

Linsanity: Lightning Strikes Again
By: Joel Katz

For the past few weeks, some guy named Jeremy Lin has taken the sporting world by a storm. For those of you that just rolled your eyes at me, please let me explain myself. I'm not here to worship the dude—you can just turn on ESPN for that—but the recent Lindemonium surrounding the new basketball icon deserves some Linsplaining. Why is everyone so Linfatuated? If you are one of the people that someone managed to stay clear of the all-consuming wave of Linsanity, one: I congratulate you, and two: Jeremy Lin is an Asian-American basketball player for the New York Knicks who cracked their starting roster seemingly out of nowhere, leading the team to a Linprobable (improbable) winning streak. After graduating from Harvard, he was signed into the NBA as a free agent in 2010. Lin seemed destined to be a career benchwarmer, until he was given an opportunity to shine. He stunned the world with his Linccredible talent, including an absolutely Linsational knack for driving to the basket.

I apologize for the obnoxious wordplay. The question is: why all the hoopla? Let's keep in mind, we've seen this before. Remember Tim Tebow? Much like Lin, Tebow led the NFL's Denver Broncos to a winning streak this year, and dominated the spotlight of his sport. Sports media tend to overreact to stories that seem marketable and buzz-worthy, but the Tebow craze brought the hype to a whole new level. Never before had one athlete gone so quickly from obscurity to being the single most talked about person in all of sports. Even today, the one thing the casual football fan remembers from this past season is Tebow-Mania—even more than that big Madonna concert all those Patriots and Giants fans went to see. But now, to see another athlete skyrocket so suddenly to icon status is truly astounding. It's the sports equivalent of seeing Hailey's comet twice in the same year. It just doesn't happen.

So how could lightning strike the same place twice? The answer is multi-part: First, both Lin and Tebow made a significant contribution to his team, and each team won games as a result. In fact, both men turned around struggling teams by seizing the spotlight and taking control of their game.

In Tebow's case, the quarterback led a desperate Denver Broncos team to six consecutive wins and a playoff berth, highlighted by a huge upset victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers in overtime. Along the way, Tebow engineered several longshot fourth-quarter comebacks, gaining popularity and feeding the media-hype machine with each one.

Lin, once cracking the starting lineup for his New York Knicks, took his team on a seven-game winning streak, catapulting the Knicks from an 8-15 record to playing .500 ball. In this shortened season, each NBA game is more critical this year, making Lin's epic run even more remarkable. During this stretch, Lin managed to score 20 or more points in six straight games, with a career-high 38 coming against Kobe Bryant and the Lakers.

The contributions Lin and Tebow have made to their teams during games are undeniable, but they are only small factors in each man's rise to super-stardom. Both men also

have unique, defining characteristics that set them apart from other athletes in their sport, and these characteristics make their stories even easier for the media to glorify.

For Tebow, his proud display of his strong Christian faith has generated tons of publicity. He unknowingly incited an internet sensation called “Tebowing” with his pre-game ritual of kneeling in prayer. Much like “planking,” “Tebowing” occurs when fans take pictures of themselves kneeling in prayer in extreme places, unique situations, or really anywhere. Tebowing aside, Tebow’s faith only contributed to the buzz surrounding his amazing comebacks, even prompting some theorists to cite divine intervention as the cause for his (or His...?) success.

Although Lin is an outspoken Christian himself, religion is not the main reason for his fame. Lin’s Asian heritage (he’s Taiwanese) is what adds even more hysteria to his Linderella story. He is one of very few players in the history of the NBA to be of Asian descent, none of which have received as much publicity as Lin. This makes for an even more compelling storyline which complements Lin’s dramatic turnaround of the Knicks.

Both Lin and Tebow have seen a huge rise in their popularity due to these unique qualities. But another factor altogether is the key for the athlete-phenom epidemic to take hold.

The third factor in the perfect storm that has spawned Linsanity and Tebow Mania is the rise of social media, specifically Twitter. Becoming more and more popular among the masses, Twitter is used by people, including pro athletes and fans alike, to post real-time updates, opinions, thoughts, questions, concerns, or musings about anything and everything (i.e. “tweet”). Even if you are not a Twitter user, I think you can see where this is headed.

It seemed like every single Sunday during Tim Tebow’s unbelievable run that Twitter would explode with shocked, excited, belated, and simply dumbstruck tweets about the God-on-Earth performing fourth-quarter miracles.

Similarly, the 11-day span of Jeremy Lin and the Knicks’ seven-game winning streak was riddled with awestruck tweets about Lin’s continuing success. While at first many people thought Lin’s success was simply a fluke, people soon realized that this was not the case. Lin’s following grew exponentially with each of the Knicks’ seven wins in a row, as Twitter exploded nearly every night to the theme of “Lin does it again!” The term “Linsanity” was coined as an attempt to describe the incredible, unexpected hot streak for Lin and the Knicks.

Twitter is a powerful tool, and it is responsible for accelerating the hype surrounding Lin and Tebow and blowing it up tremendously. Trending topics on Twitter spread faster than a gasoline-soaked wildfire, with Linsanity and Tebow Mania as prime examples. During the reign of the two athletes (Lin’s might not be over, especially if the Knicks make the playoffs), nobody could escape Twitter, or the internet, for that matter, without seeing or hearing the hype.

These factors have allowed for the Tebow-Lin Effect to have a colossal, and in some opinions, a devastating impact on today’s sports atmosphere, and on society itself. It is highly possible that another athlete in the near future could generate a comparable hype-storm if he is

unique enough to stand out amongst the crowd, while being good enough to make a significant impact on his team. The Twitter thing will take care of itself, trust me. Let's just hope to god it's someone on the Red Sox.

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