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# Criminal Minds: The Relationship between Sport and Off Field Violence

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## **Criminal Minds: The Relationship between Sport and Off Field Violence**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between type of sports team and player convicted of a crime involving bodily harm off the playing field in the National Basketball League (NBA) and National Football League (NFL). This research was beneficial to the academic community because it further developed which professional sport participants were more engaged in violent acts out of the boundaries of their respective sports. This study allowed future researchers the opportunity to build off this study in hopes of building off of what is already known. This study was conducted with a cross sectional design because secondary data was collected at one time. The data collected from the sample did not show a positive relationship between type of sport and player being convicted of a crime involving bodily harm. Instead, the data collected showed that the most frequent arrest among the sampled group was drug and alcohol related.

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Criminal Minds: The Relationship Between Sport and Off Field Violence

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## The Relationship Between Sport and Off Field Violence

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between type of sports team and player convicted of a crime involving bodily harm off the playing field in the National Basketball League (NBA) and National Football League (NFL). This research was beneficial to the academic community because it further developed which professional sport participants were more engaged in violent acts out of the boundaries of their respective sports. This study allowed future researchers the opportunity to build off this study in hopes of building off of what is already known. This study was conducted with a cross sectional design because secondary data was collected at one time. The data collected from the sample did not show a positive relationship between type of sport and player being convicted of a crime involving bodily harm. Instead, the data collected showed that the most frequent arrest among the sampled group was drug and alcohol related.

### **Introduction**

Recently, professional athletes have repeatedly been in the public's eye through media and social networks for being accused of violence off the field of play on a regular basis. Domestic violence seemed to be the most frequently reported form of arrest of professional athletes and included but wasn't limited to Greg Hardy, Ray McDonald, Dez Bryant, AJ Jefferson, Jeff Taylor, and Hope Solo. Therefore, as a society we may believe professional athletes as a whole behaved in this manor more often than non-athletes. Research findings have failed to illustrate that athletes were more violent than non-athletes or if sports in general made athletes more aggressive or violent than those who have not participated in sport.

This research was beneficial to the academic community because it further developed which professional sport participants were more engaged in violent acts out of the boundaries of their

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respective sports. The findings analyzed from this study; Exploration of sport violence on and off the field by professional athletes allowed future researchers the opportunity to build off of former studies in hopes of building on what the world already knows.

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between type of sports team and player convicted of a crime involving bodily harm off the playing field at the professional level. The research question of this study was:

What relationship exists between type of sports team and player convicted of a crime involving bodily harm?

The aim of this research was to present a deeper understanding of the relationship between professional sport participant and violence off field. This research allowed arrests and convictions of athletes to be analyzed.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Participants On-Field Sport Violence**

A common link between researches done thus far in regards to on field sport violence is that violence, aggression, and accidents differ in many ways depending on the sport being studied and the factors that influenced these variables during sport participation. Guilbert (2008) conducted a study that focused on nine sporting practices, which were; basketball, karate, table tennis, swimming, shooting, soccer, volleyball, judo, and tennis. These sports were then split into combinatorial groups based on violence and accidents, the researcher chose to use combat sports, team sports, racket sports, and individual sports (with or without weapons) when he compared 420 competitors through surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. Findings from this study showed that violence and accidents varied depending on the sport being practiced. Findings

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showed that in combat (judo and karate) and team (basketball, soccer, and volleyball) sports, violence was high and mainly physical which caused accidents on the field of play to be more serious (Guilbert, 2008). During combat sports the participants knew what to expect and how to react because the rules included and aimed to inflict violence or bodily harm on the opponent (Guilbert, 2008). Basketball and soccer don't necessarily expect a tackle, hit, or nudge since the aim of these sports were to win the ball and not inflict harm on an opponent (Guilbert, 2008). In comparison to basketball and soccer (the other team sports), violence in volleyball was found to be more verbal and mental than physical through insults and abuse (Guilbert, 2008). Tennis, table tennis, and swimming were deemed less violent and accidents were also less frequent and less serious as a result. Qualitative data retrieved by Guilbert (2008) revealed that these participants described violence as mental and verbal using foul language towards their opponent and/ or smashing their racket out of frustration. Lastly, shooting as sport resulted in violent accident not being likely to occur but when they did occur, they were serious (Guilbert, 2008). Guilbert's (2008) study facilitated the extent violence and accidents occurred in these nine sports used, helped promote civil behavior among these sports, and helped guide sportsmen's choice of practice based on their moral qualities in regards to violence and accidents.

In 2009, Kerr conducted a study that characterized violent incidents on field in Dutch Football and the motivation behind them through a proposed psychological theory. This psychological theory was known as the reversal theory approach, which included four pairs of mental or metamotivational states (Kerr, 2009). The researcher described metamotivational states as states of mind concerned with how a person interpreted their own motives at a given point in time. The four metamotivational pairs included, "telic-paratelic (serious-playful), negativistic-

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conformist (rebellious-compliant), mastery-sympathy (competitive-cooperative), and autic-alloic (egotistic-altruistic)” (Kerr, 2009, p. 44). For each metamotivational state combination there was a felt transactional outcome, which emerged during interactions between individuals and others (Kerr, 2009). The researcher stated that somatic and transactional emotions made up the felt transactional outcome and included relaxation, excitement, placidity, provocativeness, anxiety, boredom, anger, sullenness, pride, modesty, gratitude, virtue, humiliation, shame, resentment, and guilt (Kerr, 2009). Two incidents were examined in this study; Incident one play was stopped, the player was asked to leave the field but came back to kick the opponent in the head and incident two, the action took place during play and was deemed normal rules of Dutch Football, not including if he really meant to injure the opponent or not. According to Kerr (2009), two factors needed consideration in cases involving on field violence, which included intent to injure and consent. It’s understood that those who participate in contact sports consent to aggressive behavior and violent acts during the game. Being able to differentiate between sanctioned and unsanctioned aggression and violence is important in violence during play. “Having knowledge about the psychology involved could provide an additional perspective to making informed and consistent decisions about illegal acts on the sports field” (Kerr, 2009, p. 48).

Jensen, Roman, Shaft, and Wrisberg (2013) examined Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighter’s involvement during competitions. They recorded audio phenomenological interviews with seven male participants aged 24 to 36 years old and had at least three years of training experience in the MMA. These recorded interviews were later qualitatively analyzed to recognize themes. When conducting this study, Jensen et al. (2013) discovered that being inside

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the cage is completely different than being outside of the cage, described as “cage reality.” Injury and aggression toward an opponent was determined to be a normal part of competition and necessary to be successful. Jensen et al. (2013) explained that MMA fights measured the fighter’s mental and emotional toughness throughout technical skill, thought, and competitive experience. In order to be successful in some sports, competitors must be aggressive and/ or violent.

McKenry, Pappas, and Skilken Catlett (2004) explored athlete violence and aggression in hockey through five former college/ professional hockey players. The participants were interviewed to collect qualitative data on the nature of aggression and violence in sports competition. The researchers found that interpersonal aggression is common in hockey players on and off the ice. In hockey, violent behaviors are viewed as a crucial element for a team or individuals success and are mildly penalized and are reinforced by many, such as coaches, teammates, fans, media, family, etc. (McKenry et al., 2004). McKenzie et al. (2004) gave the example, “referees do not intervene in professional hockey fights as long as only two players are involved, and teammates and coaches judge players’ competence once more on their willingness to engage in violence than playing and skating skills” (p. 308). This statement provided similar results to Jensen et al. (2013) due to the findings showed that aggression and violence was in the rules of the game. Violence can at times be seen as a solution when tasks become more important than people (winning and injuring someone versus losing and not injuring someone). Athletes commonly conform to a violent sports ethic and can lead to athletes seeing this aggression as a regular position in their sport.

### **Participants Off-Field Sport Violence**



## The Relationship Between Sport and Off Field Violence

A variety of findings between off field studies have been analyzed to determine common and opposing links between the knowledge that already exists on this topic. The following literature reviews pertain to aggression and violence while not on the field of play.

Boeringer (1996), Groot et al. (2014), and McKenry, Pappas, & Skilken Catlett (2004) completed studies that involved alcohol use as a factor at some point during their process and found that aggression and violence became more prevalent when alcohol was added. Boeringer's (1996) process differed from the other studies because it was not primarily based on athletics and the findings did not support the notion that male athletes were more likely to engage in sexual behavior over those in fraternities.

Boeringer (1996) examined fraternal membership, intercollegiate athletic participation, and sex composition of living arrangements, which were researched to determine if there was a possible link between the participants and sexual coercion. The study included 477 male undergraduates who were enrolled in a large southeastern university. The participants were surveyed in a classroom setting. Boeringer (1996) observed their experiences with sexual aggression and coercion as well as their self-reported rape tendency and used a self-report questionnaire through non-probability sampling. Nine classes were used in a convenience sample of general education courses with permission from the instructor and therefore were not generalizable to the entire student body. Only 77 males (16.2%) of the sample reported intercollegiate athletic participation. Boeringer (1996) concluded that athletes scored higher on all dependent variables such as likelihood of force, likelihood of rape, coercion, drugs/alcohol, and rape but more so in the likelihood of force than any other variable in a no penalty situation. Although this study did not compare types of athletes in different sports Boeringer's (1996) findings did not support the belief that college males who participated in varsity athletics were

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more likely to engage in sexual aggression. Incidents of sexual abuse and aggression frequently go unreported and rarely inflict punishment on the aggressor. Finding out whom the aggressors were would help to educate them on ways to avoid and refrain from those actions.

McKenry et al. (2004) examined five former college/ professional hockey players that were interviewed to determine their perspectives on the nature of aggression and violence in sports competition as well as in social relationships. The five participants were asked about athletes' violence and aggression toward teammates, acquaintances, and female intimates. McKenry et al. (2004) analysis included participants' experiences, observations, and explanations of violence in hockey culture. The findings of this study indicated that interpersonal aggression was common in the lives of these hockey players, both on and off the ice (McKenry, Pappas, & Skilken Catlett, 2004). The qualitative data revealed that the participants identified athletes' tendencies to objectify women as a factor that contributed to the exploration of violence off the ice. The men included in the study defined sexual abuse of women to include verbal aggression and general disrespectful behaviors or treating women as sexual objects. The results allowed the reader to gain a better understanding of which context violence occurs off the rink in college and professional hockey player's daily lives.

Groot et al. (2014) examined 11 studies focused on collegiate, and professional/ former professional athletes. These 11 studies met the inclusion criteria as followed; (1) "the population under study was associated with college sports or used to draw conclusions about sports-connected populations," (2) the study topic and/or conclusions were largely on alcohol use, violence/ aggression, and sport, (3) the full text could be found in English, (4) the quality of the article followed the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP), and (5) the study was published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal (Groot et al., 2014). The articles obtained by the research

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group were then assessed in three separate rounds. Articles were included or excluded first based on their titles, then the articles abstracts were reviewed, and lastly, the full-text versions of the remaining articles were obtained and reviewed separately by two members of the research team. Quality assessment tools for quantitative studies were utilized during this process to rank each article's strength strong, moderate, or weak. Groot et al. (2014) used systematic reviews and meta-analysis guidelines to conduct their study. Based on the inquiries reviewed, alcohol consumption, violence, and sport participation gave the impression that they were related. The evidence showed that there was a higher rate of alcohol consumption and violence in athlete populations than non-athlete populations (Groot et al., 2014). It was recognized that specifying the type of sport rather than generalizing sport as one is an important factor. However, drinking led to negative consequences and many used it as a way to relieve pressure and stress from participation in competitive sport and led to a higher likelihood of negative consequences, including violence and aggression. This research addressed the effects of sports-based social identity on alcohol and consumption and violent behavior (Groot et al., 2014).

This next study did not include the use of alcohol or drugs throughout its study. However, it did have a connection to the main ideas presented in the previous articles due to athletes in a high contact sport choose a more aggressive response option when off the field. Cherek, Huang, & Lane (1999) and Groot et al. (2014) both referenced that specific type of sport the athlete plays is an important role in the degree to which aggression and violence occur.

Cherek et al. (1999) assessed how athletes who participated in high and low contact sports responded to aggressors in a laboratory non-sport setting. The evaluation included 16 participants, all males, aged from 15-18 years old who were recruited for "behavioral research" through newspaper advertisements. All of the participants involved has played team sports for at

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least two years. High contact sport involvement was known as participation where contact between two or more individuals was made and included Football (six participants) and Basketball (two participants). Low contact sport involvement was defined as little to no physical contact between two individuals and included Track and Baseball (each included four participants). Cherek et al. (1999) conducted urine samples at 8:30AM to ensure drugs were not being used by the contributors and were tested using the Enzyme Multiple Immunoassay Technique (EMIT). The EMIT process was important to detect if any of the participants were using anabolic steroids, which have been associated with aggressive behavior from those who have consumed it. During the research process, Cherek et al. (1999) used The Retrospective Overt Aggression Scale, The Lifetime History of Aggression Questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview to assess aggression histories, and verbal and physical aggressive behavior. This research concluded that high school athletes that participated in high contact sports more frequently chose an aggressive response option than those who participated in low contact sports (Cherek, Huang, & Lane, 1999). Cherek et al. (1999) summed up the importance of their study as, "Since society seems to be more tolerant of aggression in sports than non-sports contexts, our finding leaves some concern about the values and attitudes that our society teaches athletes to have toward aggression inside and outside of the sporting arena" (p. 1261).

Unlike the other studies reviewed in this section, Bergman, Galindo, Kimble, & Russo's (2010) study was conducted on what was currently known about aggression and violence in sports through empirical investigation. These researchers chose studies that included the following criteria; (1) involved some type of empirical analysis, experimental manipulation, and/or quantitative analysis, (2) presented a prevalent focus on athletes and/or behavior directly connected to athletes or performance, (3) when third parties were being used, the evaluation of

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aggressive and/or violent activities of athletes were analyzed through standardized evaluations or structured psychological assessment devices during the assessment process (Bergman, Galindo, Kimble, & Russo, 2010). Steroid use and the effects of performance enhancing substances were not included in this study. Bergman et al. (2010) included 32 on field, 21 off field studies, and 13 studies that focused on the perceptions of judgments on aggression. For the off field studies to be included they focused on athletes behavior not during participation in their competitive sport. Bergman et al. (2010) described the inclusion of off field as the following, “The term ‘off field’ is used as a proxy for any environment where athletic activities do not occur and the analysis that follows includes both self-report studies and direct observations of off-field aggressive acts” (p. 453). This study determined that athletic involvement was not consistently related to off-field physical aggression however, athletes have generally been more aggressive than non-athletes (Bergman et al., 2010). Bergman et al. (2010) discovered that aggression studies that focused on gender and level of competition had provided conflicted findings with no noteworthy difference between gender and type of sport. After the research on athlete aggression had been evaluated through its empirical strengths allowed future researchers to be better prepared in developing more effective research studies. These findings conflicted with the other studies due to athletic involvement not consistently having a relationship with off field physical aggression in any capacity (Bergman et al, 2010).

Aside from studies finding if aggression and violence was prevalent off the field by athletes, Moser (2004) examined professional athletes and violence against women in 2004 through three main case studies that involved Jason Kidd, Indiana vs. Mike Tyson, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts vs. Marcus Webb. Moser (2004) analyzed the three cases through how they were handled by law enforcement, teams, leagues, players, and fans. Moser

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(2004) stated, “The abuse of women by our sports hero’s becomes undeniably and embarrassingly prevalent. Sexual assault and domestic violence victims face the increasing burden of bringing a hero or superstar down from his lofty pedestal” (p. 84). Moser (2004) found that when fans booed and voiced their opinions toward players who were abusing their spouses or involved in violence the fans were criticized by the media and other players but not the athlete who made the wrong decision. The leagues and teams weren’t taking the actions necessary and efforts need to be made to ensure victim’s support and protection when facing public hero’s in court. These cases demonstrated the issues that surrounded crimes committed by athletes and why they required a special response. These cases assisted in understanding the causes of violence in the sports world and the obstacles those victims of athlete’s violence faced.

Moser’s (2014) findings were linked to the studies previously mentioned that showed a relationship between athletes and high aggression and violence rate. However, the study Moser (2004) completed differed from all of the studies, due to the case studies being examined were directly linked to athletes and acts of aggression or violence towards persons off the field of play. This study also discussed ways in which people and organizations were responding to actions of violence where no other study had done so.

### **Cultural Context**

Cases of violent acts off the field of play by professional athletes have been substantially prevalent in the past decade. It seems as though new cases of domestic violence committed by professional athlete pops up in the media every month. The following articles will detail cases that have recently come to light and the ways they have and/or are being handled both legally and by the leagues and teams.

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In 2013, Withers talked about athlete's unequal punishment and the acceptance of athletes committing violent acts off the field. This article described that professional athletes who have gotten themselves into criminal instances were not punished or held to the same standards of those in the general public by the leagues or criminal justice system. Another point the author made was that first string players are not punished as harshly as those who are third and fourth string players. Withers (2013) stated, "Professional athletes are not the only individuals with careers that are enhanced by a certain aggressiveness or that require brute strength" (p.1). The author later described that professional athletes were the only ones that the fans, the teams, and the leagues may justify it for, which could possibly lead to the reason conviction rates were so low for professional athletes. By condoning players who committed awful crimes it had become normal and acceptable. Players who committed these violent crimes could be celebrated a few years down the road for bringing their team a championship whereas a general person who committed the same crime would always have a tarnished reputation (Withers, 2013).

Recently, the National Football League had been a prime league name in media headlines for many of the leagues players being associated with violent crimes. Some of these players included but were not limited to Aaron Hernandez, Greg Hardy, Ray McDonald, Robert Reynolds, Dez Bryant, and Ray Rice. Defensive end, Greg Hardy of the Carolina Panthers was deactivated in week two of the 2014 NFL season (Riccobono, 2014) due to being convicted in July on two counts of domestic violence (Rovell, 2014). The Charlotte Observer News Paper stated that Hardy was accused of beating his ex-girlfriend and that he threatened to kill her. The judge found Hardy guilty, however, he appealed for a jury trial, which was postponed until early 2015 (Jones & Person, 2014). In August of 2014, the Carolina Panthers said they would wait to

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discipline him until the appeals were completed (Riojas, 2014). However, according to the November 4 issue of *The Observer*, Hardy was not expected to play in the NFL again that season and he agreed in September to be put on the commissioner's exempt list and received a paid leave of absence without disciplinary action against him by the league or team until the decision of his criminal actions have been made (Jones & Person, 2014).

Like Hardy, Ray McDonald a San Francisco 49ers player was arrested for a domestic violence dispute with his significant other (Riojas, 2014). According to CNN, his fiancé was 10 weeks pregnant when the altercation occurred at his home while hosting a party that left her with minor bruises on her arms and neck. McDonald posted bail and according to the article, the 49ers were waiting for the outcome of the criminal case against McDonald before determining whether to punish him (Riojas, 2014).

Another account of domestic violence involved Dallas Cowboys wide receiver, Dez Bryant. Bryant's mother called the police and Bryant later turned himself in and was charged with Class A misdemeanor domestic violence (Riojas, 2014). ESPN was credited by Riojas (2014) for saying, "Charges were dismissed in November of 2012 on the condition that Bryant undergo anger counseling and that he not be charged with a crime for the next year" (p. 4). Instead of suspending Bryant, the NFL enforced a strict set of guidelines that included a curfew, counseling twice a week and no alcohol (Riojas, 2014). When compared to Withers (2013) Dez Bryant was a prime example of a star player that received a lesser punishment for a crime he committed.

A.J. Jefferson, cornerback for the Minnesota Vikings was arrested on a felony account of domestic assault. His girlfriend claimed that she got into an altercation with Jefferson who yelled



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and grabbed her neck (Riojas, 2014). On the day of his arrest Jefferson was cut by the Vikings and received a four game suspension by the NFL, which was later lifted by Goodell for reasons not specified (Riojas, 2014). Jefferson finished the season playing for the Cleveland Browns and was later placed on the injured reserve list due to an ankle problem (Riojas, 2014). In March of that year he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of domestic assault and according to Riojas (2014) “was sentenced 90 days in jail, which was suspended to three days times served” (p. 3). The Seattle Seahawks signed Jefferson as a free agent for the next season.

According to McCarthy (2013), Aaron Hernandez was a rising star that was expected to make an average of \$5.7 million a year through 2018 and signed a two-year deal with Puma until Hernandez became the prime suspect in a murder investigation. The article explained that Hernandez pleaded not guilty and was being held without bail.

Through these cases it became obvious that there was no set way to deliver punishment to those who were involved in domestic violence cases. For Hardy, he was deemed guilty by a judge and although he was going back for a jury trial the NFL allowed him to receive a paid leave of absence. In McDonald’s case, the league and team were waiting to determine a punishment, if one at all depending on what charges were placed. Commonalities between Bryant and Jefferson’s cases were that they either admitted or eventually pled guilty to the accusations however there was no suspension or the league lifted the suspension. According to Riccobono (2014), “NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell has been criticized for not doling out appropriate punishments, and the league has been accused of not caring about women” (p. 1).

Although the NFL seems to be the main league in the headlines there have been other professional leagues with players that were charged with similar violent acts. Jeff Taylor, a

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player from the Charlotte Hornets NBA team pleaded guilty in October 2014 to misdemeanor domestic violence assault and malicious destruction of hotel property (Rovell, 2014). Taylor was accused of shoving a woman in a violent manner into a hall where she hit her head on a door on the way down then he punched a hole in a wall. Alcohol could've been a factor due to police reports saying he was "belligerent and uncooperative" (Rovell, 2014). According to Rovell's article, Taylor served a 24 game suspension, costing him \$199,689 that was placed to protect the NBA from the viewpoint of the public. However, Taylor's 24 game suspension was not set for all domestic violence cases but going forward the league will deal with occurrences case by case (Rovell, 2014). Taylor was sentenced to 18 months of probation, 26 weeks in a domestic violence intervention program, outpatient alcohol treatment program & perform alcohol sensor test daily for 60 days, random testing by the probation department, and is required to complete 80 hours of community service (Rovell, 2014). Rovell (2014) noted that if Taylor successfully met the conditions of his probation the domestic assault charges would be dropped, if not he would face further punishment from the league.

The NBA enforced a strict set of probation rules for Taylor to follow and suspended him from 24 games along with a salary penalty. This seemed to be more action towards suspension than the NFL had taken in the previous cases. However, if Taylor completed his probation correctly the charges would be dropped which was like the NFL in Bryant's case where they dropped his charges and later found out he was guilty.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The first concept is participant's violence in sport on the field. Violence on the field was defined and considered excessive when athletes acted and injured an opponent outside the boundaries or

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rules of the specific sport or after the whistle is blown (Guilbert, 2008). For this concept, variables were looked at that helped gain a better understanding of athletes on field performance in terms of aggressive or violent behaviors. These variables included major penalties, fines, game ejections, suspensions, time, participants, sportsmanship, contact, and the sport being played. For each sport, the degree to which these variables are considered a part of the game or going beyond the whistle were determined. The second concept is participant's violence in sport off the field. This was defined as any act of violence inflicted by the participant and rage that injured or physically damaged someone (Bergman, 2010). Variables that were considered included types of arrests that have caused bodily harms to others, being accused, being convicted, suspension and type of sport. Types of arrests were considered assault/domestic abuse, homicide, gun related, resisting arrest/disorderly conduct, battery, and other. Verbal abuse was not used in this study, this study focused on arrests and convictions. Outcomes were categorized as convicted, charges dropped, undetermined, not listed, and other. Intervening variables throughout this study included the data not being accessible and the random sample not including players who have committed violent acts. The knowledge on how these concepts came together was not identified, this was why the study was conducted.

### **Summary**

Randelovic and Zivanovic (2011) summarized what McKerny et al. (2004) talked about in the sense that the presence of violence in sport can be attributed to social and cultural values. The common theme between all articles is that violence, accidents, and aggression differ and can change depending on its context. Assertive behavior in sport is when a participant abides by the legal rules of the game to gain success while aggression in sport is defined as behavior that intentionally hurts or injures other players (Randelovic & Zivanovic, 2011). Cherek et al. (1999)

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determined that those who participated in high contact sports chose a more aggressive response and those who participated in a low contact sport chose a less aggressive response. Conflicted findings suggested there wasn't a consistent relationship between on and off field physical aggression (Bergman et al., 2010).

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between type of sports team and player convicted of a crime involving bodily harm off the playing field at the professional level. The research question of this study was:

What relationship exists between type of sports team and player convicted of a crime involving bodily harm?

The aim of this research was to present a deeper understanding of the relationship between professional sport participant and violence off field. This study was conducted with a cross sectional design because secondary data was collected at one time. Using secondary data made this study possible due to limited resources and allowed relationships to be identified from that data. The population for this study consisted of male professional athletes in the National Football League and the National Basketball League. To meet the inclusion criteria, the population must have played their respective professional sport within the last five years and consisted of current and former athletes.

### **Procedure**

When deciding whom to use for a sample of the population, the research used stratified random sampling. First, the number of participants that were sample was decided. Then the total number of participants per field were multiplied by 25% to come up with the following: NFL:

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424 people, NBA: 105 people per season. Twenty-five percent was used to pull a sample from the population. A random number generator was used to select the participants per sport maxing out at the numbers previously listed depending on their respective sport.

The data for this study was accessed through online sources that reported athletes' arrests and convictions through secondary, quantitative, and qualitative data that helped illustrate the number of athlete's with criminal records for each sport. After using a random sampler generator to find out who the sample included, online resources were then used to collect nominal information on players arrest history through the "[USA Today NFL Arrest Database](#)" and "[NBA Crime Lab](#)."

The descriptive statistics, which have been reported on included the highest average of athletes who participated in violence off the field. This research focused on relationships between on field participation and off field aggression and violence. A Chi-Squared Test of Independence could not be conducted due to an insufficient amount of data per cell.

### **Results**

Those sampled were taken from a population of male NFL athletes during the 2010-2014 seasons and NBA athletes during the 2009/2010-2013/2014 seasons (a span of five seasons). The data collected from the sample could not determine if it represented the population as a whole. Initially, the sample from the NFL included 2,505 participants and the NBA included 661 participants. After collecting data on the participants, those who didn't incur an incident during the season they were selected for were then deleted from the study. Due to this deletion, the number of participants included in the sample dropped to sixty-three with six of those

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participants showing up a second time due to incidents occurring in an additional season of their respective sport.

The total number of incidents collected from the sample throughout the five NFL and NBA seasons used was equal to 75, which included seven people who had more than one incident within a year but no more than two. The type of arrest response was “drug/alcohol related” with the rate 40 out of 75 incidents (53.3%). Followed by “assault/domestic violence” with a frequency of 11 incidents (14.7%) and then “other” with a frequency of 10 incidents (13.3%). “Resisting arrest/disorderly conduct” and “gun related crime” fell in the bottom three of arrest types in this study; 10.7% of incidents involved “resisting arrest/disorderly conduct” and “gun related crime” covered 6.7% incidents. “Homicide” was the arrest type that occurred the least with one incident (1.3%) recorded. Refer to Table I for further details:

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Table I

*Frequencies of Arrest Type*

Arrest Type	Arrest I		Arrest II	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	
Assault/Domestic Violence	10	14.7%	1	14.3%
Battery	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Homicide	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
Gun Related Crime	4	5.9%	1	14.3%
Resisting Arrest/ Disorderly Conduct	7	10.3%	1	14.3%
Drug/Alcohol Related	36	52.9%	4	57.1%
Other	10	14.7%	0	0.0%
Total	68	100.0%	7	100.0%

The mode of outcomes included, “not listed” at 26.7%, “other” at 24%, and “undetermined” at 22.7%. Following was “charges dropped” with 16% of outcomes. The lowest outcomes were “convicted” at 7.4% and “plead down” at 4.4%. Refer to Table II for further details:

Table II  
*Frequencies of Outcome*

Other		
Total		

The sample of the two sports was compared to the number of incidents that occurred under each type of arrest; percentages were used. The arrest type data showed that drug/ alcohol related incidents was the mode for both the NFL and NBA participants. The sample of NFL participants incurred a slightly higher percentage of assault/domestic violence arrests than NBA players with a difference of 3.7%. The sample from the NBA had 20.8% of incidents come from resisting arrest/ disorderly conduct while the NFL sample had 5.9%, which caused a difference of 14.9% between the two sports. Incidents involving gun crime were recorded for both sports; more incidents occurred from NFL participants with a difference of 3.6%. No incidents of battery were recorded for either professional sport. One incident of homicide was documented under NFL while the NBA had none. Refer to Table III for further details:



Table III

*Arrest Type by Sport*

					3.2%
					0.0%
					2.0%
					3.6%
					15.0%
					11.1%
					4.9%
Total	51	100.0%	24	100.0%	39.8%

There weren't enough responses per cell to be able to run the chi-squared analysis. The variable types used in this study didn't allow for meaningful condensing.

### Discussion

The data collected from the sample did not show a positive relationship between type of sport and player being convicted of a crime involving bodily harm. Instead, the data collected showed that the most frequent arrest among the sampled group was drug and alcohol related. It was recorded that eight out of 51 incidents (15.7%) were due to assault/ domestic violence from the NFL sample and three out of 24 incidents (12.5%) from the NBA sample. With a variance of 3.2%, no significant difference compared by sport was recorded.

## The Relationship Between Sport and Off Field Violence

The findings from this study corresponded with those from Bergman et al. (2010). Athletic involvement was not consistent in the relationship with off field physical aggression in any capacity (Bergman et al., 2010). The data collected from the sample in this study did not indicate that those who participate in professional sport are more likely to be convicted of a crime involving bodily harm. McKenry et al. (2004) found that interpersonal aggression was common in the lives of the hockey players sampled both on and off the ice which contradicted the findings from this study. This study did not compare professional athletes to non-athletes, however, there was no significant difference determined through type of sport. Groot et al. (2014) found that a higher rate of alcohol consumption and violence in athlete populations than non-athletic populations and the type of sport is an important factor. Lastly, Cherek et al. (1999) findings concluded that those who participated in high contact sports chose an aggressive response more frequently than those who participated in low contact sports.

### **Limitations**

Many factors affected the outcome of this study. One limitation that occurred was the access to data through the lack of available data and reliable data. Very few secondary resources were found specifically for professional sport arrest databases. Another way this study was limited by access to data was when collecting full active teams rosters throughout the selected five seasons. Some athletes who weren't active were listed throughout archived rosters. The data was pulled off of sources online and the researcher had to follow what the databases and websites provided. If the databases spelled a participants name differently than how the roster had the name spelled an incident could have been ignored due to spelling error.

## The Relationship Between Sport and Off Field Violence

A chi-squared analysis could not be conducted due to an insufficient number of responses per cell, the variable types used in this study did not allow for meaningful condensing. The small sample size collected negatively impacted the study and didn't allow for further testing (i.e. Chi-Squared Test of Independence). Time constraint was a limitation to this study, which caused the researcher to choose a lower sample number that could have hindered the outcome.

### **Delimitations**

The researcher made decisions throughout the research and data collection period that could have affected the outcome of this study. One delimitation was the number of seasons selected and the specific time period, which the data would be gathered from. The researcher could have selected a higher percentage for the sample to pull from the population, for example, 35% instead of 25%.

### **Recommendations**

To expand on this study, it was recommended that more than five seasons per sport were selected as well as increasing the percentage of the population that made up the sample. Doing this would increase the number of incidents per sport with hopes of filling each cell to run a Chi-Squared test to determine if a relationship exists. It became clear the importance of ensuring accessible data to avoid panic and disturbance with the study. It has been recommended that if arrest databases are accessible for other professional sports that those sports be added to the study to allow for a broader comparison among more variables and contact level.

**Conclusion**

Due to the limitations of this study, the main research question could not be answered. However, the data collected showed that incidents that have occurred in the sample of NFL and NBA athletes were most frequently arrested on drug/alcohol related crimes. There were no significant findings among the outcomes of each incident. The sample from the NFL and NBA showed that arrested for incidents involved in assault/ domestic violence crimes were not significant enough to make a determination or draw a conclusion if there is a direct relationship between type of sport and player convicted of crime involving bodily harm.

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