

3. Pamphilon continues to be an active documentary filmmaker. How do you think this decision will influence his ability to make films? To the relationships he will need to develop with the sources for his documentaries?

CASE 5-C

JOE MIXON: HOW DO WE REPORT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SPORTS?

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In 2014, Joe Mixon was a five-star football recruit who had signed on to play for the Oklahoma Sooners football program. During the summer of 2014, Mixon was in Norman, Oklahoma, for offseason workouts and practices with his new college team.

In July, Mixon was out with some of his teammates at the Campus Corner restaurant in Norman. According to witnesses, Mixon and his teammates were harassing one female student, Amelia Molitor, and one of her friends before they followed them into the restaurant. Mixon and Molitor exchanged words, with the incident escalating after Molitor shoved Mixon and then slapped him in the neck.

Mixon, a 6-foot-1 running back, punched Molitor in the face, knocking her to the ground and causing her to hit her head on a table nearby. Mixon then left the restaurant while someone helped Molitor get back on her feet. Molitor suffered broken bones in her jaw, cheekbone, and face. Molitor had to have her mouth wired shut and claimed that for six months she could not feel the left side of her face.

Following the incident, Mixon was charged with a misdemeanor but agreed to a plea bargain of a one-year probation, cognitive-behavior counseling, and 100 hours of community service. Mixon also was suspended by the team for the 2014 season. In effect, his suspension ended up becoming a redshirt year, a normal event in the lives of many athletes at major universities, where a player gets five years of education for four years of competing.

After Mixon fulfilled the terms of his plea, he was allowed to return to the team in 2015. Mixon performed well on the field, and the Sooners won the Big XII Conference championship in 2015 and 2016.

Nearly two years after the incident, Molitor filed a lawsuit against Mixon. In it, Molitor accused Mixon of negligence, willful and wanton

misconduct, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. The courts threw out the first two charges but allowed the later charge to proceed.

On Dec. 16, 2016, Mixon decided to allow the video of his attack be released to the public. The video can be seen on YouTube. The Oklahoma Supreme Court had ruled earlier in December that the city of Norman had to release the video of Mixon's attack before Dec. 26, 2016, or file an appeal. Mixon decided to release the video himself before the deadline.

Following the release of the video, Sooners head coach Bob Stoops changed his stance on Mixon, saying the initial suspension was not severe enough and dismissal from the program would be the response if the incident occurred today. However, he did not bench Mixon.

The release of the video, combined with the comments from Stoops, led to numerous sports journalists and broadcasters commenting on the situation. Legendary broadcaster Brent Musburger, while calling the Sooners Sugar Bowl game against Auburn a few days after the release of the video, commented on Mixon's situation early in the game. He quoted the OU coaching staff as saying that Mixon was "doing fine." He then added a comment about Mixon's future, saying "let's hope that this young man makes the most his chance and goes on to have a career in the National Football League."

Musburger was immediately challenged on social media. He was deemed as "tone-deaf," and his response was seen as "troubling." Some tweeted that it was time for him "to sign off" after his comments. By the third quarter of the Sugar Bowl, Musburger was forced to respond, and he took an adversarial stance with his critics, saying "I happen to pull for people with second chances."

A long-time sports anchor for the ABC affiliate in Dallas, Dale Hansen, responded to Musburger's comments with his own "Unplugged" segment. In it, Hansen dismissed the criticism of Musburger saying "What was he supposed to say?" Hansen, referencing the NFL's early mishandling of domestic violence cases, claimed: "We've already decided that hitting a woman is bad, just not *that* bad if you're good and Joe Mixon is really good." He added that the Auburn fans who booed Mixon would have cheered for him if he were on their team.

Micro Issues

1. The major charges against Mixon were dropped, in part when video indicated that Molitor was a participant in the violence that ended

with the punch. If he did not break the law, is this a story? Justify your answer.

2. Was Musburger right to bring up the incident and suspension in the context of a major bowl game? Second, should he have responded to the public criticism live on the broadcast or waited until after the game was over?
3. Should the local media have been more aggressive in seeking out the video?

Midrange Issues

1. Dale Hansen's comments included him saying that supporting Nixon because he had made only a single mistake was like supporting "someone who kills someone—but only once." Critique this comment.
2. Does it make a difference that Hansen's "Unplugged" segment is clearly editorial commentary? Would your answer be different if it were in the regular sports segment?
3. In this case, Twitter responses clearly changed the narrative in the third quarter. Should audience reaction during a news or sporting event be allowed to influence the direction of the coverage?
4. At what point does Nixon's past cease to be newsworthy to sports reporters? At the end of his suspension? At the end of his collegiate career? When he turns professional?

Macro Issues

1. *USA Today* called Musburger "tone deaf," basing that charge mainly on the fact that Musburger doubled down on his comments in the third quarter when he had the chance to walk back the words. Were they correct? Justify your answer.
2. There is constantly a debate in sports about giving players who run afoul of the law a second chance. Does the media decrease the likelihood of these "second chances" working if the original story stays alive?
3. Discussions about Nixon's act and Stoops's handling of the situation covered thousands of hours of sports talk programming. What role does the 24/7 all sports network play in the coverage of Nixon?