just those guys, but that was a worldwide thing because Michael Jordan was the biggest thing in the world. (7)<sup>111</sup>

Despite claims against Jordan, he still came to represent the first African-American athlete – maybe black figure – to truly enter the American mainstream as a global icon. Michael Jordan used his platform to affect individuals no matter the color of their skin or gender. He may not have had the political significance that some may have hoped, but his constant presence in the world’s consciousness created an image of positivity and success – a powerful influence in and of itself.

Although Jordan did not take strong social or political positions like other key African-American figures (e.g. Martin Luther King or Muhammad Ali), he provided a model of achievement, behavior and appeal much like Babe Ruth. Both represented a coming of a new age in their sports and became larger than life public figures. They were the right guys at the right time with the “it” factor. Ruth lead the way in creating a brand for himself through advertising and sports marketing, but Jordan redefined and elevated sports marketing to a new

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<sup>111</sup> Smith, *There Is No Next: NBA Legends on the Legacy of Michael Jordan*.

level and on a global scale. Jordan and Nike created a dynamic partnership that changed the sports world forever. Hall of Fame journalist, Mark Heisler, wrote on the impact Jordan had on the time and public perceptions: “He didn’t just open the door for African-American athletes to do commercials. When he got the door open a crack he went to the sky. He didn’t just make sports possible for African-Americans to do commercials. He made it possible for athletes – black and white – to become huge. Everything in the Michael story is about everything coming together with Michael” (12).<sup>112</sup> Through Jordan, sneaker companies realized there was a huge untapped market. The youth of America would pay hundreds of dollars for a pair of sneakers. Nike, which wasn’t that big at the time, used Jordan and his rise to create the biggest shoe band in America and, later, the world.

Many figures before were able to make their voice and opinion heard, but many were not able to escape the sentiments towards them by the white sector. The combination of Jordan’s on-court brilliance, personal demeanor, and Nike’s marketing genius put him in a category that no prior black athlete had ever been able to reach. Although never an activist for African-American rights there is no denying Jordan’s huge effect on sports, culture, and the millions he inspired without regard to status or race.

However, the last chapter has certainly not been written on Jordan. In a 2016 article for *The Undeclared*, Jordan wrote: “I can no longer stay silent” after the shooting of African-Americans by police officers becomes a growing issue in the United States. Jordan lost his father in a senseless act of violence. In the article he describes how deeply troubling these recurring tragedies are. He implored for solutions leading people of color to receive fair and equal treatment *and* that police officers are respected and supported: “I have the greatest respect

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<sup>112</sup> Smith, *There Is No Next: NBA Legends on the Legacy of Michael Jordan*.

for their sacrifice and service. I also recognize that for many people of color their experiences with law enforcement have been different than mine. I have decided to speak out in the hope that we can come together as Americans, and through peaceful dialogue and education, achieve constructive change.”<sup>113</sup> Despite his support for the issues facing African Americans in this article, he does not take a stand directly against those in question – a position critics use to reinforce the stigma surrounding Jordan that he avoids all that could affect his raceless image.

Jordan did not choose racial issues as his priority mission. However, his impact on the area he chose to prioritize has been immense. He was able to revolutionize marketing in the NBA, which was in its infant stages. He changed the way the game is played, marketed and shifted it to a global product.<sup>114</sup> Jordan’s name became universal – he came to Chicago and changed the course of the franchise and in the process conquered the sports marketing world. Michael Jordan has always been a figure that seriously considers the interests of his image first – may it be as basketball superstar or as a stark marketer. His prowess on the court and his success off the court represent a success story for African-Americans and the down-to-earth Jordan was an inspiration for the youth of his generation and generations to come.

Michael Jordan and Babe Ruth both understood their responsibilities as performers and role models. Babe Ruth traveled the country and the world during the offseason – certainly for money – but also out of the understanding that not everyone could get to a Major League game and, as a once in a generation athlete, Ruth was there for his fans. Jordan made a point not to take games off and always played to win and never wanted to come out of the game. John Paxson, former basketball administrator and teammate of Michael Jordan, spoke on the subject “The thing I respect most about Michael is that he understood that people were coming to see

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<sup>113</sup> Jordan, Michael. “Michael Jordan: ‘I Can No Longer Stay Silent’.” *The Undefeated*, The Undefeated, 16 Mar. 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Smith, Sam. “Michael Jordan’s Debut, 30 Years Ago.” *Chicago Bulls*, 26 Oct. 2014.

him. He took it seriously...He played and he wouldn't beg off of it. I don't always see it in the game today, where guys say that these fans are here to see me."<sup>115</sup>

In 1999, ESPN counted down the greatest athletes of the twentieth century. Michael Jordan was selected as number one – followed by Babe Ruth, Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Wayne Gretzky, and Jesse Owens. All these athletes transcended their sports as they crossed over from their sports into the world's consciousness. Jordan's societal impact was undeniable and difficult to overtake with only Babe Ruth even being considered in the conversation. Ruth impacted baseball the same way Jordan affected basketball. They transformed their sports through the excitement they brought to the field and the court. Their impact though, was not just while playing their sports, but off the field and court where they became inspirational figures that appeared accessible and relatable. Their entrance was in two separate generations. In Ruth's generation, everyone wanted to be like Ruth, who defined the common man. While, when people wished to "Be Like Mike," they were desiring superhuman perfection. The beginnings of sports marketing were defined by Ruth and then exploded by Jordan – changing the boundaries of marketing forever.

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<sup>115</sup> Smith, "Michael Jordan's Debut, 30 Years Ago."

### Chapter 3 – Michael Jordan Reinvents the Sports Marketing Playbook

Sports marketing made a distinctive shift into high gear and modernization in the 1980s and 90s. As with the Babe Ruth era, various factors came together to enhance opportunities. The explosion of cable television stations greatly expanded sports viewing options; professional (and college) athletes – and their styles – became more visible than ever; racial barriers on the player level had been broken down; professional teams were diverse and all fans had players with whom they could identify. The demand and interest surrounding sports were evidenced by the launch and quick success of ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network) in 1979; computer and internet usage held incredible potential; and video games, even in their early stages, centered on modern team sports – in fact Atari’s basketball game in 1979 featured the first black “player.”<sup>116</sup> The dollar figures surrounding Babe Ruth that seemed incredible at the time were just the tip of the iceberg as the economic role of sports marketing exploded. There were fortunes to be spent and made.

A 2010 study found that companies invested over \$46.3 billion worldwide into celebrity athletes with U.S. companies spending \$17.2 billion (4).<sup>117</sup> A later study done in California showcased the potential influence of these investments as it 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. This is not totally surprising; the widespread use of celebrity endorsements projected images of someone like Michael Jordan far more broadly than most political, economic, religious or historical figures – enabling recognition even after the figure is out of the daily public eye. Companies such as Nike, which has come to be the premier user of

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<sup>116</sup> Vanderhoef, John. “From Basketball to Zombies: African Americans in Video Games.” Press Start to Drink, 5 Mar. 2009.

<sup>117</sup> Manta, Alexander. *The Celebrity Athlete: A Powerful Endorsement Tool in the Mass Media*. Boston College, May 2013.

athlete endorsements, have paid a hefty price to gain the image and sales benefits. Nike estimated its 2010 spending on athlete endorsements to be \$712 million dollars (5) and this has only increased today.<sup>118</sup> The risks are higher when investing in athletes, as they are human, and their performance and behavior are unpredictable. However, the reward can be a game-changer. As explored in Chapter 2, Michael Jordan set the gold standard of performance and image. Nike signed Jordan out of college, and they grew together as Jordan became a Hall of Famer and Nike rose to the top of the shoe industry. The story of Michael Jordan – with Nike and beyond – is a case study in the new world of global sports marketing, branding, and influence.

Jordan was appealing and able to capitalize on multiple advantages -- combining his success on the court with his personality, confidence, and smooth demeanor. These factors made people believe him and want to follow him. Jordan's marketability was more than just basketball success; it was also built on the ideals and qualities that people admire about Jordan himself. Many believe that Jordan and Nike set the standard for an athlete and product endorsement relationship.<sup>119</sup> However, Jordan's personality not only appeals to basketball players; it is relevant to all athletes as well as to those individuals with no association with sports. Jordan's message of tenacity, determination, teamwork, and humbleness can be applied to all. Jordan and Nike established a formula that transcends an individual product or sports. It represents a personality and traits that can appeal to athletes and non-athletes. It is at the core of Nike's "Just Do It" slogan. Jordan was the perfect representation and catalyst for this kind of powerful marketing because of his skills, his character, his accomplishments, and his personality. Additionally, his attention and ability to steer clear of controversy enabled the marketing messages to soar without distraction.

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<sup>118</sup> Manta, *The Celebrity Athlete: A Powerful Endorsement Tool in the Mass Media*.

<sup>119</sup> Manta, *The Celebrity Athlete: A Powerful Endorsement Tool in the Mass Media*.

His brand message is relevant across different industries and products. 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” (24).<sup>120</sup> So, 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 effect between his different endorsement campaigns.<sup>121</sup>

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Within their generations, Michael Jordan and Babe Ruth would both be categorized as marketing dreams. However, their lives and expertise as athletes did not enable them to take full advantage of opportunities outside the game. One cannot delve into the growth and evolution of sports marketing without recognizing the role (for better or worse) of player agents. For Ruth, Walter “Christy” Walsh provided the support. As the legacy of Michael Jordan began to grow, one man was behind it all – David Falk [Figure 1]. As a representative for more than a hundred basketball players throughout his career, Falk has become one of the most influential agents in NBA history. During the peak years of Falk’s career in the 1990s, he was often considered the second-most powerful person in the NBA behind Commissioner David Stern and, by 2000, he had at least one client on all but two NBA teams. Falk transformed the economic world of sports when, in 1996, his client, Alonzo Mourning and the Miami Heat agreed to a seven year, \$105 million-dollar pact making him the first athlete in sports history to sign a contract of that size and magnitude. This contact, negotiated by Falk and his company FAME, changed the entire salary structure of the NBA and sports in general as Falk and FAME earn their clients over \$400

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<sup>120</sup> Jackson, Steven J., and David L. Andrews. *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity*. Routledge, 2001.

<sup>121</sup> Manta, *The Celebrity Athlete: A Powerful Endorsement Tool in the Mass Media*.



million in a six-day period. His most impactful partnership, though, was Michael Jordan, whom he signed after the 1984 NBA draft.<sup>122</sup>



Figure 1: Michael Jordan and David Falk shown together on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*. Falk became famous for his relationship with Jordan, though he's represented dozens of stars.<sup>123</sup>

The first step for David Falk and FAME was getting Jordan his first shoe deal. FAME and their clients had already agreed to shoe deals that paid their clients millions of dollars but they approached Jordan differently. They understood there was something different about this client. Falk decided to make large demands to shoe companies on behalf of Jordan and insisted on the inclusion of his own shoe line and a royalty: “We decided to stretch the envelope...Instead of calling up the companies and asking them how much they would pay Michael Jordan, we called them up and asked them to make a presentation and explain what they could do to promote him. Needless to say, this got a lot of quizzical replies.”<sup>124</sup> After Jordan listened to pitches from every major shoe brand, when Nike showed its commitment to tailoring the design and the brand to the style that Jordan wanted, the stage was set for the formation of what is arguably the greatest partnership in sports marketing history. Not only were the financial

<sup>122</sup> Falk, David. *The Bald Truth: Secrets of Success from the Locker Room to the Boardroom*. Gallery Books, 2010.

<sup>123</sup> Lombardo, John, and 2015 February 23. “Champions 2015: David Falk.” *Champions 2015: David Falk*, 23 Feb. 2015.

<sup>124</sup> Clark, Ken. “The Art of the Sneaker Deal.” *Footwear News*, 21 Apr. 1997.

terms of the deal unprecedented, but the massive agreement was completed despite prior difficulties related to marketing African-American athletes. Nike overlooked race because of the magnitude and persona of the athlete with whom they were associating, and their hope was that the United States and the world would do that same. The financial success spoke for itself as the Jordan shoe line was expected to earn \$3 million for Nike in about three to four years, but, it turned out, the Air Jordan sneaker earned Nike \$130 million in 1985 alone. Nike's \$500,000 contract (in addition to stock options that earn Jordan \$7 million over the first five years) with Jordan became one of the great bargains of all time.<sup>125</sup> Phil Knight – the founder and CEO of Nike – and Nike did everything right during the beginning of their partnership with Michael Jordan [Figure 2].



Figure 2: Nike's Philip Knight was honored for his many contributions to the game of basketball when he was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2012. He was introduced by 2009 Hall of Fame inductee Michael Jordan.<sup>126</sup>

They had built their brand through savvy marketing strategies and moving production overseas to Asia, which made it cheaper and increased the profit margin. Knight boldly proclaimed at a show industry conference in Chicago in the mid-70's that he was not in the shoe business, but in the entertainment business, and this mentality was the reason behind the explosion of Nike and Michael Jordan.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Hirschberg, Lynn. "The Big Man Can Deal." *New York Times*, 17 Nov. 1996.

<sup>126</sup> Lopes, Guilherme. "Phil Knight, Co-Founder of Nike, Comments on the Value of Michael Jordan's First Contract." *SneakersBR*, 5 Aug. 2016.

<sup>127</sup> Rovell, Darren. "How Nike Landed Michael Jordan." *ESPN*, ESPN Internet Ventures, 15 Feb. 2013.

Falk soon proved that he was a more than capable as an agent using innovative marketing ideas to grow the Jordan brand and image. Falk's positioning for his client began with the showcasing of Jordan as an all-American man, which also meant minimizing his race:

It was clear when you met him that he grew up in a close-knit family...His parents, James and Doloris, had been very, very close to their children, had great family values—they were disciplined, respectful, pretty much color-blind...we felt that he represented something as all-American as apple pie. So, the game plan was to get involved with all-American companies, like McDonald's and Coke and Chevrolet. Which we did.<sup>128</sup>

Falk allowed Nike to establish Jordan's primary image, then began expanding the Jordan brand by connecting his name with Coca-Cola, Chevrolet, Gatorade, McDonald's, Ball Park Franks, Wilson Sporting Goods, Rayovac, Wheaties, Hanes, and MCI Communications. Falk's ideas of marketing and growing Jordan stretched to all areas of the marketplace, including fragrances called simply "Michael Jordan," which was cited as the best-marketed product of 1996 by the American Marketing Association.<sup>129</sup> It was clear that Jordan's potential advertising and endorsement range was vast; his brand and image was just beginning – his success off the court grew as his success and fame on the court surged.

In terms of endorsement freedom and financial gain, Falk's most impactful move was to help Jordan opt out of the NBA licensing program. The National Basketball Players Association allowed the NBA to own the licensing rights in exchange for shared revenue. These deals included video games, merchandise, and other products that included player images or game footage. The NBA operated as the sole brand manager for NBA players as a group worldwide, as they held a tight control over any licensing deal. However, as with Jordan, players would be able to reclaim their image for personal use (their name, numbers, and images).<sup>130</sup> With this, the

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<sup>128</sup> Andrews, David L. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. State University of New York Press, 2001.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas, Barbara. "They Really Want to Be Like Mike." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 4 June 1999.

<sup>130</sup> Verrier, Justin. "NBPA Preparing to Handle Players' Licensing in New CBA." *ESPN*, ESPN Internet Ventures, 17 Feb. 2017.

NBA had no further power over the Jordan brand.<sup>131</sup> As a result, due partly to Falk's tenacity and partly to Michael Jordan's own professional success and personal magnetism, Jordan became: "indisputably the most powerful and effective endorser of products in American history...making the business of hawking products more lucrative than playing the game."<sup>132</sup> Jordan's success was such that he turned down \$300 million worth of endorsement deals in the span of four months in 1998. David Falk, back in the eighties, had intuitively grasped something that was still eluding many business-school pros—the way “branding” can be a reciprocal process. Falk had no equity in Nike, McDonald's, Coca-Cola or Chevrolet. He had equity in Michael Jordan. The corporations wanted Jordan to leverage their brands; Falk would use their brands to leverage Jordan.<sup>133</sup>

"Air Jordan paved the way for all the other deals," Falk says. "Nike spent more than \$5 million on advertising. So now we can walk into a designer like Guy Laroche, which is selling the Time Jordan watch, and say, 'You don't have to spend that much because Nike and McDonald's and Coke are constantly putting him on television for you.'"<sup>134</sup> This is referred to as *rub-off* or *transference* and it's the ultimate goal of the new sports marketing. While Jordan says he aspires to be seen as "neither black nor white," Falk wanted him to be perceived as "giving something back" to the black community, so, Jordan partnered with The Johnson Products (a skin care brand popular with the African-American sector). ProServ has also steered Jordan to high-exposure charities and public-service campaigns. Jordan is genuinely devoted to this work, but it also polishes his marketing image.

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<sup>131</sup> Marantz, Steve. "The Sporting News: The Man with a Plan. (NBA Players' Agent David Faulk)." *The Sporting News*, 14 Oct. 1996.

<sup>132</sup> Wetzel, Dan, and Don Yaeger. *Sole Influence: Basketball, Corporate Greed, and the Corruption of America's Youth*. Warner Books, 2000.

<sup>133</sup> Gates, Henry Louis. "Michael Jordan's Advertising Empire." *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 18 June 2017.

<sup>134</sup> Patton, Phill. "The Selling of Michael Jordan." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 9 Nov. 1986.

The relationship between Jordan and David Falk is based on trust. Jordan wrote in the Forward to Falk's book, *The Bald Truth: Secrets of Success from the Locker Room to the Boardroom*, of their relationship: "David Falk taught me the business of sports. From my very first contract with Nike to wearing Air Jordan basketball shoes, through the myriad of corporate endorsements...David prepared me to become a successful businessman..." (xi).<sup>135</sup> Falk won Jordan's trust through strategic sacrifices – understanding that at times he needed to forfeit a piece for a positional advantage as Jordan writes "...David would tell me what he truly felt even when it wasn't popular or politically correct. As much as I always valued his skill for negotiation and his creativity in marketing, I especially admired his courage to express his convictions when it mattered most" (xii).<sup>136</sup> In 1988, Falk negotiated Jordan's second contract, which was, at the time, the most lucrative in basketball history. Afterward, Falk presented Jordan with a bill—the standard sports agent's fee, which is four per cent of the client's salary. Falk recalls that Jordan wasn't pleased: "He said immediately; 'I think it's too high,' and he offered to pay roughly half of what I had proposed." Falk agreed and told Jordan he would also reduce the agency's marketing fee by a quarter as he understood that, as the market escalated, Jordan would, in the future, take issue. As a strategic move, he decided offer it to Jordan voluntarily, as a gesture of good faith.<sup>137</sup> This was clearly a smart business decision, not made out of generosity and kindness, even if in good faith; Falk had crunched the numbers and knew how important Jordan was to his business and even with a decrease in his cut, the revenue was still exorbitant. Falk understood that he was replaceable, but a client like Michael Jordan is not.

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<sup>135</sup> Falk. *The Bald Truth*.

<sup>136</sup> Falk. *The Bald Truth*.

<sup>137</sup> Gates, Henry Louis. "Michael Jordan's Advertising Empire." *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 18 June 2017.

Falk recognized that the range of the brand value of Michael Jordan was extensive – and his relationship with Jordan enabled him to push the envelope. The results provide a world class playbook for sports marketing related products and promotion. Falk’s most dynamic and inventive idea teamed Bugs Bunny and Michael Jordan together in a feature film, and then sold the concept to Warner Bros. Pairing Jordan with Looney Tunes characters originated with the Nike “Hare Jordan” ad campaign, which ended with one of Bugs Bunny’s favorite catchphrases “This could be the start of a beautiful friendship” -- hinting at more collaboration between the animated bunny and Jordan in future commercials and hindsight also suggests the film. “Hare Jordan,” which cost an estimated \$1 million to produce, was first released during the Super Bowl and was a huge success for both Jordan and Nike – in addition to revitalizing the Looney Toons empire. [Figure 3]<sup>138</sup>

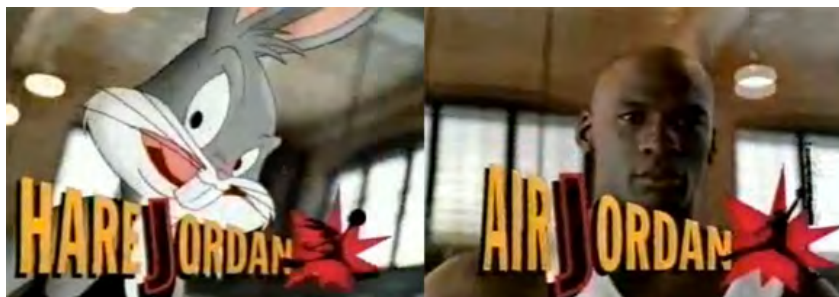


Figure 3: The 1992 Hare Jordan featuring Michael Jordan and Bugs Bunny was one of the major inspirations for the film, *Space Jam* and also helped to revitalize the Looney Tunes empire.<sup>139</sup>

In 1996, the film *Space Jam* was released. Over the years, Jordan had been offered countless roles in films, but turned them down because there was only one role for the basketball great, playing as himself. *Space Jam* [Figure 4] allowed him to broaden his audience and create a family-friendly brand image for himself and the NBA. By hopping right into the world of

<sup>138</sup> Horovitz, Bruce. “‘Hare Jordan’ May Give Animation Ads a Lift.” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Jan. 1992.

<sup>139</sup> Betschart, Brian. “Throwback: Air Jordan 7 (VII) Hare Jordan Bugs Bunny Original Commercial.” *SneakerFiles*, 31 Aug. 2012.

Looney Tunes, he was able to appeal to a younger audience, thus making him a hero even for kids who might not even be interested in basketball.<sup>140</sup>

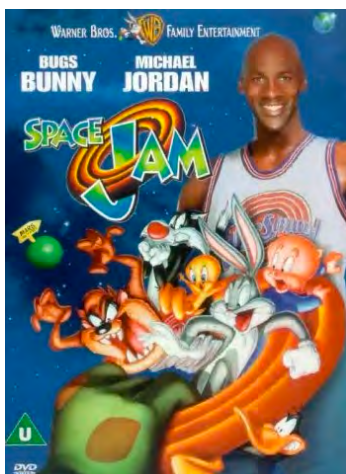


Figure 4: *Space Jam*, released in 1996, was created mostly as a marketing ploy for Michael Jordan and the brands associated with him, while also revitalizing Looney Tunes, but, today it has become a sort of cult film.<sup>141</sup>

*Space Jam* presents an alternative history of what happened between Jordan's initial retirement from the NBA in 1993 and return in 1995. Bugs Bunny enlists the future Hall of Famer to join his animated friends in an attempt to defeat a group of aliens (who want to enslave them for their amusement park) in a basketball game. The film displays Jordan as he falls back in the love with the game that he had left for baseball, while helping Bugs Bunny and his friends defeat the perceived unbeatable alien monsters.<sup>142</sup> The promotion of the movie was a massive reason for its success. *Space Jam* opened at number one in the United States and grossed over \$230 million worldwide including \$90 million in domestic box office sales – making it the highest-grossing basketball film of all-time.<sup>143</sup>

The *Space Jam* promotional investment is estimated at \$70 million, which does not include Warner Brothers' own marketing campaign, with a budget of around \$20 million. This

<sup>140</sup> Izadi, Elahe. "Twenty Years Later, 'Space Jam' Is the Movie We Never Knew We Needed." *Chicagotribune.com*, 15 Nov. 2016.

<sup>141</sup> "Space Jam." *WebJunior*.

<sup>142</sup> Ebert, Roger. "Space Jam." *Rogerebert.com*, 15 Nov. 1996.

<sup>143</sup> Johnson, Roy S. "The Jordan Effect the World's Greatest Basketball Player Is Also One of Its Great Brands. What Is His Impact on the Economy?" *Fortune*, 22 June 1998.

included trailers and TV spots, which ran during the weeks before its release date. McDonald's, a longtime sponsor of Michael Jordan, also launched a promotion in support of the film. The promotion featured six *Space Jam* toys and *Space Jam* Happy Meals, also offering eight action figures. Jordan sponsors Rayovac and WorldCom also promoted the movie. The film's other promotion partners included General Mills, Kraft Foods' Jell-O brand, and Bayer Corps, which supported its Looney Tunes kids' vitamins with special packaging and point of purchase promotions. Rob Friedman, Warner Brother Studio's president of worldwide advertising and publicity, continued with the promotional efforts to make "Space Jam" hip, which included hiring Steven Rifkind Co., an entertainment marketing company specializing in building word-of-mouth in urban areas and inner cities.<sup>144</sup>

Nike, though, had concerns about being part of the promotion of the movie, as it feared the effects of the movie on the image they had helped Jordan craft. Nike allowed Warner Brothers to sell apparel featuring Michael Jordan, but only through its own studio stores. David Falk described his view of *Space Jam*: "Some think it's a vehicle to sell merchandise. I'm sure it will. Some think it's an effort to broaden his appeal among kids. I'm sure it will...But first and foremost, we saw it as a great litmus test for a new class of opportunity for Michael after his NBA years are over." The film also served as a method for maintaining and increasing Jordan's image during a time when he was not in the spotlight on the NBA hardwood. Even before the movie was released, the plans for marketing the *Space Jam* brand were already set as it had 200 licensees including JC Penney, Kmart, Sears Roebuck & Co, Target, Toys "R" Us, and Walmart – which all had their own customized retail promotions. Merchandising of the film has brought in over a billion dollars in sales since the film has been released. An industry insider has

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<sup>144</sup> Jensen, Jeff. "'Space Jam' Turning Point for Warner Bros., Jordan; Animated Epic Scores \$70 Mil in Tie-In Promos from Partners, But not Nike." *Ad Age*, 28 Oct. 1996.



calculated that the brand's global economic impact is close to four to six billion dollars due to the success of the film and the resurged marketability of Bugs Bunny and Looney Toons.<sup>145</sup>

*Space Jam* could also serve as a textbook study of how to optimize marketing value and opportunities. Years before it became a film industry norm, it featured countless instances of product placement. Gatorade, Wheaties and Jordan's other endorsed products were all featured in some capacity in the movie. Falk made sure everything Jordan did was integrated. Originally the product placements were somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but it turned out to be a highly successful marketing play when the film was released. Today *Space Jam* has engendered a sort of cult following; *Space Jam* has now become a sort of nostalgic, cultural phenomenon – still generating interest and revenue more than 20 years later. Adults wear *Space Jam* basketball jerseys and even visit the movie's still active, original website. In 2016, as part of the film's twenty-year anniversary, Nike reissued its *Space Jam* shoe and the film was rereleased in theaters nationwide. The rerelease was a marketing strategy to attract a new generation of audience to the movie and a demonstration of the film's ongoing appeal and that the legacy of Michael Jordan will not die, but only grow.<sup>146</sup>

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Returning to the shoe industry, Nike – when signing Michael Jordan – had the marketing muscle that no other shoe brand had at this time. In fact, Nike had an advertising campaign in mind even before Jordan played his first game in the NBA. Nike committed to putting one million dollars into marketing Jordan's shoes in their first six months on the shelves. In the coming weeks, David Falk came up with the Air Jordan name and Nike was working hard to make it a hit. In 1984-95, Jordan's Nike shoes were banned by the NBA because of their lack of

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<sup>145</sup> Izadi, Elahe. "Twenty Years Later, 'Space Jam' Is the Movie We Never Knew We Needed." *Chicagotribune.com*, 15 Nov. 2016.

<sup>146</sup> Johnson, Chloe. "The Jordan Effect." *Linkedin*, 4 Mar. 2015.

uniform color schemes, but Jordan continued to wear the shoes, and a commercial followed featuring the dialogue: “On October 15<sup>th</sup>, Nike created a revolutionary new basketball shoe...One October 18<sup>th</sup>, the NBA threw them out of the game. Fortunately, the NBA can’t keep you from wearing them.” The banning of the shoe caused a huge stir and gave Nike and Jordan a huge influx of free publicity. The Air Jordan Is, at an unheard-of price at the time of \$65 a pair, hit stores nationwide in March 1985 and, by May, Nike had sold \$70 million worth, and by the end of that year the Air Jordan franchise had yielded more than \$100 million in revenues. Phil Knight, the co-founder of Nike, called the product success in the annual report that year: “the perfect combination of quality product, marketing and athlete endorsement.” The advertising campaign suggested that the shoes gave the user an unfair advantage and that whoever wore them had a certain edginess associated with outlaw activities. Nike assured Jordan that the fines would not affect his image, and MJ rocked them all the way to his Rookie of the Year honor.<sup>147</sup>

Nike was always a successful shoe brand but was not the behemoth it would become with Michael Jordan. Phil Knight had the idea of a sneaker named for an athlete, marketed and endorsed by that individual. Athletes endorsing various products, both sports related and non-sports related, were not a new phenomenon, but Jordan went further than that. The Jordan brand was designed, marketed, and centered around one man. 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.” 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.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Rovell, “How Nike Landed Michael Jordan.”

<sup>148</sup> Manta, Alexander. “He Celebrity Athlete: A Powerful Endorsement Tool in the Mass Media.” Boston College, May 2013.

The youth during this time were yearning for something different. Style was becoming prominent, and color was integral. Sneakers made the jump into fashion thanks to Jordan and Nike. As Jordan's career took off, Phil Knight built Nike into a mighty, multi-billion-dollar transnational empire that ingeniously marketed its sneakers over the new global media. Jordan continues as a huge force in the shoe market to this day and the Jordan brand itself is a \$800 million brand. Jordan said of the Jordan brand:

I think initially it had a lot to do with my impact on the basketball court. And then that translated to everything off the court. But then it was the quality of the shoes that we were building. I mean, it always had a sense of style about it and it was totally different from what you see in the marketplace. And I think that has allowed us to transcend over time and one of the reasons why it has lasted for 23 years. One -- it's gotta be hip. Two -- it has to be done with the highest of quality and three, it represents the best in basketball and those are three things that we've earned.<sup>149</sup>

Jordan brand became its own subsidiary, and the Jumpman logo [Figure 5] gave him his own identity. Nike knew its brand was strong, so, with the creation of a sub-brand, the company became a two-headed monster committed to blowing every other shoe marketer out of the water.



Figure 5: Air Jordan XXXI (released August of 2016) features both the famous Nike swoosh and Jumpman logo.<sup>150</sup>

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Even at a young age, Michael Jordan understood the importance of his brand and image. An image is fragile and can be destroyed quickly and swiftly. Even during his rookie season in the NBA, he already showed the needed grace in the face of the media to create the

<sup>149</sup> Rovell, Darren. "Michael Jordan: Still 'Marketing' Success." CNBC, CNBC, 5 Aug. 2010.

<sup>150</sup> Screenshot from the Nike Jordan website: <https://www.jordan.com/collection/air-jordan-31>

uncontroversial image that Jordan still holds tight to today. In September 1985, Michael Jordan signed an endorsement deal with Coca-Cola. During the press conferences in Chicago to announce the endorsement deal, a reporter asked the then twenty-two-year-old Jordan: “Which Coke do *you* like – New Coke or regular Coke?” The inexperienced young player, with his future as a pitchman in the balance answered coolly: “Coke is Coke. They both taste great” (308).<sup>151</sup> Jordan had passed his first test with flying colors. But, his skin color became a focal point in his campaign with Coca-Cola. Jordan, who prided himself as color-blind, disliked this decision. But, the Coca-Cola campaign painted Jordan as a black man that the whites accepted, would follow and support. He was described as: “Mr. Middle America despite his dark skin color” and “the nonthreatening black man whites would accept as one of their own” (308).<sup>152</sup> This flew against everything he stood for, but, as one of his first endorsement deals, Jordan rolled with the punches. He used it as a building block, and it informed his connection with Gatorade which changed the sports marketing world and the sports drink industry.

One of Jordan’s most well-known campaigns was the Gatorade “Be Like Mike” commercials. This advertising campaign used Jordan’s humility, personality, and backstory to create an inspirational commercial that highlights the fact that if one puts everything into something they can succeed “Like Mike.” This tag line encouraged people, young and old, 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. Jordan first signed on with Gatorade in 1991, and the company reaped the benefits of his celebrity status in their very first year.<sup>153</sup> Annual revenues jumped from \$681 million to over \$1 billion. In a sense, Nike had already done much of the heavy lifting for

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<sup>151</sup> Wiggins, David Kenneth. *Out of the Shadows: A Biographical History of African American Athletes*. University of Arkansas Press, 2006.

<sup>152</sup> Wiggins. *Out of the Shadows*.

<sup>153</sup> Rovell, Darren. “Famed ‘Be Like Mike’ Gatorade Ad Debuted 25 Years Ago.” ESPN, ESPN Internet Ventures, 9 Aug. 2016.

them by helping Jordan build up his brand image that people believed in and bought into, and all Gatorade had to do was create its own angle on the Jordan brand and let his stardom do the rest of the work.<sup>154</sup> Jordan's role in the growing Americanization of global media was profound.

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Michael Jordan and Nike capitalized on the rise and expansion of television viewership as it transitioned from something very exclusive with very few channels to a media of hundreds of channels. This created the opportunity for companies to advertise their brands on channels whose audiences are more likely to purchase their product. This was a new development in marketing as companies could select certain channels to more specifically target the proper audience. This enabled an effective shift. Previously athletes advertised for products during sporting events, and celebrities – such as actors, models, and actresses – were used as spokespeople during television shows and movies. But now more specific segments could be targets. Nike and Jordan selected MTV to target young buyers of sneakers and sports channels like ESPN to target the sports fan.<sup>155</sup> This was awesomely powerful as these new media options not only played a dominant role in creating and defining American popular culture, but they used that culture's own seductiveness to influence the language, eating habits, clothes, and television watching of people around the world.

After his retirement from playing, Jordan's global influence became clear. Thanks to television ads, Air Jordan Nike sneakers were sold for as much as a \$1,000 a pair, and some were collected like jewels all over the world. As an example, Chinese schoolchildren ranked Jordan with Zhou Enlai ( who helped start the Communist Revolution) as the two greatest figures of the

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<sup>154</sup> Manta. "He Celebrity Athlete: A Powerful."

<sup>155</sup> LaFeber, Walter. *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*. W.W. Norton & Co., 2002.

twentieth century.<sup>156</sup> Jordan's significance is described further by sociologist Harry Edwards, who blisteringly attacked professional sports and the roles assigned black players: 'If I were charged with introducing an alien life form to the epitome of human potential, creativity, perseverance, and spirit, I would introduce that alien life form to Michael Jordan' (28).<sup>157</sup>

Within his own lifetime, African-American athletes had been victimized and exploited – not made millionaires. They were also often condemned for choosing merely to focus on sports, rather than acting as role models for the youth and future generations. Jordan embodied a figure that excelled in sports, acted as a role model and was able to become one of the most successful advertising figures the sports world has seen.

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Michael Jordan not only changed the world of advertising and sports marketing, he was also hugely influential in transforming the NBA, Chicago and their basketball franchise, the Bulls. Prior to the drafting of the future Hall of Famer, the franchise's estimated worth was \$18.7 million, which was only a fraction of some other franchises. Viewership and interest was disappearing, but, within the next ten years, the Bulls sold out tickets for all home games and had thousands of names on a wait-list for season tickets. The franchise's worth exceeded \$190 million and was climbing (today the franchise is worth \$2.6 billion).<sup>158</sup> The NBA meanwhile became a television goldmine not only in the United States, but globally. The value of the NBA in 1984 was 400 million dollars; by the time Jordan retired, the NBA was valued at 7.8 billion dollars.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*.

<sup>157</sup> LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*.

<sup>158</sup> Johnson, K.C. "Forbes Values the Bulls at \$2.6 Billion." *Chicagotribune.com*, 7 Feb. 2018.

<sup>159</sup> Badenhausen, Kurt. "David Stern to Retire After Delivering \$12 Billion In Value to Owners." *Forbes*, 25 Oct. 2012.

Before Jordan entered the NBA, 8% of the league wore Nike shoes, but, by the time he retired that had increased to 48%. The Nike swoosh, designed by Carolyn Davidson, was designed to make it possible for people in faraway lands whose languages did not easily translate the word “Nike” to identify Nike products simply by the Swoosh. In addition to the Swoosh, Knight emphasized the importance of Jordan in the worldwide spread of Nike: “It saves us a lot of time... You can’t explain much in 60 seconds, but when you show Michael Jordan, you don’t have to. People already know a lot about him. It’s that simple” (63).<sup>160</sup> By 1991, a poll ranked Jordan and Bo Jackson as the world’s two most famous athletes – a ranking due largely to their global television commercials for Nike.<sup>161</sup> By this time, the average American was exposed to about three thousand advertising messages each day. Corporations were now spending so much on advertising and other promotions that it amounted to \$120 annually for every person on earth.<sup>162</sup>

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Nike, though, was not the perfect product that everyone believed it to be. There were major issues surrounding their production in China and use of cheap and sometimes even child labor. This sparked issues with Michael Jordan as its premier public representative as he avoided associating and discussing these issues in interviews. Many criticized him for his decision, though he did this for the good of his personal image as he felt he could do nothing to change the circumstances in China. Jordan’s gambling issues were also a concern, though it did little to affect his image. His betting was confined to recreational pursuits, golf and poker. His connection with gambling only heightened his image as a man possessed to win—in any

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<sup>160</sup> LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*

<sup>161</sup> LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*.

<sup>162</sup> Appelbaum, Kalman. *The Marketing Era: from Professional Practice to Global Provisioning*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.

endeavor. Besides, the misdeeds were, in nature, non-venal, nonsexual, and nonviolent. Most fans associated his issues not in a negative sense but felt that Jordan being a little bad actually reflected positively on his image. Jordan was depicted so perfectly by the media and through advertisements that these “wrinkles” humanized him and created an image of commonality with the public.

Babe Ruth was known also to have an extreme appetite for life and passion for winning. Despite the negative associations, he was able to rise above them. The American people forgave him and sometimes even praised his behavior; it elevated his figure as an individual that was one with the American people. For better or worse, the American public seems most willing to cut their sports heroes some slack. There are stories and books detailing Jordan’s addictive habits, including a book written by a golf hustler about matches played by Jordan for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Though Jordan was condemned, the behavior also placed him with the likes of Ruth and Ali. They all defied society’s norms and conventions and yet still became accepted and celebrated.

In addition to issues in China and with gambling, unrest in the United States also occurred as individuals (both young and old) were murdered due to the high price of the Air Jordan sneakers – “It’s bad when we create an image of luxury about athletic gear that it forces people to kill over it” (91).<sup>163</sup> Spike Lee, Michael Jordan’s partner in many Nike commercials, responded: “The emphasis should not be on the sneakers or the Starter jackets...The emphasis should be on: what are the conditions among young black males that are making them put that much emphasis on material things?” (91).<sup>164</sup> The sneakers crimes soon became only part of a

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<sup>163</sup> LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*.

<sup>164</sup> LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*.



larger set of charges leveled against Jordan. Even considering these charges against him, he was perhaps the most widely admired African-American in the country.

Just as much of an issue during this time period was the staggering amount (one in three) of African-American youth growing up in poverty. Jordan worked hard to be a role model. Jordan stood accused of making a terrible situation worse: by showcasing his basketball skills to the world, encouraging the youth of all races be like him. Critics claimed his message should instead spend his energy teaching the marginalized youths of America that they should stay in school so they could survive. In response to this criticism Nike and Jordan put money into youth groups and sponsored many of the mid-night basketball leagues that bought inner-city youths off the streets at night and into supervised neighborhood gymnasiums. This was a step in the right direction, but the issues persisted, while Nike and Jordan stayed mostly out of the spotlight in regards to these issues as they focused on growing their brand.<sup>165</sup>

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Jordan's most lucrative deal is with Nike, which has paid out over \$473 million dollars over the course of the contract, which he's had since 1993. A 1991 deal with Gatorade that is still in effect today is valued at \$18 million and a deal with Hanes since 1992 has netted him over \$14 million. The sports memorabilia outfit Upper Deck paid Jordan over \$13 million from 2000-2014, while video game 2K Sports had two separate contracts with the superstar for a total of roughly \$2.5 million. Jordan is very strategic about the deals he makes – Marc Ganis, president of SportsCorp, says of the Hall of Famer: "His image is guarded zealously and he only makes long-term deals for big money that convey a positive image of the Michael Jordan brand."<sup>166</sup> Through his marketing savviness, Jordan has been able to cultivate the image the way he wants

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<sup>165</sup> LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*.

<sup>166</sup> Garcia, Ahiza. "Rare Glimpse into the Michael Jordan Marketing Machine." CNNMoney, Cable News Network, 14 Aug. 2015.

and extend his worth long after his career. Jordan never allowed his name to be attached to anything that misrepresented him. This mentality defined his personal success and led his brand success, which will undoubtedly continue to be valuable even after his death.

One of the powerful aspects of his endorsement deals is that Jordan has never tried to create a brand without a corporate partner. He is seen as a loyal consumer, and that has spilled over into the brands that he endorses. With Hanes, for example, he does not endorse any other fashion-oriented product, besides his own Jordan Brand. That type of loyalty has enabled Hanes to direct its men's underwear line marketing directly at target consumers. An entire generation of consumers has now viewed Hanes as being the garment of choice by Jordan. This has resulted in tremendous sales. Jordan speaks to the power of today's athlete to influence sales. If an athlete is respected by society at large, and they have name recognition, then the endorsement means something. It is no longer about the underwear itself – it is about the athlete who is seen wearing it.<sup>167</sup>

Michael Jordan's marketing and promotion machine is recognized as a model for the future of sports marketing. The campaigns created around his name are valuable as an example of a successful method of using athletes to sell a product. Jordan's commercial for Gatorade: "Be Like Mike" is one of the most memorable, famous, and profitable in the history of televised advertisements. The commercial encompasses all three aspects of rhetoric: logos, ethos, and pathos. Logos, which is logic and facts used to compel an audience to buy the product being advertised is utilized in the commercial through cause-effect strategy. Hence, if you drink Gatorade, then you will be able to perform like a champion. In addition to this, the "if...then" strategy conveys the product to the audience as it proclaims that if you drink Gatorade, then you

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<sup>167</sup> "Michael Jordan's Marketing Power Has Continued Impact on Hanes." The Fields of Green, 7 July 2017.

will not get dehydrated and will be able to perform at your best. In terms of ethos, which is an ethical appeal relying on authority or reputation, the advertisement exploits Michael Jordan. He is one of the most reputable and trusted athletes. His presence encourages the audience to buy the product – to be more like Michael Jordan. Finally, the use of pathos, an emotional appeal, is a key element of the video. The advertisement provides two aspects of pathos: (1) the promise of gain and (2) the promise of enjoyment as it shows that by drinking Gatorade you can become a champion at whatever you do. Michael Jordan's role in the commercial showcases that Gatorade will help increase endurance in sports and other activities that no other product could do.

The intended audience of the commercial is also very important to its success as it presents relevant information to influence their purchasing decision. Despite the universal elements of the commercial, the ad's intended audience is mostly meant to influence children and teenagers. This is done through graphics similar to those of video games, and also uses a well-respected authority figure among teens. The intended reaction from the viewers is that "if Michael Jordan drinks Gatorade, then so should I." Gatorade is a common energy drink enjoyed by teen athletes. The music is also a major element of the commercial as its upbeat and energizing tempo engages the viewers. There is not much audio in the video in terms of speaking, and this decision works to draw in a younger audience as it shows instead of tells. It uses clips of Jordan's performance on the court – attempting to show that by drinking Gatorade you too can match his success. The commercial was not only successful when it originally aired but is successful to this day as even individuals who have never seen the commercial know the phrase "Be Like Mike." It has become a euphemism in the English language to represent the quest for greatness in sports or in anything that an individual is attempting to achieve.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Rovell, Darren. "Be Like Mike' to Re-Air during ASG." ESPN, ESPN Internet Ventures, 12 Feb. 2015.

Along with Gatorade, Jordan and McDonald's was a powerful partnership. One of their most influential commercials was aired during the Super Bowl in 1993. The spot – “The Showdown” also featured NBA Hall of Famer Larry Bird. The commercial was simple and attainable to all as it featured the two all-time greats engaging in a simple game of “H-O-R-S-E.” Many of us have played this simple playground game and can associate directly with the commercial. The commercial itself the two legends trying to outdo each other for Jordan's lunch, a Big Mac and fries. The spot is just plain fun. This commercial is ranked as one of the best and most successful commercials ever produced. Jordan and Larry are represented in the commercial as, in a sense, children competing for the best prize – which caters to the intended audience of the advertisement – the youth of America. In addition to this, the commercial featured the first use of a popular term today: “Nothing but Net.” In addition to this, it has sparked a few remakes of the spot including one, which featured Jordan and Marvin the Martian, which inspired *Space Jam* and a more current advertisement featuring LeBron James and Dwight Howard recreating the now famous 1993 spot. [Figure 6] The simplicity and relatability of this spot is what made it so successful.<sup>169</sup>

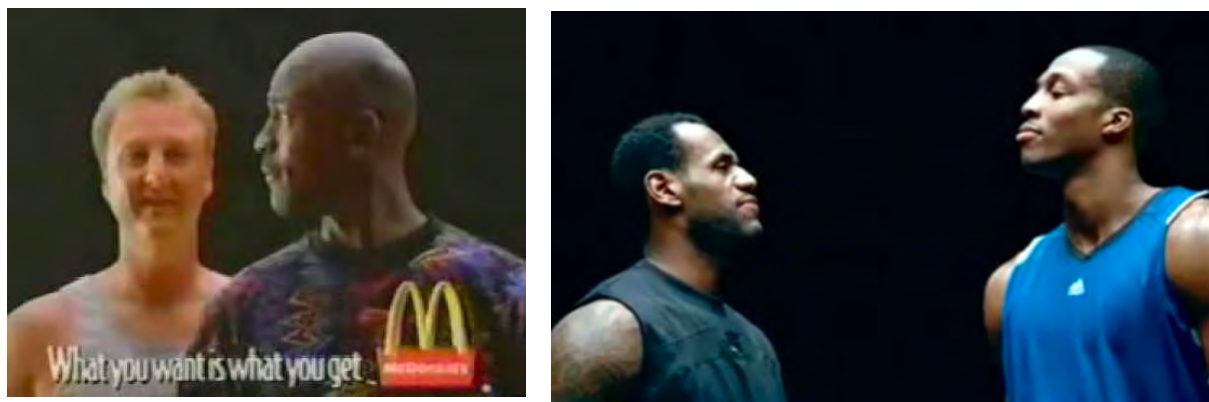


Figure 6: Larry Bird (left) Michael Jordan (right) pictured in the 1993 spot for McDonalds<sup>170</sup> on left and a still from the 2010 spin off featuring LeBron James (left) and Dwight Howard (left).<sup>171</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Velasco, Schuyler. “Top 5 Greatest Super Bowl Ads.” The Christian Science Monitor, The Christian Science Monitor, 30 Jan. 2013.

<sup>170</sup> Briggs, Justin. “Larry Bird vs. Michael Jordan McDonalds Commercial.” YouTube, YouTube, 3 Aug. 2006.

<sup>171</sup> McDonaldsAllAmerican. “FULL VERSION: McDonald's Commercial with LeBron James and Dwight Howard.” YouTube, YouTube, 7 Feb. 2010.

Another compelling example of Michael Jordan's success as a pitchman is shown in his Nike commercials featuring the director/writer/actor Spike Lee. These televised commercials were sparked from Lee's film *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), where Spike Lee plays the fictional character, Mars Blackmon. Blackmon is a "Brooklyn-loving" fan of the New York Knicks, sports, and the Air Jordan shoe. Nike used the success of Jordan in basketball and Lee in the film industry to spread the brand even further. Jim Riswold, the former creative director for the Portland, Oregon based advertising agency, Wieden+Kennedy, was instrumental in the union and creation of the commercials featuring Lee and Jordan [Figure 7].



Figure 7: Michael Jordan and Spike Lee (as Mars Blackmon) shown in a print advertisement for the Jordan Brand.<sup>172</sup>

Riswold, after viewing Lee's 1986 film, was particularly inspired by a scene where Lee's character refuses to take his Jordans off while sleeping with a woman: "He won't take his Air Jordans off, and it was like, that's an idea, that's an advertising campaign." This campaign became the first time that Nike showed a human side of the athlete, with some humor, and had some fun with popular culture. Riswold said of the commercials: "I think that opened up the access point for Nike to not just necessarily be for serious athletes, but for anybody, for fans,

<sup>172</sup> "The Life and Career of Spike Lee." *Nydailynews.com*, New York Daily News, 20 Mar. 2017.

because there's no bigger fan than Mars Blackmon...I mean, not only did he love his Air Jordans, the product, he loved the man."<sup>173</sup>

In the commercial, Lee plays Mars Blackmon, who becomes well known for his use of the phrase: "It's gotta be the shoes." The ad campaign has been credited as a landmark in the evolution of sneakers into massively profitable items of fashion. In the commercials, "Mars" not only supports the claim that Michael Jordan must be the best player in the world because of his Air Jordans, but also tells the audience that Air Jordans "get [Mars] up for his game." Blackmon was by no means at the level of basketball ability as Jordan, but, in the commercials, he gains skills once he puts on the sneakers. The union between Jordan and Lee opened Nike to the world of film as now the Jordan brand attached with both film and sports. Jordan and Spike made the United States believe that it really did have to be the shoes, and Nike grew into the most popular and profitable shoe brand in the world.

Each "Mars Blackmon" commercial was unique in its own sense. Although all of them were black and white, Blackmon brought something different to the table for each commercial, making them stand out. While his look remained the same, he always seemed like he was bothering Jordan in a different way. In one commercial Blackmon hung from the rim on top of Jordan's shoulders (Air Jordan 3 Commercial) and in another he was in Michael's ear asking him all kinds of questions [Figure 8]. It is important to note that Blackmon did most of the talking in the commercials while Jordan would either be posing or playing in the shoes. This is important because the audience needed to hear what Mars was saying while they were looking at the *Air Jordan* shoes. Nike and Spike Lee allow Blackmon to introduce Michael Jordan as though he is just one of the guys, again playing on the audience's emotions. Mars often refers to Jordan as his

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<sup>173</sup> Dunne, Brendan. "How Spike Lee Became Michael Jordan's Hypeman." Sole Collector, 20 Oct. 2016.

“main man” (Is It the Shoes?), playing on the idea of ethos and pathos. Kairos, which is a favorable moment for decision or action, is often used at the end of the short, thirty-second commercials. Michael Jordan would either makes a funny statement about Mars or perform an exciting dunk. When writing the commercials, Spike Lee knew the importance of the audience to be left with Michael’s voice and the *Air Jordan* logo. The Mars Blackmon commercials are integral to the success of the Air Jordan brand to this day. By giving Michael Jordan his own shoe, and marketing his true personality, Nike was able to catch lightning in a bottle. Nike and Spike Lee’s vision was genius, and ever since the 1980s Nike and Michael Jordan have not looked back, continuing to innovate and inspire.<sup>174</sup>



Figure 8: 1988 Nike ad with Jordan and Spike Lee, cementing the Jordan brand in the national consciousness.<sup>175</sup>

Nike took a gamble wanting to change the entire market by betting on one person, Michael Jordan, and it worked. Air Jordan shoes came to sell with little to no marketing as their reputation became established. Social media, blogs, and other sources, along with the buzz surrounding the release of new shoes, provided Nike and the Jordan Brand free advertising. The history of the brand and the nostalgia surrounding the brand help the sneakers sell themselves. It was a long process (beginning in 1985) to reach that point with Michael Jordan and Nike investing a massive amount of time and money into the expansion of the brands. Jordan and

<sup>174</sup> Madden, Lance. “Spike Lee Is Still the Best Nike Jordan Brand Pitchman.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 5 Dec. 2012.

<sup>175</sup> DaniBoxx. “Air Jordan III Commercial.” YouTube, YouTube, 8 Mar. 2007.

Nike's investments paid off. When a new Jordan shoe has been released, the internet explodes, and product has flown off the shelves.

Michael Jordan has become such an icon in the sports advertising industry that simply featuring his name in a spot creates instant attention and credibility for the product. In Mid-1998, *Fortune* magazine estimated that Jordan had at least a \$10 billion impact on the U.S. economy and half of that total (\$5.2 billion) benefited Nike. Today, that number has only risen, and Jordan has become the first billionaire athlete.<sup>176</sup> He sparked a revolution in sports marketing and – along with a posse of creative partners willing to bet on his star power -- created diversified and highly lucrative worldwide businesses. It began with Babe Ruth as the pioneer achieving great success, influencing the nation and reshaping the opportunities for professional athletes. But Jordan took Ruth's playbook and rewrote it for himself, other professional athletes and a global audience now connected by a click. No other athlete has been more financially successful and/or has had more of a social, cultural, and economic influence on the United States and the world.

The story of Michael Jordan represents an ideal of the American experience enabled by free enterprise, hard work and the drive of an individual. Jordan's huge success was also linked to savvy partnerships that broke new ground, such as his representation of Nike and many other major companies like Gatorade and McDonalds. His brand began with Nike and then expanded beyond anyone's previous imagination. With the help of his agent, David Falk, and the marketing budgets of giant product companies, Jordan redefined the image and role(s) of the athlete and branding and rewrote the rules and scope of sports marketing.

Based on these precedents, perhaps the best question is "Who and What Is Next?"

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<sup>176</sup> Harper, Peter Alan. "Jordan's Career Spurred \$10 Billion Impact on Economy, Fortune Says." DeseretNews.com, Deseret News, 2 June 1998.





## Conclusion – Past and Present

The role of sports in American society is enormous, cutting across all classes, economic backgrounds, ages, genders, races, ethnicities, or other demographic categories. It can be seen from any small town to big cities on weekends as people gather on public ballfields; it is a component in some form in almost every educational institution; it brings people together around the television, in stadiums, or searching online to track and cheer on favorite teams. Sports have become synonymous with national holiday celebrations in the United States as athletic events mark Independence Day (baseball), Memorial Day (auto racing), Labor Day (tennis), New Year's Day (college football), and Thanksgiving (professional football). Major sporting events often also feature patriotic themes. In addition to this, sports often dictate social schedules as weekends are marked by high school sports, college sports, professional football games, as well as European soccer matches – a part of the fabric of life for millions.

Sports – at every level – also represent an enormous and highly influential *business*. The annual revenue of sports teams and clubs in the United States last year was over thirty billion dollars.<sup>177</sup> The top professional sports leagues' annual revenues are staggering, as the NFL brings in \$13 billion, MLB: \$9.5 billion, Premier League (soccer): \$5.3 billion, and NBA: \$4.8 billion.<sup>178</sup> To look a little deeper, the average cost to attend (for a family of four) an NFL, MLB, NBA, and NHL game can be seen in the chart below [Figure 1]:

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<sup>177</sup> Santo, Charles A., and Gerard C.S. Mildner. "Economic Impact of Sport Stadiums, Teams, Events." Human-Kinetics, 2010.

<sup>178</sup> Kutz, Steven. "NFL Took in \$13 Billion in Revenue Last Season - See How It Stacks up against Other pro Sports Leagues." MarketWatch, 2 July 2016.



Figure 1: Visual, showing the cost for a family four to attend a football, baseball, basketball, or hockey event.<sup>179</sup>

The average household spends about 6 percent of income on entertainment including movies, music, and sports. Over the past year (2017), Americans spent \$100 billion on sports -- \$56 billion on sporting events, \$33 billion on athletic equipment, and \$19 billion on gym membership (36% of millennials have paid for a gym membership).<sup>180</sup> The average cost of student athletics (grades 6-12) is on average \$671 annually per student, with 21% spending over one thousand dollars on their child's athletics.<sup>181</sup> These numbers represent the scale at which sports have shifted from a pastime to a huge, wide-ranging business, with live, professional games no longer within reach for most average citizens – except, of course, via mass media which represents another multi-billion dollar aspect of the business.

Americans like competitors; they like winning; they admire and are inspired by gifted performers. As a result, it is not surprising that exceptional athletes have been given celebrity status. They are embraced as role models on and off the field. Fans are interested in their private lives, their secrets to success, their likes and dislikes. Like any other public figure, they

<sup>179</sup> "The Economy of Food at Sporting Events." Sports Management Degree Guide.

<sup>180</sup> Kutz, "NFL Took in \$13 Billion in Revenue Last Season - See How It Stacks up against Other pro Sports Leagues."

<sup>181</sup> Heitner, Darren. "1 In 5 American Parents Spending More Than \$1,000 Per Child on Sports Related Expenses." Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 4 Oct. 2012.

owe their status to the adoration of the public – the adults and children alike who follow and admire them for their superior skills and abilities. With this in mind, it is also not surprising that modern marketers have recognized and capitalized on the attention-getting, selling power of professional athletes. Sports marketing literally and figuratively moved into the big leagues with Babe Ruth, who played in Major League Baseball (MLB) in 1914. Part of Babe Ruth's influence can be attributed to timing. He rose to fame during the "Roaring 20s" when American culture was increasingly drawn to excitement, and Babe Ruth represented that both on and off the field. It was also a time when mass media (radio and newspapers) was reshaping communications to new levels of reach and efficiency. Local stories became national ones; people could participate in events even if they could not attend; culture was shifting. Those factors -- combined with Ruth's extraordinary performance on the baseball field and his personality -- set the stage for never-before-seen levels of exposure.

Ruth's prominence on and off the field allowed him to become an icon for America's greatness and passion for living. In 1930, Babe made \$80,000 a year – \$5,000 more than President Herbert Hoover. Because this was during the depression, many found this figure astonishing. When a reporter asked Ruth, though, he saw no issue, "Why not? I had a better year than he did."<sup>182</sup> His comment was cocky and confident, mixed with some humor. Probably one of the most notable signs of his celebrity status surrounded his large portfolio of endorsements deals -- many of which had no connection whatsoever to baseball. Ruth popularized the concept of athlete endorsements; during this time period, there was no Nike or Adidas to take pro sports stars to a heightened status. Ruth set the foundation for the future of sports marketing; the deals developed by Ruth, his agent and advertisers created a template for a wide range of promotional

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<sup>182</sup> Treese, Joel D. "President Herbert Hoover and Baseball." WHHA, The White House Historical Society, 2000.

activities -- and Americans were ready and willing to accept the connection of a revered athlete with products, within or unrelated to the world of sports. The floodgates had been opened.

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Michael Jordan took the size and scope of sports marketing to an entirely new level. Again, one has to recognize that, like Babe Ruth, Jordan was the exceptional and charismatic athlete who burst on the scene at the right time. Mass media was in another incredible revolutionary mode; the internet was poised to create unheard of levels of connectivity; the social and political upheaval that had rocked the country during the 1960s and 70s had quieted; racial integration had made better progress within American sports teams than in most other areas; and major sports and athletic brands were competing for market share and to expand their businesses. A stunning performer, Jordan was an African American athlete with incredibly broad appeal. Paired with the marketing money and muscle of Nike, Jordan recast the boundaries of sports marketing; he became a generational trendsetter whose influence on sneaker culture, basketball, and modern-day advertising stretched well beyond the National Basketball Association (NBA).

Today, the level of activity and the depth of consumer connectivity related to sports marketing is higher – and more intimate – than one could ever have imagined in the time when *Space Jam* was rewriting the rules. The cornerstone of success in the professional sports sector is deeper engagement with the fans. Technology is creating opportunities for growth in this sector by facilitating just that. The proliferation of on-the-go access to sports content is allowing professional sports leagues and franchises the opportunity to interact more closely with their fan base. Wider and deeper fan engagement can result in enhanced loyalty, which is beneficial since engaged fans are likely to spend more time and money on sports. Anytime access, stronger

loyalty, and the likelihood of increased spending makes the professional spectator sports platform all the more attractive to large corporate sponsors that are likely to be more willing to part with dollars for exposure. The end result will likely be more money flowing into the sports ecosystem.<sup>183</sup>

Alongside tremendous growth and evolution in sports marketing, the past remains remarkably relevant. Jordan retired in 2003 from professional basketball, but he continues as a current presence, influencer and inspiration -- as a former star, style icon, and businessman. Rookie player for the Utah Jazz, Donovan Mitchell, who played baseball and basketball growing up, wears Jordan's secondary number 45 (worn when he returned to basketball after a year playing professional baseball). Mitchell was born in 1996, after Jordan ended his attempt at a baseball career. Jordan Brand Vice President Howard White says of Jordan: "I think that every generation really has their own thumbprint, but if you look at Michael's influence you still see the shaved heads out there on the court—still see people playing with a great deal of flare...I think that stamp obviously went beyond his culture... [athletes are] still compare[d]...to Michael Jordan."<sup>184</sup> The obvious connection between Jordan and the NBA's younger generation is his Jordan Brand sneaker line, which is extremely popular in the league. Whether the Jumpman logo is seen on players' feet, clothing or on the uniforms of Michael Jordan's Charlotte Hornets, the iconic symbol remains synonymous with the game of basketball.

Chris Paul, Houston Rockets point guard and Jordan athlete says of the Hall of Famer: "MJ will always be a staple on the NBA because guys care about how they look when they play and what shoes they wear on-court...MJ had a flare and style about him when he played. For me personally, I remember MJ used to tell me about going down to the corner in front of the other

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<sup>183</sup> Gunnion, Lester. "Behind the Numbers: Professional Sports and the Merits of Being Big and Connected." Deloitte Insights, 7 Aug. 2015.

<sup>184</sup> Harris, Jarrell. "MJ's Influence as Strong as Ever in Today's NBA." SI.com, Sports Illustrated, 2 Jan. 2018.

team's bench so the other teams could look at his shoes, which is killer.”<sup>185</sup> Paul believes that Jordan’s sneaker line is one of the reasons his legacy and brand still resonate with players to this day – even if they have never seen him play. The way Nike and Jordan mastered the sneaker business was through their storytelling. So many of his shoes are iconic because they have significant moments or games they are tied to.

US consumers buy 7.5 pairs of shoes per capita per year, which is more than any other country in the world. Apparel and footwear contribute almost 375 billion dollars to the US economy, which is a bigger contribution than new cars, alcohol, toys, or practically any other industry.<sup>186</sup> The sneaker culture began in 1921 when Chuck Taylor attached his name to the shoe brand Converse. Converse was a pioneer of celebrity marketing as they set a marketing standard in the world of athletic footwear. Hip-Hop joined the sneaker culture long ago as songs like “My Adidas” (1986) by Run-D.M.C. started the trend of personal expression and identification through sneakers. Michael Jordan and Nike brought the power of celebrity endorsement to new heights. The strength of celebrity endorsement is on full display with Stephen Curry’s Under Armour brand, which, is worth over \$14 billion to Under Armour. All of this reflects a fashion revolution where the shoes and apparel that used to be just for the gym are now worn everywhere – so the market keeps expanding.

It is not just new sneakers that make up the current market; the submarket of sneaker resale is almost as impressive and well executed as the primary market. Estimated to be worth more than \$1 billion, the sneaker resale market is fueled by the excitement created by an intentionally low supply of each sneaker release. Campless, a provider of sneakerhead data, estimates that 96% of the sneakers on the resale market are Nikes. This balance is what puts

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<sup>185</sup> Harris, Jarrell, “MJ’s Influence as Strong as Ever in Today’s NBA.”

<sup>186</sup> “Footwear - US Consumers Bought 7.5 Pairs of Shoes per Capita per Year.” *APLF*, 20 Jan. 2015.

sneaker culture, and Nike in particular, in such a unique position. Alec Leach, a writer for lifestyle and trend site Highsnobiety, said of the resale market: “By ensuring supply never *quite* meets demand, Nike creates a market that nets the resell community millions of dollars a year, while cultivating the sort of rabid following that keeps the Swoosh at the forefront of consumer culture.”<sup>187</sup>

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As Babe Ruth set the modern sports marketing stage and Michael Jordan blew the doors off, the power and appeal of sports related or sports inspired messaging is currently recognized as an effective means to promote and empower – even for non-sports-products. And the impact can go far beyond selling -- as multiple media and cross marketing expand reach and engagement across consumer groups and different countries. This power and money is doing more than just selling; it is being used to bring awareness and change. First aired in June 2014, but popularized during the Super Bowl, *Always* released a groundbreaking commercial: “Like A Girl” – produced by documentary filmmaker Lauren Greenfield. This advertisement concentrates on the outdated, but still popular phrase and insult: “You throw like a girl!” *Always* spokesperson, Judy John said of the campaign: “We set out to champion the girls who were the future of the brand...Girls first come in contact with *Always* at puberty, a time when they are feeling awkward and unconfident-a pivotal time to show girls the brand’s purpose and champion their confidence.” Empowering girls during this time of their lives when confidence is at its lowest would give a powerful, relevant and purposeful message.

Once the film by Greenfield was shot, a campaign was then constructed around it to spread the message and empower women by showing that ‘like a girl’ should be a meaningful

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<sup>187</sup> Weinswig, Deborah. “Sneaker Culture Fuels \$1 Billion Secondary Market.” *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*, 18 Mar. 2016.



and powerful statement all women should embrace. The social hashtag #LikeAGirl was introduced as a rallying cry. John adds: “The hashtag was essential in rallying people to change the meaning of ‘like a girl’ by showing the world that it can mean amazing things.” In *Always*’ ad campaign, they use strong emotional appeals to empower girls, and to eliminate the phrase as a negative one.<sup>188</sup>

The advertisement was featured during the Super Bowl, a pinnacle event for advertisers; it opens with a casting audition, with a blonde teenager standing in front of a camera. The message “What does it mean to do something ‘like a girl’?” flashes on the screen. The director tells the young woman to show what it means to run like a girl. The teenager begins to jog in place, flailing her arms, squealing, and adjusting her hair. The director then asks the same thing of other teens of both genders, and they all do similar actions. They are then instructed to fight like a girl and throw like a girl, which results in scratching and flailing and dropping imaginary balls. Then the message changes as girls ages ten and younger respond to the same prompt. These young girls are shown running furiously in place and around the studio, punching the air with passion, and throwing the imaginary ball far into the distance. The screen shows the question, “When did doing something ‘like a girl’ become an insult?” A young girl says, “I’m not sure if it’s a bad thing or a good thing. It sounds like a bad thing.” The campaign wants to instill in young women that doing activities like a girl should not have a negative sigma as they are strong, tough, and passionate.<sup>189</sup>

*Always* is a company that produces menstrual products for young women and girls and their message is for this demographic. By depicting young women in their ad, as well as younger girls, they are making the ad relatable. One can easily imagine themselves, a sister, daughter, or

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<sup>188</sup> Sanghani, Radhika. “‘Like a Girl’: What Does That Mean to You?” *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 27 June 2014.

<sup>189</sup> Beltz, Mel. “Rhetorical Analysis of Always’s ‘Like a Girl’ Advertisement.” *RCL Blog*, Penn State, 2 Oct. 2014.

friend in the same position as the girls in the video. As well as the girls themselves, *Always* is also marketing this ad towards the purchasing parents. Every parent wants to see their daughter happy, self-confident, and respected. By revealing the underlying sexism of this popular comment, it sends a message to parents that they need to help empower their daughters, as well as teach their children that these comments can be destructive.

The audience of this ad is not limited to targeted consumers. The advertising campaign featured multiple spots with discussions of different issues. It runs on TV, is displayed before YouTube videos, and is widely circulated on the Internet. Because of its popularity on social media, its message has reached thousands more people than if it had solely been shown on television. With Emma Watson's recent speech on feminism at the UN as Goodwill Ambassador, the surge of celebrities like Beyoncé self-identifying as a feminist, and the many issues and lawsuits surrounding domestic and sexual abuse, there could not have been a more perfect time for an ad with the focus on empowering young girls. In an age where girls' feelings toward their bodies are influenced by the media (social and mass) and their peers, the positive message like that of the *Always* campaign is necessary and timely. *Always* challenges underlying attitudes about women (e.g. not being as strong as men) and supports power structures based on equality. *Always* wants to combat negative perceptions and break down the barriers put up by the past.<sup>190</sup>

Always #LikeAGirl generated considerable global awareness and changed the way people think about the phrase 'like a girl', achieving more than eighty-five million global views on YouTube in over 150 countries. Prior to watching the film or advertisements, just nineteen percent of sixteen to twenty-four associated positively with the phrase "like a girl." After

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<sup>190</sup>Beltz, "Rhetorical Analysis of Always's 'Like a Girl' Advertisement."

watching, however, 76% said they no longer saw the phrase negatively. Furthermore, two out of three men who watched said they would now think twice before using the phrase as an insult. Always' brand equity showed a strong double-digit percentage increase during the course of the campaign while most of its competitors saw slight declines. Judy John said of the campaign: [it] is proof of the power that creativity holds...People connect with and buy the brands that share similar points of view or values they have. These brands have big ambitions and they make a positive and emotional connection with their consumers. That's why purpose-driven brands are succeeding."<sup>191</sup>

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In the traditional sports marketing arena, Adidas (Nike's biggest threat and competitor) has also adopted a purpose-driven strategy; the doors opened by Jordan and Nike set precedents for no limitations on reinvention and imagination. Adidas' campaign "Here to Create" is a multi-dimensional story comprised of long and short-form content across social, TV and adidas.com; rooted in film. The purpose of this campaign is to encourage any form of creativity. Their film and advertising spots revolve around the rally cry: "Calling all creators. Those with the need to make something new. Those who question everything to invent what is to come. Changing sport every day. A family, related by mindset. Pull up a chair. Join us." "Here to Create" is motivating all "creators" to join Adidas in changing the world and creating a better one. This content features some of the world's most influential athletes, designers, and musicians seated at one table. United by their passion to create, these Creators call on athletes everywhere to defy conventions and join the Adidas movement by using their imaginations to make something new and shape sport culture. Ryan Morlan, Adidas VP of Global Brand

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<sup>191</sup> Smith, G. F. "Case Study: Always #LikeAGirl." D&AD, 14 Feb. 2018.

Communications says of the concept: "The rules of sport are not defined. We believe in the power of writing your own rules, but it will take those who think differently and are confident enough to make it happen. It will take Creators...Adidas is shaping the future of sport every day through our products, partnerships, and innovations, and with this campaign, we've called on some of the most admired faces in sport culture to help us inspire others to find their Creator within, no matter what their field of play."<sup>192</sup>

While showcasing a number of the brand's most innovative technologies and coveted footwear, this latest film also features diverse Creators of Sport Culture, representing the present and future of Adidas, including: soccer superstar Lionel Messi, musician and producer Pharrell Williams, NBA superstar and gold medalist James Harden, tennis champion Garbine Muguruza, iconic fashion designer Alexander Wang, soccer great David Beckham, NFL Super Bowl MVP Von Miller, 2 time NFL MVP Aaron Rodgers, WNBA superstar Candace Parker, up and coming baseball stars Carlos Correa and Kris Bryant, and Hall of Famer Tracy McGrady (NBA). Adidas is relentless in its pursuit of being the world's best sports brand. As the Creator Sports Brand, Adidas is redefining the athletic pursuit as a form of creative expression. By bringing together the great athletes in the world of sports along with other entertainment icons, the credibility of the brand is increased as it appeals to a universal audience. By bringing together athletes of the past, present, and future Adidas is represented as a brand for the ever-changing world and for all generations.<sup>193</sup>

The value principle is one of the main principles that drives the success of this campaign. A major reason why people interact with campaigns or channels is to be part of a group or

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<sup>192</sup> Allen, Nathan. "Adidas – Here to Create Campaign Analysis." NTA Design, 18 Jan. 2018.

<sup>193</sup> Gast, Beth, and Lisa Cannellos. "Adidas Invites the World to Create in New Global Campaign." PR Newswire: News Distribution, Targeting and Monitoring, 20 Dec. 2017.

community of like-minded people. “Here to Create” is all about joining a movement and community of creators. In our world today, a lot of people are trying to make their mark in the world or influence it in some way. This campaign is fueling that desire in people from all backgrounds and industries. The campaign is mainly pertaining to sports, but also features the fashion and music industry. The story principle is used prominently as every individual featured in their advertisements has his or her own story. The campaign is encouraging everyone else to create their own story.

The landscape of sports is vast with cultural, economic and social effects that are wide-ranging and often complicated, positive and uplifting at times – and negative and destructive at others. This project focused on two sports icons, Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan. They are both figures that transcended time; their influence was immense, and their lasting effect on the economy of sports, sports, and sports marketing today is undeniable. The fortunes being made in the ever-expanding world of sports could reasonably be questioned; however, the world clearly values games, competition and excellence. They continue to be a source of yearning, thriving, and achieving. Their unique value can be seen through continuing, extreme transnational power – something particularly evidenced through Major League Baseball (MLB). The economic and cultural impact of the MLB on Latin American countries, such as the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, is extensive. The league dominates baseball life in these countries as youth and their families often see baseball as a way to escape poverty. As a result, the reach of MLB extends to children, affecting childhood education and the operation of youth baseball leagues. MLB as an economic institution continues to search for opportunities to expand

global baseball markets and their presence in other nations.<sup>194</sup> To borrow a line from an NBA advertising campaign launched in 2017: “This is why we play.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Rosentraub, Mark S. “Governing Sports in the Global Era: A Political Economy of Major League Baseball and Its Stakeholders.” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, Indiana University, 2000.

<sup>195</sup> Wilson, William. “Sneak Peek: NBA Launches New Campaign ‘This Is Why We Play’.” *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*, 12 Oct. 2015.



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