

Too big to be bullied Community Comment January 30, 2014 Mike Goldsby

When I hear the word bully, I always think of kids on a playground. But some recent events challenge that perception.

Jonathan Martin was an offensive lineman for the Miami Dolphins. He's six foot five, three hundred and twelve pounds, twenty four years old, and in really good shape. But he quit the team because he was bullied.

Just to be clear, the term bullying gets used alot and not everyone understands it. Being bullied does not mean having a disagreement or even a single fight. Bullying is a behavior pattern that reflects an imbalance of power. This can be achieved through physical abuse or intimidation, emotional abuse, even intellectual intimidation. It typically represents a higher social status person or persons exerting inappropriate influence on someone with less status.

So, in the school yard, an older kid picks on a younger kid, or a bigger kid picks on a smaller kid. But in the adult world, bullying is not just based on size or age. It is based on status and power and a sense of privilege.

In the Dolphin locker room and on the field and off, Martin was being harassed and threatened by several senior players, especially fellow lineman Richie Incognito. I have seen a couple of videos of that guy and he has the wrong last name. There is nothing incognito about his behavior. They left insulting and threatening e-mails and messages. They even extorted 15 thousand dollars from Martin for a trip to Las Vegas, then didn't include Martin on the trip.

Martin snapped, resigned and went public. Team management appears to have taken it seriously and Incognito has been suspended for his conduct.

I know some of you are thinking that being bullied is just a part of life. That it comes along with being on the playground or being in the locker room. That kind of thinking is wrong and it is what allows bullies to keep on bullying.

Martin is a role model. He knew he didn't have to put up with it and he got out and spoke the truth.

A recent example of a poor role model will be playing this Sunday; Seattle Seahawks Cornerback Richard Sherman. I'm not sure if you got to see his unsportsmanlike tirade following the 49ers game but in 30 seconds Sherman demonstrated what is wrong when people think their position entitles them to say anything.

I have seen numerous long explanations from Seahawks supporters rationalizing or minimizing Sherman's comments. They think it is important to point out that Sherman is very intelligent with a degree in speech communications. His professors must be proud. They also point out that he supports charities and foundations. That's a tax write off and does not excuse poor conduct.

Some more poor conduct followed the State of the Union Address. New York congressman Michael Grimm was being interviewed on camera by a TV reporter, who took the opportunity to question Grimm's ethics allegations.

What happened next got caught on tape. Grimm threatened to throw the reporter off of the "blinking" balcony and said he would break him in half like a child. He sounded kind of serious.

What do Grimm and Sherman and Incognito all have in common? They all issued public apologies. And they each had their behavior made public. That may be an important part of calling out a bully and showing that bullying is not a normal part of life.

**This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment**