

When Sports Go Too Far

-Dan Rosenberg

Playoff time in any sport breeds intensity and fanaticism. With the Bruins being competitive and defending Stanley Cup champions, fans all over New England were on the edge of their seats for the first round of the playoffs. This intensity can bring out the best in fans, as everyone is united behind their team. But it can also bring out the worst; the racist backlash over Joel Ward's series winning goal marred the Capitals' victory, and brought shame to Bruins Nation and Bruins fans all over the country.

Joel Ward is an African American hockey player playing for the Washington Capitals. He also scored the deciding goal in overtime of game seven against the Bruins, securing the Capitals' second round berth. While this was a period of letdown and heartbreak in Boston, for Ward, it should've been a time of celebration and joy. Unfortunately, social media blew up with racist and hurtful messages to Ward, mainly from Bruins fans. These messages were uncalled for and, if they were said in person, could be grounds for a discrimination lawsuit. Instead of being able to celebrate his personal victory, Ward's achievement was marred by the unrestrained anger of fans who could not maturely deal with defeat.

This ability to anonymously send messages is one of the greatest weaknesses of social media and the internet. Since there is no threat of consequences, people feel free to spout hateful and discriminatory messages. Sites like Twitter and Facebook, while often used positively, need to improve on what is allowed to be said, because the disgusting words sent to Joel Ward are unacceptable in any medium, in person or on the web.

The other very disturbing piece about this story is the clear presence of racism in sports. There is no way a man should be made to feel inferior because of his race, especially over a simple game. It is important to step back and look at what is being said; and it's quite unbelievable that people sent a man death threats because he scored a goal in hockey. That's something that needs to change, and it reveals the ugly side of American society.

Bruins fans everywhere should be ashamed of their actions towards Mr. Ward, and everyone should be sending this man an apology, whether or not he eliminated our beloved team. There should be no place in our culture for this flagrant racism, and until it's eliminated, the integrity of sports will always be questioned.

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