

NFL veteran: I never saw a bullying culture as bad as the Miami Dolphins

There was no leadership in the Miami Dolphins locker room. There's a difference between teasing and harassment



[Myron Rolle](#)
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Miami Dolphins. Photograph: Bill Feig/AP

In my 27 years I have had fortuitous opportunities to be part of some dynamic social circles. I have been in the board room as a trustee at [Hampden Sydney College](#). I have been in a village in Bukavu, Congo with a President Clinton-assembled group of young leaders. I have been at the [Bodleian library](#) with Rhodes Scholars. And, currently, I am in labs with my fellow medical students. However, nothing compares to my football career and my immersion in the culture of a college and National Football League locker room. Nothing.

In these locker rooms, one finds an amalgamation of excessive money, egos, youth, competition and hierarchal structures. Indeed this mix sounds ominous. Yet, it can be countered by strong leadership. A strong leader that sets the course for the team. A strong leader that encourages and expects excellence both on and off the field. And a strong leader that introduces the element of basic human respect into a locker room full of edgy, I-still-know-many-thugs kind of players.

Unequivocally, there was no leadership in the [Miami Dolphins](#) organization, leading to [Richie Incognito bullying Jonathan Martin](#), forcing Martin to leave the team. The coaches and general managers can set policies for the locker room, but that space is ultimately governed and run by the players. If there is an "anything goes" culture in that Dolphins locker room, then the other players exhibited no leadership when they failed to check Incognito for his [vehement abuse](#) of Martin.

Incognito exhibits no leadership when he crosses the line from innocuous teasing to full-blown harassment, especially when he calls Martin racial epithets and threatens his life on more than one occasion. And frankly, Martin exhibits limited leadership capacity when he allows his basic human respect to be taken away by a lesser man. The fortitude, regardless of his size, that Martin needed to overcome the torment by this insecure sociopath was somehow lost, and I pray that his loved ones give him support and re-bolster his confidence.

When I played football at Florida State University, my mostly Florida-based teammates joked on my New Jersey upbringing, my boarding school experience, my glasses, my proper speech, my tucked in shirt and my abhorrent dislike for sweet tea and country fried steak. But the ribbing stopped there. Basic human respect existed in our locker room, seniors drew a line, I refused to have my self-worth depreciated and our singular goal of winning on Saturdays trumped by any momentary pleasure one received from hazing another player. When I got drafted by the Tennessee Titans in the 6th round of the [2010 NFL Draft](#), the same locker room experience I had in college unfolded in my professional career. If Jonathan Martin had been fortunate enough to have a similar team culture to what I experienced, he would be preparing for his game this Sunday.

But he didn't. Therefore, we must raise awareness and advocate that the [NFL](#) take action against [bullying](#), and that the Miami Dolphins re-focus their team leadership and provide requisite help for the victim and sanctions for the perpetrator.

I'd classify Martin's locker room experience as an anomaly. But that does not mean, similarly to a rare malady, that we should not investigate it, localize it, eliminate it and then build immunity to fight it if it ever starts to develop again. Martin must recover, Incognito must purge himself of his bigotry and we all must learn that leadership and basic human respect are the best remedies against the bullying that has made its way into NFL locker rooms, not just primary school playgrounds. We have to do better.