

BAD ATTITUDE OR GOOD ATHLETE?

AFTER THE PANTHERS' Superbowl loss to the Denver Broncos, quarterback Cam Newton walked out of the postgame press conference less than three minutes after it began. He was called "sore loser" and worse.

He's not the only pouting athlete.

Late last year mixed martial artist Ronda Rousey, the UFC's Bantamweight Champion, refused a pre-match glove touch with Holly Holm, her challenger, who went on to defeat Rousey in the second round.

Are they poor sports or fierce competitors?

Mike Dixon, who works with professional athletes and also coaches youth sports, says fans often don't get the full story.

"People don't realize what ultra competitors these guys are at this level," says Dixon, a partner at Intrepid Marketing Group of Raleigh. "That's what separates a lot of them. A lot of them have the physical abilities; it's that mental edge.

"As a parent, you look at it and say, 'Man, I wish Cam had handled that just a little different.' At the same time, if you look at his body of work over the past, all the things he does for his community in Charlotte, it's amazing. You don't want to let one situation ruin his reputation."

That reputation includes giving away touchdown footballs to kids after each game. (To clarify a rumor, he is not fined for each ball—that's true only if a player throws a ball into the stands.) Newton's Sunday Giveaway program is part of the Cam Newton Foundation, which helps youth in Atlanta and Charlotte.

At 26, maybe Newton is just young and immature. Some say the structure of the press conference was unprecedented in that he could hear the Bronco's responses at the same time he was answering questions.

Carolina was a strong favorite, which made the loss particularly tough, says Dixon, who's sympathetic.

"Cam's still young; he's still learning. It takes time to learn and mature and see some of these developments. It's one of the toughest defeats he's had. The media and the press built this thing up like Carolina had no chance of losing."

Newton has had no regrets. "You show me a good loser, and I'll show you a loser," he told reporters in Charlotte a few days after the press conference. "If you want me to conform, I'm not that guy. If you want me to be that type of person, I'm not that. This league is a great league with or without me. I understand that. I am my own person. I take pride in that."

Fierce competitor or poor sport? Tell us what you think at raleighmag.com.



AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

ALTHOUGH NOT COMMENTING about the Panther's recent press conference, Duke's athletic director Jon Jackson tells us what Duke tells its players.

Q. How do you advise players to respond to the media on good days and bad days?

A. We tell them to be themselves, think about the question that is being asked before they answer and respond in a way that properly represents themselves, their families, their teammates and their school. They also are reminded that they are in control of the situation, not the other way around.

Q. What are the struggles involved since these players are so young and often so driven and tied to the end result, which is, essentially, what makes them such good players?

A. Consistency in all phases of a student-athlete's development – in competition, in the classroom, in the community and in responding to the media – is important. Whether their efforts result in victory or defeat, players should strive for excellence and understand they are in a process. Handling themselves in a classy and positive manner, regardless of the result, is a key part of that developmental process. For the most part, we believe our players understand and embrace that.

