

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF HEISMAN TROPHY

WINNERS: COVERAGE 2000-2015

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ABSTRACT

In 1935 the inaugural Heisman Memorial Award was presented at the end of the college football season and continues to serve as a symbol of athletic excellence for winners. The publicity can also earn schools media attention, and maintaining the relationships with the media has been an important strategy in sports public relations. This research then delves into the thematic elements of media coverage for the Heisman winners over the past 15 years and searches for commonalities among sources, themes and other elements in regards to coverage.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1935, New York's Downtown Athletic Club (DAC) members appointed a Club Trophy Committee to present what would be the inaugural Heisman Memorial Award at the end of the college football season. Originally named the DAC Trophy, the award was presented to the University of Chicago's Jay Berwanger, and by 1936 the trophy was renamed after DAC athletic director John W. Heisman (Heisman Trophy Balloting, Heisman Trust Mission Statement).

Over 80 years have passed, and the award has become a symbol of achievement and success, awarded every December to the most outstanding college football player whose performance best exhibits the pursuit of excellence with integrity and whose character epitomizes diligence, perseverance, and hard work (www.Heisman.com).

Today, the Heisman is not only a symbol of athletic excellence for winners, but the publicity can also garner positive effects for the winning school. For example, a study conducted from November 10, 2012, to January 6, 2013, by Joyce Julius & Associates concluded that Johnny Manziel's Heisman win generated more than 1.8 million media impressions, which translated roughly into \$37 million worth of media exposure for Texas A&M (Kahn, 2013). This media exposure included news mentions in major national print, television and Internet outlets (www.12thman.com). In another study, Joyce Julius & Associates stated that athlete recognition for awards like the Heisman can be worth up to nearly \$5 million a month in media exposure for both the player and school (Arnold, 2013). In another example, Baylor spent \$10,000 marketing

2011 Heisman winner Robert Griffin III, and received an estimated \$250,000 in earned coverage for the University (Hoglund, n.d.). As noted by Hoglund, such campaigns help engage Heisman voters and solidify a brand in order to reach the goal of having a candidate win the Heisman. The residual effects of an athlete winning the Heisman can also increase donor funds as in 2013, when Baylor received a donation of \$35 million, the largest gift by a living graduate, that was to be used for the business school and new football stadium (Grief, 2014).

Although receiving the award is a great honor, there are certain contingencies as to how a winner is chosen. Not only are the candidates' game statistics taken into consideration, but 870 members of the media, former Heisman recipients, and the public, whose votes are aggregated into one formal vote for each candidate, elect a recipient for the award (Heisman.com). Schools can choose to create different strategies for presenting an athlete and marketing him in a way that shows his distinct talent on and off the field. These Heisman campaigns are aimed at keeping the candidates relevant to voters and the media while demonstrating how the candidates exhibit the qualifications embodied in the trophy. Schools can spend between \$3,500 to \$12,000 on promotional campaigns because of the intrinsic value the Heisman brings to recruiting other athletes, garner alumni support, and boosting ticket sales (Helitzer, 2001; Salmon, 2005).

Building and maintaining relationships with the media has been an important strategy in the world of sports public relations because sports have become big business and because the way professionals have used public relations has evolved to follow those trends (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). Șerbănică & Constantinescu (2016) observed that although public relations has been considered a traditional tool for promotion and communication, professionals who take a special role in sponsorship and endorsement opportunities can make the role of a public relations professional more sophisticated. Sports public relations is a managerial

communication-based function that identifies and evaluates the relationship between key stakeholders and a sports organization in order to foster desirable relationships (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). Sports organizations present local, national and international events and programs, which garner a variety of different publics to communicate with. Currently, sports public relations is seen as a sector of the marketing department of sports organizations, and public relations professionals are focused on communicating with fans and promote the celebrity status of athletes (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016).

Meanwhile college football has become a staple in American culture, business, economics and wealth, which has created lucrative opportunities among schools and teams: an estimated \$400 million of revenue is generated among bowl games alone (Miller & Washington, 2014; Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). Ruihley, Pratt, & Carpenter (2016) found that these challenges include updating stakeholders in real time due to the development of social media.

Another major challenge concerns the Heisman Award process itself. Some say the award is overrated and others state that the Heisman winner cannot truly represent the best player in the country because athletes of different conferences may play different roles for teams whose playing style and competitiveness differ (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009). Other criticisms state that Heisman awards usually go to those who “merely fit the profile” of those most likely to be awarded: quarterbacks or running backs from a top-ranked team who regularly appear on television (Glier, 2003; Schechter, 1997; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009). Others question the qualifications of voters: Every voter is incapable of seeing all the games featuring every potential recipient, especially those West Coast games shown at later times, when the East Coast voters are less likely to watch (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009; “Heisman atrophy,” 1994). This forces voters

to rely on performance statistics and media coverage because they are more comprehensive and accessible (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009).

These criticisms lead to the importance of public relations campaigns during the Heisman race. The sports information director (SID) is generally in charge of creating these campaigns that could set the standard as to what key ideas and messages are sent to voters by the schools (Salmon, 2005). The anticipated outcomes of these Heisman campaigns are for the schools' candidates to win, therefore each campaign must connect with important stakeholders and inform the voters and media why a specific athlete is deserving of the Heisman (Salman, 2005).

Despite the impact a Heisman win can have on a player, his school, and his football program, there have been little to no studies that analyze and compare the coverage of the winners. This study will examine the media coverage of each Heisman winner, from 2000 to 2015, to determine the common themes that emerged regarding the eventual winners of the Heisman Trophy. This is of particular interest given the past decade in which at least three Heisman winners—Tim Tebow, Johnny Manziel, and Jameis Winston—seemed to have garnered an unusual amount of media attention for their performances on and off the field, for better and for worse.

The importance of this research is to help develop insights into Heisman media coverage in relation to the athlete and schools that the athlete represents. The role of public relations, especially in sports, has become part of the marketing sector of collegiate, professional and amateur sports (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016), but when searching for examples of media coverage of the Heisman in respect to the themes and content, there is little to build upon. Analyzing the media coverage can also reveal strategic intent of schools when promoting a certain athlete for the Heisman. The campaigns and marketing strategies used by universities to

promote a candidate can potentially influence the thematic elements and language used by the media in their Heisman coverage that in turn can potentially influence voters.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been very few studies in regards to the Heisman Trophy and the media representation of the candidates. Instead, researchers have explored other routes of the Heisman campaign, such as the public information director and his or her role in creating the campaign (Warnke, 1992). Others look to the voters of the awards and ask their opinions of sports information directors of sports programs to study the legitimacy of campaigns and its effectiveness with voters (Salmon, 2005). Additional research dives into the importance of public relations and marketing in the world of sport because it helps build the relationships with stakeholders (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016), while others use case studies to view single elements and effectiveness of the campaign as a whole (Cuneen, Schneider, Gliatta & Butler, 2006; Seltzer and Mitrook, 2009).

In particular, Salmon (2005) used legitimacy theory to better explain what sports public relations institute or school do when planning for an award campaign like the Heisman. While interviewing the voters of college football awards, Salmon (2005) examined the forms of promotion that are most persuasive, how credibility and knowledge of a sports information director plays a role in persuasiveness, and how legitimacy creates a more persuasive message in promoting candidates for an award. Some of the voters reported that because of the improvement of technology, voters were able to watch highlights and performances of candidates, but those highlights do not “tell the story” of the candidate, so the responsibility of providing those details lies with the sports information director (Salmon, 2005).

In another instance Warnke (1992) analyzed the characteristics of Heisman candidates, the schools they represented, and promotional materials released by the schools and found that media exposure is heavily affected by three factors: performance, individual athlete, and team. Those three factors magnify the amount of both controlled media disseminated by the schools and earned media generated by the outlets. If there is a lot of media attention then schools, especially large powerhouses, may not need to use a lot of controlled media, such as press releases, media kits and other tools to help promote a candidate for the Heisman (Warnke, 1992). Generally large powerhouse schools tend to have high revenue and value that is related to the program. For example, Forbes estimated that the University of Texas Longhorns is valued at \$152 million, with revenue of \$121 million. Other schools at this level include Notre Dame and The University of Alabama. The top 20 football programs together earn an annual average of \$92 million (Forbes, n.d.).

While observing several cases of big division and small division schools, Warnke (1992) observed how the SID uses his or her position to create pre-season buzz around potential candidates by creating controlled media such as newsletters, handbooks, videos, faxes and posters. Warnke (1992) also explains that uncontrolled media consists of newspaper articles, broadcasting commentary and public appearances that require a third party to make a decision of the content that is to be created, but what is not shown within the study is how both the controlled media created by a university can help influence or have commonalities among the uncontrolled media, thereby generating earned coverage.

One thing to note, in looking at the communication efforts of the SID in the case of San Diego State, sports information director John Rosenthal consulted sportswriters across the country to gather their opinions on effective promotional material and learned that a majority of

voters prefer informational campaigns and are turned away from glitzy over-the-top promotional materials (Warnke, 1992; Rosenthal, 1992). For example, voters tend to think press conferences, websites and emails with bullet points and simple “fast facts” are the most useful for Heisman promotion, while over-the-top materials like bobble heads and ties were negatively received (Salmon, 2005). Voters are more inclined to respond to campaigns, especially those from smaller schools, when it “fits the environment of promoting a candidate for the Heisman” and “shifts back to the attributes of an ideal candidate,” reinforcing the attitude that the candidate is worthy of the award (Warnke, 1992). And while smaller schools focus on information driven preseason campaigns, big-name schools use the preseason to remind schools of their powerhouse teams and players, especially when promoting a candidate whose position generally isn’t considered for the trophy. Once the season starts, the campaign is geared more toward the team and player factors, and schools tend to create information-based materials in order to keep candidates relevant to voters and the media.

Seltzer and Mitrook (2009) examined media stories from the AP college football polls and *Rocky Mountain News* and applied agenda-setting and framing theories in examining expert opinions in the media. Ultimately, there was some evidence to suggest that expert opinion may have some influence on how media coverage frames the Heisman Trophy race, which could affect the outcome of voting, but that relationship is confined to the last few weeks of the race. Seltzer and Mitrook (2009) stated that there is a difference between expert opinion and media coverage and conclude that there is a possibility that opinion leadership of experts can mold media coverage of the Heisman race and candidates, especially during those final weeks.

Others have examined specific campaigns relative to their competitors such as Cuneen, Schneider, Gliatta and Butler (2006), who studied Ben Roethlisberger’s Heisman campaign

strategies and challenges. Although Roethlisberger played football at a Mid-Atlantic Conference (MAC) university, Miami University, from 2000 to 2003, a school that has not largely been recognized for having athletes in the Heisman race, the athletic department director of marketing noticed Roethlisberger's talent and decided to put together a campaign that matched those of highly publicized schools. Miami's *Where Have You Ben* campaign focused on news releases sent to Heisman voters, placed Roethlisberger on regional and national radio and television shows, and broadcasted ESPN special features to the public in order keep Roethlisberger's name and brand in the media (Cuneen, Schneider, Gliatta & Butler, 2006). Contenders from well-known programs and other conferences then launched their campaigns for the trophy, which decreased the amount of coverage Roethlisberger received as a potential Heisman candidate. Despite having a great season, then, Roethlisberger was overlooked as a potential winner of the Heisman possibly because of the status of the Mid Atlantic Conference, which consists of what are considered to be mid to major universities that do not have the same enrollment or resources as bigger Division 1 schools (like Texas or Alabama) and thus are limited in financial resources and media exposure (Cuneen, Schneider, Gliatta & Butler, 2006).

Others studied specific aspects of Heisman campaigns such as Sanderson, Barnes, Williamson & Kian (2015), who investigated the Twitter social media campaign of Florida State University Heisman candidate Jameis Winston and the negative reaction that ensued. In conducting a thematic evaluation of over 1200 tweets, researchers explored a social media campaign that was part of a public relations campaign for Jameis Winston. Although there was an intent to tailor the campaign to FSU fans and the media, the #AskJameis live questionnaire led to online participants hijacking the forum and responding with sarcastic and critical tweets about Winston's legal issues (Sanderson, Barnes, Williamson & Kian, 2015). The researchers

concluded that although there was an intention to engage a variety of stakeholders, organizations must be aware of the repercussions of making a public figure available to live public scrutiny and anticipate a variety of reactions when doing so.

Public relations' role of relationship building (Ferguson, 1984) is integral to the wider system of sports marketing communications (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). When it comes to campaigning for the Heisman, public relations professionals use a variety of materials such as emails, press conferences, gimmick items and salient messages to help persuade the voters of a candidate's worthiness for the Heisman (Salman, 2005). Looking at coverage of winners can help determine if there are common thematic elements of the media or if the media portrayal of athletes differs depending on the candidate. Focusing on the winners can help show the common characteristics of the winners and the school that they represent.

Research Questions

- RQ1: What are the thematic elements that emerge from the content of coverage of Heisman winners from 2000 to 2015?
- RQ2: How does the coverage differ among the winners?
- RQ3: Is there evidence of a Heisman campaign within the media coverage of the Heisman winners from 2000-2015?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study will consist of a thematic analysis of the media coverage of each Heisman winner for each of the first 16 years of the Heisman competition in the 21st century, which allows for a broad scope of schools that represent different NCAA football conferences (BIG10, PAC12, SEC, and ACC). Similar to that used by Seltzer and Mitrook (2009), the time frame for this study within each year will begin July 1 because it is approximately one month before the first season game and extends past each year's December Heisman Trophy award, which usually occurs around the second Saturday of December.

Similar to Sanderson, Barnes, Williamson & Kian (2015), who explored 1214 tweets to determine how the #AskJameis Twitter public relations campaign was hijacked by audiences by conducting a thematic analysis through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the present study is designed to reveal common themes and ideas of media coverage following a Heisman winner. This method allows researchers to create a strategy in going over data, reviewing it, and analyzing it in a comparative way that allows ideas and themes to be brought out. As prescribed by Daymon and Holloway (2011), the collection of data and subsequent analyses should happen "iteratively" (p. 126), allowing for connections and contrasts to be made. In the present study, those findings will be examined to determine broad descriptions of the relationship between each Heisman season's media coverage and each year's Heisman winner and then between and among the coverage of the 16 Heisman winners across the time period of this study.

A census of media coverage of those candidates was examined and compared for thematic content in the second highest circulated sports magazine, *Sports Illustrated* (SI) and the top two highest circulated print news sources featuring a daily sports sections, *The New York Times* (NYT) and *USA Today* (USAT) (Cision). The reason SI will be used instead of *Athlon Magazine*, the highest circulated sports magazine, is because the databases used (Proquest and Scout) have full access to SI, whereas there are no documented databases with previous articles pertaining to *Athlon Magazine*, including Athlon's website. Similar to the reasoning used by Kian, Vincent, & Mondello (2008), USAT and NYT were selected for this study because both newspapers regularly contain sports coverage that are nationally distributed throughout the United States.

The ProQuest Newspapers database will be used to collect the articles for *The NYT* and *USAT* whereas The University of Alabama's Scout search system will be used to collect the data from *SI*. Because the time frame of this study encompassed the rise of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, to name a few of the leading social media platforms, as well as mobile apps, print media was selected to ensure consistency across the study in comparing coverage from 2000 to 2015.

Every article that fits within each year's July-to-December timeframe and that pertains to each Heisman winner was pulled, entered into a spreadsheet, and analyzed. This system allowed for accuracy in recording an article's citation information, capturing quotations, entering notes and analysis, and sorting the entries to detect emerging themes and trends in coverage by year, by athlete and/or by outlet. The search terms used in each year to find these articles were the athletes' names: Chris Weinke, Eric Crouch, Carson Palmer, Jason White, Matt Leinart, Reggie Bush, Troy Smith, Tim Tebow, Sam Bradford, Mark Ingram, Jr., Cam Newton, Robert Griffin

III, Johnny Manziel, Jameis Winston, Marcus Mariota, and Derrick Henry. A total of 1,530 articles were found across the three outlets. Of those, 46 appeared for 2000, 90 appeared for 2001, 95 appeared for 2002, 101 appeared in 2003, 112 appeared for 2004, 145 appeared for 2005, 105 appeared for 2006, 92 appeared for 2007, 101 appeared for 2008, 71 appeared for 2009, 126 appeared for 2010, 65 appeared for 2011, 74 appeared for 2012, 88 appeared for 2013, 105 appeared for 2014, and 114 appeared for 2015 (See FIGURE 1).

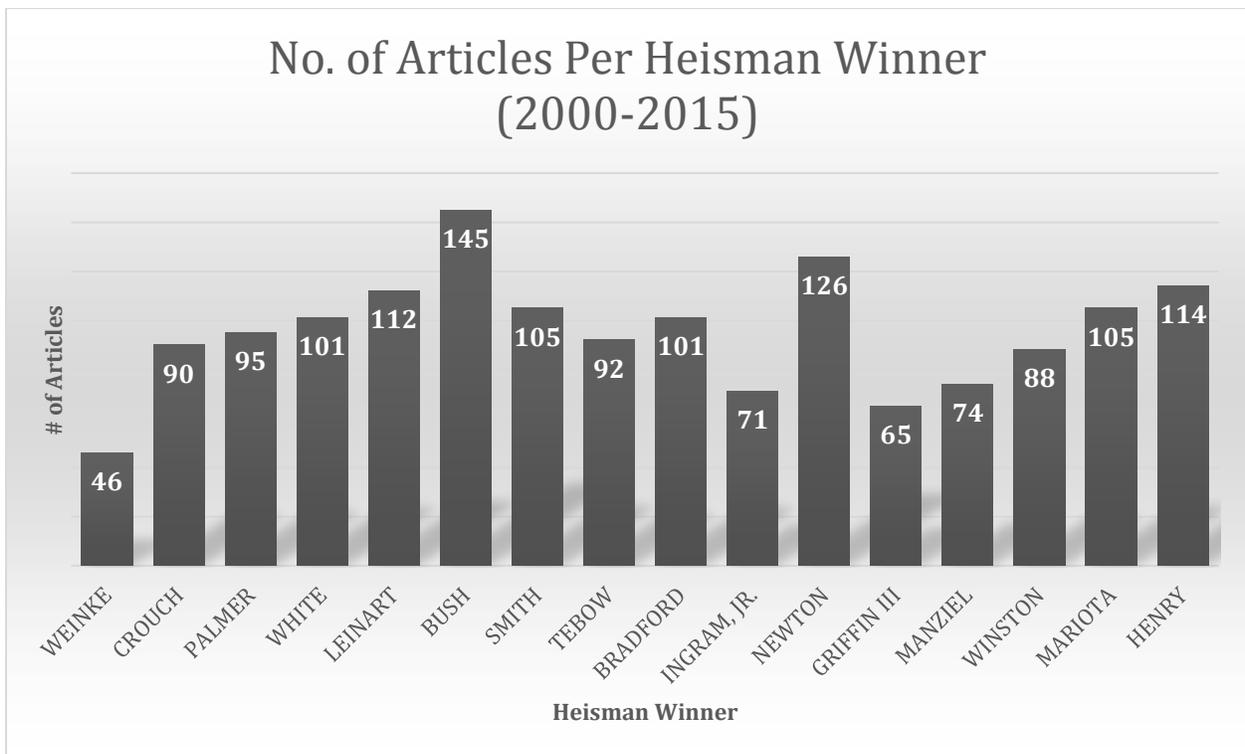


FIGURE 1

The Southeastern Conference had the most winners (5), and the PAC12 came in second with four winners (See FIGURE 2).

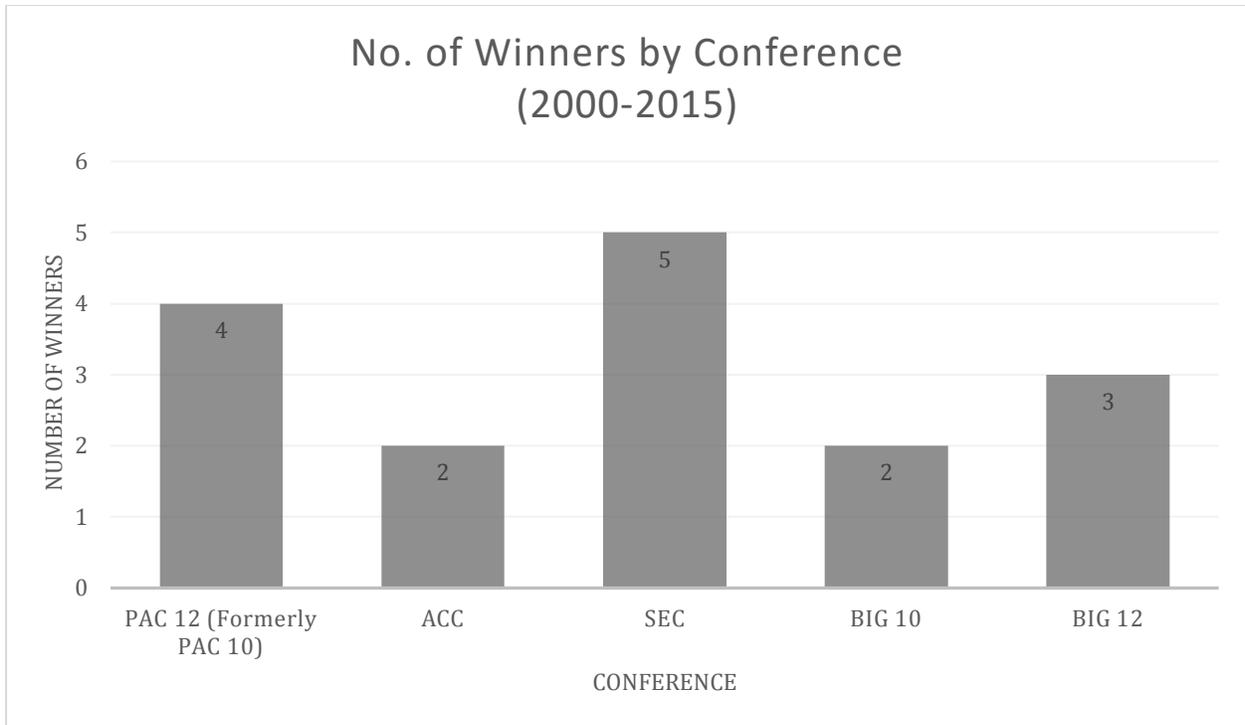


FIGURE 2

Each article was read and organized in a spreadsheet with the following information: author, publication date, outlet, article title, text copy of the article, summary, notes, and notable quotes or excerpts. Notable quotes and excerpts included quotes from teammates and other coaches that described the Heisman winner (See Appendix B). Some of those descriptions include personality, play style, competitiveness, athleticism or anecdotes of the winner. Some of the notes included common descriptors among the winners as well.

CHAPTER 4

COVERAGE OF THE HEISMAN WINNERS

Chris Weinke, 2000

Starting at the turn of the 21st century, Florida State University of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) was undefeated and on the quest of defending its 1999 national title. The team returned with several of its players, including three-year starter and 28-year old senior quarterback of the football team Chris Weinke who, according to USAT, needed only 707 yards to become Florida State's all-time Passing Leader ("Weinke starts run at school record where they know passing game well", 2000). During the time frame, The NYT was the first to report Weinke's premature bald spot and age, 28, which was considered abnormal and older than most collegiate athletes (Noble, 2000).

After a short stint playing as an infielder for the Toronto Blue Jays, a professional baseball team, Weinke returned to college and pursued football. His teammates were well aware of his age and often teased him for it, but his athletic ability and leadership skills were not questioned among coaches and teammates. Quoted in The NYT, Florida State's center Jarad Moon said, "A lot of times it seems the offense and defense are separate teams. But everybody looks up to Chris."

Talks of Heisman candidacy made its way in early August as preseason media coverage prepared fans for the upcoming season, with roster changes and statistics from the previous season among all three media outlets. By late August, Florida State had played its first game against Brigham Young where Weinke set career highs for attempted completions and went 32

of 50 for 318 yards (AP, 2000a). Joe Drape of NYT, designated Weinke as an “old man” at Florida State when compared to Virginia Tech’s “superman” otherwise known as Michael Vick (2000a). In the same article, both quarterbacks were said to be among an elite and diverse group of men who play the “most important position in football” and that playing that position shows maturity and toughness.

With the season beginning to progress some questioned if Weinke could lead FSU to another championship, and Weinke was quoted as saying, “Now . . . there's a big amount of pressure on me from people who say, 'Can he do it again? We'll find out what he's really all about'” (Wieberg 2000). During the 2000 season, USAT cited a few coaches and their opinion on the importance of the quarterback and its ever-growing need of leadership and talent to face more complex defenses (Wieberg, 2000). By late September, Weinke was considered a “flashy” among former FSU quarterbacks in The NYT and was leading the No. 2 team in the country in extending its winning streak to 16 games (AP, 200b; Drape, 2000b). Weinke was injured mid-season when he sprained his left foot after stepping in a hole and reinjuring it later in the game. It is not until October 2 when the first round of Heisman updates was published in USAT that Weinke was considered on pace to the Heisman with Michael Vick leading the race (Whiteside, 2000a). Even with an injured ankle, Weinke insisted he was healthy enough to add to his 26-1 record as a starter and raised his Heisman Trophy caliber statistics after completing 64 percent of his passes for 1,478 yards and 12 touchdowns (Drape, 2000c).

Throughout the season Weinke was regularly described as old, but his position and age were also used to describe his ability to lead and make plays. In USAT’s Heisman race updates, Weinke continued his steady pace throwing for a school-record 536 yards and five touchdowns against Duke. Despite putting up great numbers, the season was still early and in mid- October

the 2000 Heisman Trophy race was still wide open, with six solid candidates still in the running (Whiteside, 2000).

Weinke had another noteworthy performance against Clemson after a 27-for-43, two-touchdown, 521-yard performance against Clemson (Whiteside, 2000c). His performance helped elevate him to the top of the list in USAT's Heisman watch and gave the FSU offense the title of Weinke & Co. (King, 2000). During the final weeks of November, Weinke was making a run for the Heisman and preparing to play in his final home game against No. 4 Florida (Carey, 2000).

In that final home game Weinke was the country's leading Division I-A passer with 3,814 yards and 30 touchdowns (Nobles, 2000). Weinke was quoted in saying that rather than going to the National Football League early, he returned for his senior year because he loved the game. He closed out the season with symptoms of the flu but said: "There's no sweeter way to go out than to beat Florida at home. Actually, having the flu might have helped me. I felt totally relaxed out there" (Nobles, 2000).

SI's Tim Layden reported that jokes don't cease because a 28-year-old college football player is simply too inviting a target to leave alone (2000), but there was nothing but respect and reverence in the locker-room for Weinke. Freshman quarterback Chris Rix said, "When I'm with him, I cut down on my messing around and try to be as mature as possible. I try to keep my focus, because I want Chris to respect me and be proud of me" (Layden, 2000). Weinke's "brilliant" senior regular season career began by missing six years of football to play baseball but after returning to Florida State, Weinke suffered a ruptured disk in his neck that nearly ended his career and caused him several months of painful rehabilitation. (Layden, 2000 & Schechter, BJ, 2000). Viewed as a curiosity among fans and even teammates, "the Old Guy" known as Chris Weinke was said to have had one of the best college quarterback careers in history while

bridging the generation gap by playing young to ease tension and old to exert leadership (Layden, 2000).

Heisman race updates put Weinke in the lead, who even with the flu, remained a frontrunner. By late November, the Heisman race was primarily between two quarterbacks, Florida State's Chris Weinke and Oklahoma's Josh Heupel, with some voters arguing that Weinke was too old to win the award (Whiteside, 2000d). On the other hand, SI reported that for the first time in a while, voters and fans went into the Thanksgiving holiday with the Heisman Trophy race wide open due to Virginia Tech quarterback Michael Vick going down with a sprained ankle in late October (Kim, Mravic, Bechtel, & Yaeger, 2000).

The race left voters sifting through candidates' worthiness including Weinke's, who became the front-runner. Despite being the oldest person on the team, teammate Tarlos Thomas said, "He's the difference in all our wins. He's our father," but according to Albert, Weinke's age is his only and primary drawback (2000). In early draft reports, SI's Peter King quoted several NFL scouts who observed Weinke and his abilities and although some worried about his age, speed and agility, one scout was quoted in saying that, "his age isn't that big a deal, because he doesn't have much wear and tear on his body" (2000). Weinke continued as the front-runner of the Heisman race in late November after leading the team to a 30-7 victory against Florida (Whiteside, 2000d).

On December 7, 2000, The NYT's Joe Drape concluded that the Heisman was a two-man race between Weinke and Oklahoma's Josh Heupel because both quarterbacks shared the common trait of audacity (2000e). The race was down to the two men, after Vick fell of Heisman updates after an ankle injury in late October (Whiteside, 2000c). In Weinke's circumstance, according to Drape, his worthiness of the award came when he enrolled at Florida State as a 24-

year-old freshman after 6 years of minor league baseball, and in 1998 he broke his neck late in the season, but persevered through a “grueling rehab” to order to return in 1999 and help lead his team to an undefeated season and the national championship (2000e). Weinke was awarded the Heisman on December 9, 2000 against Heupel with 1,628 votes to 1,552.

After the win, coverage revisited Weinke’s 6-year stint with the Toronto Blue Jays, his ability to overcome adversity and injury, and his financial success with real estate investments he made with his salary from the minor leagues (Whiteside, 2000e). The media coverage concluded with a precursor to the matchup between Heisman winner Weinke and the runner up Josh Heupel as Florida State prepared to defend its national title against Oklahoma. The overall coverage of Weinke surrounded his age, from his mature features and role on the team. Players and teammates thought of him as a leading figure because of it.

Eric Crouch, 2001

Fresh off a two-loss season to Oklahoma and Kansas State and injury, Eric Crouch was ready to lead Nebraska (of the Big Ten conference) to a redemption season for the championship title and consideration for the Heisman Trophy (USAT staff and wire reports, 2001). The USAT Coaches’ poll agreed, ranking Nebraska at number 4 in the Top 25 poll and listing Crouch as an early contender for the Heisman since he was one of the best pass-rushers in the country (2001). Expectations were high as even Nebraska Coach Frank Solich was quoted as saying the team expected Crouch to have a great season (King, 2001). Crouch was expected to forego his senior season and enter the NFL draft, but instead elected to stay that extra year in hopes of leading his team to the national championship. “It’s always been a lifetime goal of mine,” he said. “It would be a great way to finish out my career with a Big 12 title and a national championship, but a lot of things will have to factor into that” (Whiteside, 2001a).

His diligence and persistence in winning can be attributed to Nebraska tight end Tracey Wistrom who said, "He's [Crouch] just amazing. If anybody has any reason to brag or boast about the things they've done here, it's Eric. And he is probably the last person to ever do anything like that. He's really team-oriented. He wants to do what's best for this program. That's the way he approaches everything'" (King, 2000). As for his stance among other quarterbacks, Texas' quarterback Chris Simmis was quoted as saying that, "As far as quarterbacks go, Crouch is like the salty veteran of the group. He's been in a lot of big games and has had a lot of success. He probably feels like we're some young bucks coming up'" (Whiteside, 2001a). Kelly Whiteside (2001a) called Crouch the "golden boy" of Nebraska as a new age of college quarterbacks who were making way to surpass the previous class that included the 2000 Heisman winner Chris Weinke.

The season officially began with a 42-14 victory over Troy State and media coverage honed in on stats and game replays in both The NYT and USAT. After reporting an in-depth preseason overview and team standing, SI did not begin to deeply cover the Heisman race and season until early November when Nebraska was paving its way to the national championship. The season continued with matches that include Notre Dame, where it was stated that despite Crouch being comfortable with his personnel, there were some vulnerabilities within the Nebraska Huskers team. But that didn't seem to matter and Nebraska won the game, dedicating the win to Head Coach Frank Solich after his father had passed away (Lapointe, 2001a).

Nebraska season coverage continued with updates written in brief game reports in The NYT that included some of Crouch's stats, such as his completions, attempted throws and touchdowns. By late September, it was reported that Crouch scored on a 95-yard run, the longest in school history, and rushed for a school quarterback-record 191 yards as No. 4 Nebraska beat

Missouri (Associated Press, 2001a). In the game against Iowa State, Crouch set an N.C.A.A. record for rushing touchdowns by a quarterback, scoring 4 times (Associated Press, 2001b). Before continuing their season and playing against Baylor, Iowa State Coach Don McCarney said Crouch was a legitimate Heisman contender and that "he is as complete a quarterback as I have seen" (Lapointe, 2001b). Mid-October Heisman updates stated Crouch's candidacy was steady as he led the team to victory over Baylor and Texas Tech (Associated Press, 2001c & Whiteside, 2001b).

According to Whiteside (2001c), Crouch's deciding factor for the Heisman would be how he plays up against Nebraska, the reigning national champions. There was no doubt that Crouch was the man leading the Huskers to victory, but New York Times' Joe LaPointe (2001c) stated that Crouch could have difficulty playing against Oklahoma due to his surgically repaired throwing shoulder. That proved to be wrong as the Cornhuskers clinched another victory against the Sooners with a trick play called the 41 Flash Pass, and Crouch solidified his candidacy for the Heisman (Murphy, 2001a). The Saturday after Thanksgiving led to an unexpected loss to Colorado, jeopardizing Nebraska's hopes of going to the national championship (Associated Press, 2001c). The devastating loss had some reporters such as Whiteside (2001g) doubting Crouch's worthiness to win. Crouch himself was disappointed and said, "the quarterback has a lot to do with whether you win or lose" ("News summary", 2001). Although some said he was worthy of a nomination, some said that the loss raised questions about his ability to continue in the post season if given the chance.

Finally, the nominees for the Heisman were announced and journalists from the analyzed sources made their case for the candidates: Joey Harrington of Oregon, Ken Dorsey of Miami, Rex Grossman of Florida and Eric Crouch of Nebraska ("News summary", 2001). The outlets

reported that the voting would be one of the closest races in Heisman history and that voters were unsure of who to vote for; a week before ballots were due only 90 of the 923 had been submitted (Drape, 2001a; Whiteside, 2001f). Schools began last-minute efforts that included Nebraska's e-mail campaign to voters (Whiteside, 2001f). USAT was the only to mention the last-minute efforts of schools and their candidates. On the other hand, Drape states that Crouch won the Heisman as an 11th hour favorite because of what he would consider an "outstanding career" and senior status (2001b). In addition to the Heisman, Nebraska found itself back in contention for the national championship against Miami when the final Bowl Championship Series ratings were released (Weiberg, 2001b).

After the Heisman win, media coverage switched to reporting on Crouch's path to the Heisman and how he was mature beyond his 23 years. "I had to grow up pretty quick," Eric Crouch said, "I had to take on some responsibilities the man would normally do" (LaPointe, 2001f). At the time, Crouch had a fiancée and a 2-year-old daughter to support, which is why he seemed mature for his age; even teammate Mic Boetter said he has a mature taste in music (Lapointe, 2001f). LaPointe also described the quarterback as projecting a canny and confident air while his "facial features are dark, even and almost delicate in repose" (LaPointe, 2001f). On top of graduating with a degree, Crouch took some time to sing in musicals over the previous two summers to raise money for charity.

As Crouch prepared for the national championship, journalists stated that it was getting hard to tell which was more impressive, the first impressions or the lasting impressions. The first impressions belonged to Miami, the team Crouch and the Huskers were to soon face in the national championship and the lasting impressions belonged to Nebraska teammates, coaches and fans who "still shake their heads at what an average Joe their hero has remained despite

being probably the most popular figure in the state” (Moore, 2001). Most of the media coverage ended with what would soon be a Nebraska loss to Miami in the national championship and predictions of Crouch’s potential role in the NFL (Moore, 2001). Moore predicted that Crouch would be best suited as a wide receiver or kick returner in the draft, but Crouch stated, ““I think scouts will look at consistency, accuracy and arm strength, and I feel like I have all those things. . . I just have to go out and prove myself”” (Moore, 2001).

For this candidate coverage focused less on Crouch’s character and more on his game stats and play and team effort. Week by week, both The NYT and USAT updated their Heisman race updates. Each update listed five or six candidates and a one-to-two sentence summary of vital stats. By mid season, the race alternated between the three or fourth quarterbacks that would soon be invited to the Heisman ceremony.

In Crouch’s case, his reported statistics included attempted passes, completions, touchdown passes, and interceptions. His coverage was based more on team success whereas the coverage of Weinke, the 2000 Heisman winner, was not only about team success, but also about the role of the quarterback in a leadership position and his unusually older age. Coverage did not pick up until late in the season around early to mid-November, when Crouch was leading Oklahoma to a redeeming season compared to the Sooners’ previous year. SI’s coverage also remained very minimal. In some cases, Crouch was featured solely in the picture of an article surrounding weekend roundups of games or a game day stat was featured within the caption.

Carson Palmer, 2002

In 2002, Carson Palmer returned for his fifth year to the University of Southern California (USC), a school in the Pacific Athletic Conference (PAC 10). In preseason projections and rankings, journalists analyzed Palmer saying that he must deliver and improve his skills

(Michalis, 2002). Usually known as Tailback U, because of its dominant rushing game, USC had fallen short in earlier seasons and without a balanced rushing game, Palmer had struggled previously in leading the Trojans to a winning season (Timanus, 2002a).

At six foot, six inches, Palmer was reported as being maddeningly mediocre despite having the arm strength, and a 235-pound body of a pro, leading the Trojans to a 16-16 season (Whiteside, 2002a). His performance could have been attributed to his personal beliefs and performance when quarterback coach Steve Sarkisian said, “When we first got here, Carson's confidence was in the dirt. It seemed as if he felt he was the reason this program wasn't succeeding. This year he's so much more relaxed. He's always in attack mode” (Murphy, 2002). During the first game of the season, Palmer had an erratic first half against Auburn, but changed pace and played “flawlessly” in the second half (Moore, 2002a) With the season opener, The NYT reported that with the lack of a running game, the Trojans had to rely more on Carson Palmer (Drape, 2002a).

As the season went on, the Trojans continued their winning run with a victory against Colorado and the once labeled inconsistent quarterback completed 22 of 30 passes for 244 yards and a touchdown (Maisel, 2002). Palmer was reported to have had a slow start that helped lead to the downfall of USC against Kansas State. Palmer helped lead No. 18 USC to victory against Oregon State and but faced a lost against Washington State (Timanus, 2002b). With this uneven record during USC's season, it was not until early November that Palmer was placed on the Heisman radar before the game against Stanford (Timanus, 2002c). Palmer was reported to be continuing his finest season and would soon become the all-time conference-passing leader with 290 more yards (Timanus, 2002d).

During the mid-November Heisman updates, Palmer was said to be on pace toward earning the award when compared to other potential nominees, after he threw for two touchdowns and ran for another in the victory against Arizona State (Whiteside, 2002b).

Palmer insisted that his senior season was one of personal redemption as he continued to lead the Trojans into national prominence (Moore, 2002b). Moore also reported in USAT that Palmer, who at the beginning of the season was nowhere near the Heisman radar, had a chance to make his way into receiving a nomination (2002b).

When presenting his case as to why Palmer was qualified for the Heisman award, USAT's Eddie Timanus reported that Palmer had a greater experience and advantage in creating his stellar senior year (2002e). Palmer went on to become the division leader in passing and held the record for attempts and completions in the Pacific-10 (Whiteside, 2002b).

By late November, the Trojans were ranked No. 3 by The NYT computer and No. 7 in the Associated Press poll and were being led by Palmer, who during the last seven games of the season had thrown 23 touchdowns (Arkush, 2002a). His dominance and leadership were noted in the NYT, USAT, and SI as to why Palmer had been brought in as a late-season candidate for the Heisman. Palmer was finally living up to the hype of being one of the "most heralded quarterbacks" in the country and proved his athleticism by leading USC to a 44-13 victory against Notre Dame, where he completed 32 of 46 passes for 425 yards and four touchdowns (Hack, 2002; "Head to Head," 2002; Whiteside, 2002c).

Draft predictions put Palmer as potentially either the first quarterback or first pick overall in the NFL draft since he could lead the Trojans to a 10-2 record against one of the toughest schedules in the country, while also throwing for 3,639 yards and 32 touchdowns (Murphy, 2002). Murphy also predicted the final results of the Heisman race, since there were 921

members eligible to vote. A large portion of those voters also had most likely not seen Palmer play because they were on the East Coast and rarely were awake to watch Palmer play. Murphy (2002) also noted that there could be some hesitation to vote Palmer as the Heisman recipient of because no one expected him to have a stellar season, including USC, which did not produce a Heisman campaign or even place him on the cover of the Trojan's media guide.

By the end of the season, Palmer was seen as the likely winner of the Heisman because of his ability to lead the Trojans to the Orange Bowl, where they were to face Iowa. But the New York Time's Joe Drape said that the competition among other candidates may "rival the closest Heisman race, in 1985, when Auburn's Bo Jackson beat Iowa's Chuck Long by 45 points" (2002c).

Kirk Herbstreit (2002) of USAT noted that Palmer's talent was "breathtaking" and that his worthiness for the Heisman stems from him earning it on the field and taking a team with a 6-6 record and leading them to a 10-2 season, top-five ranking and invitation to the Orange Bowl. There was very little mention throughout the season about Palmer's personal life and character. The coverage focused in on Palmer's leadership on the field and his ability to put the team on his back, since the formerly known Tailback U lacked a strong running game. Herbstreit also noted that Palmer's candidacy might have been hurt because most of the games played were after 10 p.m., a time where many voters were asleep or not watching (Martzke, 2002).

On December 15, 2002, Carson Palmer became USC's first quarterback to win the Heisman, saying, "it will always be Tailback U, I was just fortunate to win it as a quarterback" (LaPointe, 2002). After Palmer won the Heisman, SI's Peter King reported on the opinions of NFL scouts and how they were to draft Palmer, noting some of his attributes, including having

good feet for his size, an average deep arm, and good accuracy, all of which could help him if the Bengals choose him with the first overall pick in the draft (2002).

The coverage closes out with the competition between a preview of the game-day match up for the Orange Bowl between USC and Iowa. Other coverage included summaries of the sports year in review and mentions of Palmer winning the Heisman and predictions for the NFL draft, which projected both Palmer to go in the first round and be ranked highly among other quarterbacks who could forego their senior year and enter the draft, including Eli Manning (Mississippi) and Rex Grossman (Florida) (Forbes & Gordon, 2002).

Jason White, 2003

From leading the league in pass efficiency to falling to Kansas State, much of Jason White's coverage was plagued with reminders of his past injuries and how he had to overcome them. He was the leader of the Big 12 Conference's Oklahoma football team. Jason White's coverage began in The NYT with the recovery of his torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) from the 2002 season. Previously he had torn his left ACL during the 2001 season even as Oklahoma relied on him and his weak knees to lead the team to the Sooners' second national championship in four years, having been ranked at No. 1 before the season began. (Anderson, 2003; Thamel, 2003; USAT and ESPN Board of Coaches, 2003). A local from Tuttle, Okla., White chose the Sooners over Miami and before his senior year season could start, he was aware of concerns about his health and his ability to lead a football team. His career was full of ups and downs, from losing the starting job to other quarterbacks, to injuries and to being named team captain (Whiteside, 2003a).

White was fully aware of how his injuries had affected his athletic abilities because he was no longer able to use the speed that made him a running quarterback, but he remained

positive before the season saying, “I used to have real fast feet, and I was always in a hurry--in my drops, in my reads, everything. Now everything has slowed down for me. I'm more relaxed” (Anderson, 2003). Sports writer and Heisman voter Kelly Whiteside (2003a) even questioned whether or not Oklahoma could win title with a quarterback who had two surgically repaired and rehabbed knees.

In the season opener, White went 23 of 35 for 248 yards and led the team to a victory over North Texas, but his health and durability would be tested against Alabama in the next game where the Sooners overcame the Tide with a victory (Associated Press, 2003; Glier, 2003a; Timanus, 2003). White continued to lead the Sooners’ undefeated record, and by the fifth week of the season, White tied a team record by throwing five touchdown passes for a career high of 384 yards (“College Football,” 2003). In the early October Heisman watch, Whiteside was listed as a steady candidate among the four players.

The Sooners defeated No. 11 Texas, and White began to deter doubters after coming into the game as the country’s third-most efficient passer, completing 17 of 21 passes for 290 yards and 4 touchdowns, numbers that NYT’s Joe Drape labeled as Heisman contenders (2003). By late October, White ranked first in the nation in passing efficiency (180.2), and completed 68.9% of his throws while throwing 20 touchdowns and three interceptions (Murphy, 2003). His season highlights drove home his Heisman candidacy as he was placed in the lead of Heisman updates with 53% of the votes in a Heisman viewer’s poll (Martzke, 2003)

When discussing the Heisman worthiness and how candidates become front-runners, Ray Glier reported on the opinion of Heisman voters and the formula for winning. In that story, Heisman voter Dennis Dodd said, “the player with the best chance plays for a top-10 team, plays on television, plays well late in the season and plays a skill position” (Glier, 2003c). Although

White was having a phenomenal season and his team remained undefeated, there were other candidates whose stats were considered better and whose team rankings exceeded that of the Sooners (Glier, 2003c). That meant that White had more to lose in respect to the other candidates. Glier stated that voters tended to ignore the gimmicks and school-sponsored campaigns and focused more on the best player on the best team (2003c).

When November started, White was still a strong contender for the Heisman after being ranked second nationally in passing efficiency, throwing for 2,288 yards passing and having a completion percentage of 67.4 (Glier, 2003b). The Associated Press reported that White may have sealed his win for the Heisman after breaking a school record and throwing five touchdowns in the first half of the game against Texas A&M (2003). Before playing Texas Tech, White was the passing efficiency leader who had thrown 36 touchdowns and six interceptions and after playing Texas Tech, the Sooners remained undefeated after a 56-25 victory (Glier, 2003e).

Throughout the season there was a lack of coverage about White's personal life until SI's Phil Taylor reported on White's background from Tuttle and how he received his hard work ethic from working at his father's concrete company (2003). The Sooners' Offensive Coordinator Chuck Long commented on White's work ethic and perseverance saying, "Jason is a very tough-minded young man. There's something about that small-town, working-class background that has made him a no-nonsense, unflappable guy. His attitude is, I don't care how hard the job is, just tell me what has to be done, and I'll do it" (Taylor, 2003). Taylor also reported how White's gentle humor and laid-back demeanor made him a favorite among the team and how his mere presence on the field was heroic to some (2003).

The Heisman was considered a tight race between White and Pittsburgh's Larry Fitzgerald, but after Pittsburgh lost to Miami, White was back in the lead and by early December

was seen as the clear choice for the Heisman (Caldwell, 2003). The Sooners were not able to continue their dominance of college football and lost to Kentucky State in the Big 12 championship, but they still were placed in the national championship. White was listed as a Heisman Trophy finalist along with Jason White, Eli Manning, Chris Perry and Larry Fitzgerald, but White came up on top with 319 first place ballots and became the fourth Sooner to win the trophy (LaPointe, 2003).

As award season wrapped up for college football, season highlights became the bulk of the media coverage, as journalists recalled an injury ridden Jason White, the All-American quarterback, who adjusted his play and game tactics to help the Oklahoma Sooners qualify for the national championship against Louisiana State University. And to conclude the season, White announced he would be returning for his final year of eligibility (Whiteside, 2003b).

Matt Leinart, 2004

Early in the preseason of 2004, there were reports of Matt Leinart being the new leading man for the PAC 10'S University of Southern California (USC) (Carey, 2004a). Kelly Whiteside wrote that Leinart had "central casting" qualities, while also being a Heisman Trophy candidate (2004a), an early prediction for a season just under way. Leinart was a quarterback, looking to help defend USC's national title and preserve its preseason rank as the No. 1 Trojans (Whiteside, 2004a). Whiteside played out the leading-role metaphor of Leinart, saying he had boyish good looks and big-lug charm, but Leinart's counteracted it saying, "I'm pretty boring" (2004a).

Along with the preseason No. 1 ranking, Leinart was listed as a favorite on the early Heisman watch list (Menez, 2004). Leinart was called the heir to USC's last Heisman winner, 2002's Carson Palmer, with a great shot at winning the national title with the addition and benefit of a great running game (Bierman, 2004; Carey, 2004b). In the season opener, the junior

quarterback finished 19 of 29 passing, including 11 of 13 in the second half, for 272 yards. He also finished the game with three touchdown tosses to running back Reggie Bush, and no interceptions (Thamel, 2004a).

Leinart was competing against the previous season's Heisman winner Jason White and dealing with the team's loss of the All-American wide receiver Mike Williams after he was denied eligibility after being denied entry to the N.F.L. draft (Bechtel & Cannella, 2004). In addition to competing against White, Leinart was considered a "glamour quarterback" from a high-profile school alongside the 2003 Heisman winner, Jason White of Oklahoma (Phil, 2004b)

For two years, Leinart had to wait behind Carson Palmer, the Heisman Trophy winner in 2002 and finally got his opportunity to start. He threw for 3,556 yards and 38 touchdowns in the 2003 season and was the nation's third-most efficient passer (Thamel, 2004b) U.S.C. Coach Pete Carroll said Leinart's seamless transition could be attributed to his base of knowledge (Thamel, 2004). USC's offensive coordinator Norm Chow on the other hand, was credited with helping to transform Matt Leinart into a leader and frontrunner for the Heisman (Taylor, 2004a)

It was reported that Leinart had received one-one-one quarterback tutoring since the age of 14 and that this experienced helped him build the foundation of what would soon to be his ability to lead the Trojans (Thamel, 2004c). By early October, both Leinart and teammate running back Reggie Bush were being considered for the Heisman (Whiteside, 2004b).

After briefly falling under the radar, due to the loss of wide receiver Steve Smith and a dependency on running backs, Leinart jumped back into the race for the Heisman Trophy, passing for 224 yards and four touchdowns, including two to the freshman Dwayne Jarrett, before sitting out the fourth quarter against Arizona State (Tafur, 2004) During the mid-October Heisman watch, Reggie Bush, considered the most explosive player in the nation, had to share

carries with fellow running back LenDale White and split ballot votes with Leinart, diminishing Bush's chances of winning (Beech, 2004a). Leinart, on the other hand, continued to be in line to earn a Heisman among other candidates (Whiteside, 2004b)

Other Heisman polls placed Leinart at No. 2; however, USAT's online Heisman poll ranked Leinart first with Oklahoma's Adrian Peterson a close second (Wieberg, 2004b). But in early November polls, Leinart had done nothing to hurt his Heisman candidacy after completing 65.4% of his passes for 18 touchdowns and four interceptions for the No. 1 Trojans, but much of his thunder had been stolen by "supersoph" running back Reggie Bush (Murphy & Sabino, 2004), despite his lower ranking on the Heisman list.

Leinart threw for five touchdown passes in a 41-10 victory and completed 24 of 34 passes for 400 yards in the victory against Notre Dame (LaPointe, 2004). Leinart's quest for the Heisman had precedent in both his position and in this game since USC quarterback Carson Palmer helped beat the Irish in a similar fashion two years earlier (LaPointe, 2004a). Teammate Reggie Bush said of Leinart, "He's on fire. He's my pick for the Heisman" (LaPointe, 2004a).

In an unfamiliar fashion, rapper Snoop Dogg paid a surprise visit to the USC campus and attempted to catch a 40-yard pass from Leinart; reporters noted that the result brought to mind the title of the rapper's new song, "Drop It Like It's Hot" (Altobelli, Bechtel, & Cannella, 2004). The end of November saw Leinart in a lead position to earn the Heisman, since he had completed 24 of 34 passes with no interceptions in the game against Notre Dame ("College Football," 2004). He had thrown two or more touchdown passes in 22 of his 24 starts at USC and thrown for three or more 12 other times ("Heisman Hot Sheet," 2004).

USC coach Pete Carroll said, "Matt's given us the leadership, the great play. He's carried the offense. He and Carson accomplished the same thing, really, to this point. . . . He's been the central figure . . . the pivot guy for the whole thing to happen" (Moore, 2004b).

By mid season, because both Reggie Bush and Matt Leinart were in the running for the Heisman, it was hard to mention one without the other in media coverage as both athletes were having tremendous seasons. Bush said, "I'm throwing my support behind Matt for the Heisman," noting that he was content to be Leinart's running mate all while helping him amass his Heisman worthy statistics (Taylor, 2004c).

The Trojans beat UCLA 29-24 and ended the season with a 12-0 record and a strong chance of getting the opportunity to play in the Orange Bowl on Jan. 4. (LaPointe, 2004b). "His game was just off the charts," said Pete Carroll, the Trojans' coach talking about Leinart. "They're chanting his name in the locker room" (LaPointe, 2004b).

Five finalists were chosen for the Heisman presentation, including two sets of teammates: Oklahoma's Jason White, up for a second year, and Adrian Peterson; USC's quarterback Matt Leinart and Reggie Bush; and Utah's Alex Smith (Carey, 2004c). Leinart was awarded the Walter Camp player of the year after going 24-1 as a starter and leading the Trojans to a 12-1 record in the 2003 season and a 12-0 record in the 2004 season (Associated Press, 2004a; Moore, 2004c). "He's terrific," Offensive Coordinator Chow said of Leinart. "He's just like Carson, just a joy to be around. He's everything you'd want. I've been real blessed. To go from Philip Rivers to Carson Palmer to Matt Leinart, that's like a dream" (Moore, 2004c). Although the race was expected to be tight, Leinart won the Heisman with a comfortable margin, but the Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback was not selected to be the MVP for his own team, because that award went to Reggie Bush, who finished fifth in the Heisman voting (Associated Press, 2004b;

Caldwell, 2004). It was noted in SI that Leinart had been given advice from his 2002 Heisman winner Carson Palmer predecessor to, ““Act like they're calling someone else,”” but Palmer couldn't control his emotion and excitement when his name was called for the award (Markazi, Bechtel, & Cannella, 2004).

After the Heisman winner was announced, SI's Tim Layden reported how Jason White and Matt Leinart met the previous win after a teammate introduced them. White knew that Leinart was a candidate and prepared him the moment that Leinart would be experiencing just six months later. "You win that, everything changes" Jason White was reported to have said to Leinart. White at the time had the chance to become the second 2-time winner of the Heisman, but failed in the post season to perform and received harsh criticism from fans, Heisman voters, and the media. Starting his senior year, White was not worried about being the front-runner of the Heisman anymore. His priorities had changed and his only intention was to win a national championship. Leinart on the other hand won the starting quarterback job after Heisman winner Carson Palmer left for the NFL. In his first season, Leinart finished 6th in the voting (Layden, 2004). Layden reported the differences between the two athletes: Leinart throws with a lazy left, while White with a "stinging" right. Both athletes had a slightly different experience during their collegiate careers. Some of the biggest differences between the two were how they approached certain scenarios. Layden suggested recreating a picture of Oklahoma's Billy Sims and USC's Charles White, who were in similar positions as Leinart and White. One had previously won the Heisman and the other was on route to winning the award. Layden noted that Leinart thought it was a cool idea while White said it was not what he was "going for" this season (2004).

Layden later noted that when White won his Heisman he opted to bring the trophy on the plane, rather than having it shipped, and took it on a personal tour, visiting family and friends

whom he had not spoken to in a while (2004). After a failed performance in the Sugar Bowl, White was on a quest to redeem his performance and bettering himself as an athlete, whereas Leinart was focused on winning and proving how he could continue his legacy as a “perennial power” quarterback after being a former 14-year-old baseball prodigy turned quarterback (Layden, 2004).

The coverage ended with pregame analyses of the Orange Bowl, the game where USC and Oklahoma were facing each other, a match between back-to-back Heisman winning quarterbacks and their fellow Heisman nominee running backs, Adrian Peterson and Reggie Bush (Morrill, Bechtel, & Cannella, 2004). The media coverage closes out with the NFL scouting reports of Leinart’s stance among other quarterbacks and where he could be best utilized, but he would eventually end up deciding to stay for his senior year (Murphy & Sabino, 2004).

Reggie Bush, 2005

From before the 2005 season could even begin, Reggie Bush was already on the Heisman radar after serving as USC’s running back and Leinart’s “most electrifying players” at his side (Wieberg, 2005). Reporters commented on Bush's speed and finesse on the field and the defenses’ inability to keep up with him, saying his own shadow had trouble keeping up with him, able to elude a tackler in a photo booth (Murphy, 2005a).

Teammate and Heisman winner Matt Leinart was quoted in saying, "I think he's the best player in college football" (Murphy, 2005a). Because of his speed and talent, other coaches commented on his fame and Arizona coach Mike Stoops said, "You're more conscious of him than you are of Leinart" (Murphy, 2005a). It was reported that it could be hard to focus for Leinart and Bush because of the star treatment they receive from fans and celebrities, but Leinart

and the USC offense continued to play well despite the distractions. USC's "ultimate weapon" was the 5'11", 202-pound Reggie Bush was equally effective lining up as a running back or as a receiver (Jenkins, 2005a; King, 2005a; Timanus, 2005).

In a late September game against Oregon, the "light-stepping feet" of Bush, ran for 122 yards and a touchdown on 20 carries, and he caught a touchdown pass (Sherwin, 2005). By the end of September, there were five Heisman hopefuls to watch. One of those athletes included USC'S "all-everything" otherwise known as Reggie Bush (Whiteside, 2005a). Up until that point in the season, Whiteside (2005a) had labeled Bush as the "most talented player in the country."

When playing against Arizona State, Reggie Bush scored the winning touchdown, giving USC a 31-28 lead. After finishing the game with 158 yards and 2 touchdowns on 17 carries, NYT's Pete Thamel said that Bush's ability to finish the game could have placed him ahead of Leinart in the current race for the Heisman Trophy (2005a).

When bringing up the topic of the Heisman, many voters and journalists were skeptical of a running back's ability to capture the award. "I'm not sure a tailback can win the Heisman this year, unless it's a guy like (Southern California's) Reggie Bush who does a lot of different things," said ESPN analyst and former Notre Dame coach Bob Davie (Timanus, 2005). Since the award usually goes to quarterbacks, it was noted that Reggie would have to continue his stellar season and skill in order to beat out other candidates. USC was ranked No.1 and was on the road to having historic season with a 3,000-yard passer, a pair of 1,000-yard runners and a pair of 1,000-yard pass catchers, which would have been a first in NCAA history (Moore, 2005a).

Reggie Bush on the other hand, bolstered his Heisman campaign with three touchdown runs and 160 yards on 15 carries in the game against Notre Dame, where he was said to have spent most of the day as if he had a big S on his chest (Murphy, 2005b). The game between USC

and Notre Dame drew a 7.9 rating, which was reportedly the highest for an Irish game on NBC since 1994 (Verducci, Bechtel, & Cannella, 2005)

But the best play of the day may have been an assist known as the “Bush Push” where Bush pushed Leinart into the end zone for the game-winning touchdown (McCarthy, 2005; Thamel, 2005). The play captivated both fans and the media as Bush’s big play propelled him to the top of the Heisman list. With this win, USC extended its win streak to 28 games and preserved its chances for a third consecutive national title (Jenkins, 2005b).

By mid-October and for the second straight year, Reggie Bush and Matt Leinart were at the top of the list for the Heisman alongside Vince Young and 5 other contenders who weren’t as well known (Menez, 2005; Murphy, 2005c). After the win against Stanford, Bush led the Heisman list in USAT’s Heisman Hotsheet after going 113 yards in 12 carries and running for a touchdown (2005). Heisman ballots were mailed out during Veteran’s Day weekend and it was reported that Heisman polls had ranked Texas’s Vince Young as No.1 in ESPN.com, SI.com, and Scripps Howard, but had Bush leading on USAT.com (Whiteside, 2005b).

Also during November, struggling teams in the NFL begin to look at potential draft picks and needs. Leinart was on the list as was Bush, highly regarded as the running back who was predicted to forgo his senior year to enter the draft (Crouse, 2005a). In the meantime, USC continued to dominate its opponents with “its abundance of offensive weapons” (Mandel, 2005). Because of the dominance of several offensive players, those same weapons could actually have been hurting the Trojans’ chances of producing a third Heisman winner in four seasons (Mandel, 2005).

During Thanksgiving week, when USC played against Fresno State, Bush ran for two touchdowns and set a career high with 294 rushing yards, catch three passes for 68 yards, while

shattering a Pacific-10 record with 513 all-purpose yards, second in Division I-A history (Whiteside, 2005d). His performance led to USC Head Coach Pete Carroll saying, "How about Reggie! He was electric all night long. He's just got the magic. You've got to be in love with him. He was firing and roaring" (Whiteside, 2005d). Bush's stepfather, LaMar Griffin, said "Tonight, I think he won the Heisman Trophy" (Jenkins, 2005d).

Bush had been gaining national attention since high school, when coaches thought highlight videos of the "fat-free 200-pound running back" were doctored (O'Connor, 2005). Bush helped lead USC to victory and extend their winning streak to 33. O'Connor also said that Bush was "the ultimate video-game superhero, his thumb forever locked on the thrust button." Even ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit said, "It's unfair to compare anybody to Reggie Bush. He's at a different level. ... He's a once-in-a-lifetime back. Just sit back and appreciate it" (O'Toole, Moore, Whiteside, Byrne & Carey, 2005). Neither Bush nor Leinart had openly campaigned for the award, but the word around USC was that Leinart got his last year, so it's Bush's turn (Moore, 2005b). Throughout the season, Bush inscribed his strips or eye black with either "619," the area code for his hometown, or with "S-E," for Spring Valley's southeast San Diego County as a way of paying homage to his friends and family back at home (Reiter & Kennedy, 2005).

Bush's performance had been so good that he "left observers searching for new hyperbole to explain his play" and that all the adjectives to described him were used up (Thamel, 2005c). Thamel himself called Bush sublime, scintillating and dazzling as well as dominant, transcendent or untouchable (2005c). Reporters had said that Bush had consistently been the most exciting and valuable player on the field for the last two seasons (Rhoden, 2005).

Texas and USC prepared to play each other for the Rose Bowl, and ABC's Craig James called Bush "just spectacular," while ABC's Aaron Taylor found him "magical" (Hiestand,

2005). Bob Ryan on ESPN's *The Sports Reporters* predicted that not only would Bush win the Heisman but that "it should almost be unanimous" (Hiestand, 2005).

Bush was awarded the Walter Camp Player of the Year. Meanwhile, New York Jets fans were thinking about the upcoming draft, since the Jets were projected to have the No. 1 overall pick, which was being referred to as the Bush-Leinart sweepstakes (Brown, 2005). Bush became the seventh Heisman Trophy winner from USC and the three finalists -- Bush, Leinart and Young -- would meet again at the Rose Bowl, when the Trojans and the Longhorns would play for the B.C.S. national title in Pasadena, Calif. (Jenkins 2005e).

Bush won the Heisman Trophy with 2,541 points after receiving 84.9% of the first place votes (Murphy, 2005d). Young had 1,608 points and Leinart 797. Of the ballots mailed, Bush received the highest percentage of first-place votes ever, winning with 2541 points, while the runner up Vince Young had 1608 (Whiteside, 2005e). Bush's margin of victory (933 points) was the second largest to USC tailback O.J. Simpson beating Purdue's Leroy Keyes by 1,750 points in 1968 (Whiteside, 2005e). In the meantime, the Houston Texans were traveling to San Francisco the upcoming weekend for a matchup that had been billed as the Reggie Bush Bowl, because it was supposed to determine who gets to pick Bush in the upcoming NFL draft (Jenkins, 2005). After that weekend, if nothing else changed throughout the remainder of the NFL season, the 2-12 Texans would have the honor of being in position to select Reggie Bush (Weisman, 2005). Bush's speed, quickness, hands, and open-field instincts were predicted to also help Bush succeed in the NFL (King, 2005b). After Texans fans realized the team's place in the draft, many of them chanted, "Reg-gie Bush, Reg-gie Bush," as he would most likely be the first overall pick in the upcoming draft (Associated Press, 2005). USAT's Jill Liber wrote that USC's top-ranked, two-time defending national champion team was "the most glamorous team in

college football” because of its two Heisman Trophy winners in the backfield, a 34-game winning and a historical three-peat championship run in near sight (2005).

Following Leinart’s Heisman-winning season in 2004, Bush’s coverage portrayed him as a powerful threat and part of a powerful dynamic duo between him and Leinart. If there were any one word that could describe the season of Reggie Bush, it would be “electrifying.” The word electric or electrifying was mentioned over 14 times during the July to December timespan of Bush’s Heisman winning season. The context in which it was used was either to describe the dominating skill of Bush or the offense that he played for. Each source labeled Bush’s ability to demolish defenses and to outrun his opponents, leading to an increase in media coverage compared to other Heisman winners. With 145 articles analyzed, Bush dominated the media coverage compared to the 15 other Heisman winners.

Troy Smith, 2006

During the 2006 preseason, Big Ten’s Ohio State was ranked No. 1, led by the electrifying offensive talents of quarterback Troy Smith and wide receiver Ted Ginn Jr. (Dodd, 2006). Smith, a year before, had been preparing for the season, knowing he would be sitting out the opener due to an NCAA infraction of accepting money with no guarantees of regaining his starting job (Dodd, 2006). Smith was considered the symbol for Buckeyes’ road to glory despite the fact that he went from being a questionable prospect to a versatile “multifaceted quarterback who attacks defenses with his running and passing” (Bierman, 2006; Dodd, 2006). His play style drew comparisons to Vince Young who led the Longhorns to a national title the season before (Dodd, 2006). Smith was forced to mature, receiving a two-game suspension from the 2004 Alamo Bowl and 2005 season opener for accepting \$500 from a booster; both proved to be a turning point (Dodd, 2006).

Smith became known as the “Big Man” because he “can't go one place without someone noticing him” (Mandel, 2006a). Smith recalled an incident when he went to a cellular-phone store, and a female salesperson handed Smith a note that reads “YOU ARE A GREAT ROLE MODEL FOR OUR BLACK BROTHERS” (Mandel, 2006a). Smith entered his senior year as the nation's preeminent dual-threat quarterback and Ohio's most popular athlete not named LeBron, even though many of his current admirers had a negative opinion of him just a year earlier (Mandel, 2006a).

Smith's performance in the previous season's Fiesta Bowl started the comparisons with Vince Young and put him in the contention for the Heisman in the 2006 season (Mandel, 2006). Smith was labeled a danger, a running and throwing quarterback, as he became more efficient through the air with his passes (Carey, 2006). As the season started, Smith had not been intercepted for over 122 passes as he led the Heisman race and helped the Buckeyes shed the image of having a “vanilla” offense while also beating teams like Texas (Lopresti, 2006; Thamel, 2006a).

Ohio State's victory against Texas showed how Smith was a quarterback in every regard and the unquestioned leader of the No. 1 team in college football because he alternated between efficient and electrifying (Murphy, 2006a). Smith's quick decision-making and ability to make plays continued the comparison with the University of Texas quarterback and 2005 Heisman runner up, Vince Young. Whenever he was to compare himself with Young, Smith would answer, "He's a great guy, but I play for a totally different team” (Murphy, 2006a).

The coverage of Smith briefly looked at his friendship and history with Buckeyes star wide receiver Ted Ginn, Jr., a childhood friend and, 14 years later, a teammate (Drape, 2006).

Their bond and friendship led to a great quarterback-wide receiver relationship where Ginn caught five of the seven touchdown passes thrown by Smith (Drape, 2006).

As the season progressed into October, Smith's status on the Heisman watch rarely budged (Thamel, 2006b). He led the No.1 team, ranked 24th in passing yards and 11th in pass efficiency with only two interceptions and 12 TD passes (Aicher & Granderson, 2006). Fans like Pamela Mason began to notice his leadership ability on and off the field and wrote letters to SI editors saying, "He has emerged not only as a great QB but as a good man. It gives me hope that with the right guidance from tough but caring coaches-such as Jim Tressel-college football soon might be as satisfying off the field as on" (Renner, Mason, McEvoy, Martin, Sierra, Wall, & ... Wyman, 2006).

Smith continued to lead the Ohio State's undefeated season and went 17-for-20 for 191 yards with no interceptions and three touchdowns against Bowling Green. ("Early October USAT Heisman Hotsheet," 2006). Although his numbers weren't as high or as "gaudy" as his competitors, Smith's efficiency helped lead the Buckeyes in victory over Texas and Iowa (Taylor, 2006). After beating Michigan State, Smith became the sixth in national passing efficiency ("USAT Heisman Hotsheet," 2005).

By early November, there were two men leading the Heisman race: Ohio State's Troy Smith and Notre Dame's Brady Quinn (Whiteside, 2006a). According to the football equivalent of exit polls, Smith was predicted to win the Heisman Trophy as the best college player, but he had another game against Michigan before votes were to be cast, and it could be his most difficult challenge (Lapointe, 2006a). Since Oklahoma running back Adrian Peterson sustained a clavicle injury midseason, his chances of winning the trophy had diminished and the race for the

trophy was usually positioned as Smith competing with Notre Dame quarterback Brady Quinn (Lapointe, 2006a).

Smith was undoubtedly the unquestioned front-runner for the past two months of the season, but he threw for just 108 yards in a 17-10 win over Illinois, and it was Smith's second straight game with fewer than 200 yards passing (Stewart, 2006b). Since there were not very many alternatives for the Heisman, Smith remained in the lead (Stewart, 2006b). Through the first 11 games, Smith said he played "all right" (Garcia, 2006). His stoic opinion about his play did not stop the fact that Smith continued to be in the lead for the Heisman, after throwing for nearly 2,200 yards and 26 touchdowns, including four against Northwestern (Garcia, 2006).

"I've never known both teams to be undefeated... It really blows my mind" said Troy Smith, about his opinions on playing an undefeated Michigan and a Heisman trophy candidate Mike Hart (Lapointe, 2006b). With both teams undefeated the Buckeyes ranked first while Michigan ranked second and the stakes of the game included the Big Ten conference title, a trip to the national championship, and the Heisman Trophy candidacies of Ohio State quarterback Troy Smith and Wolverines tailback Mike Hart (Lapointe, 2006b). After beating Michigan, Ohio State was looking for its first outright Big Ten title since 1984 and a berth in the B.C.S. title game (Thamel, 2006c). It also solidified Troy Smith as the favorite to win the Heisman Trophy (Thamel, 2006c).

Towards the end of November, Kelly Whiteside (2006b) wrote about the five stages of Smith's career that took him from "athlete to star" at Ohio State. Smith arrived to Ohio State in 2002 and was listed as an "athlete," not "quarterback" (Whiteside, 2006b). He would soon redshirt and play as a running back and kick returner on the Buckeye's scout team. Eventually Smith would go on to play 10 games as a backup running back and kick returner. By 2004, he

started as a quarterback when Justin Zwick was injured and lead the team to a 4-1 finish (Whiteside, 2001b). Smith had to sit out the season opener in 2005 due to an NCAA infraction, but during the second half of his junior season, Smith developed into one of the nation's top passers, leading the Buckeyes to a 10-2 record, Big Ten championship, and was Fiesta Bowl MVP (Whiteside, 2006). Despite his off- field issues, Smith proved himself worthy of playing and coach Jim Tressel said, “When you think of Troy, the first thing that comes to my mind is leadership” (Whiteside, 2006b).

Heisman finalists were announced and quarterbacks Troy Smith and Brady Quinn of Notre Dame were selected as finalists alongside Arkansas’ Darren McFadden, but Smith was the predicted favorite (Associated Press, 2006). Smith was trying to become the sixth player from Ohio State to win the Heisman and the first since Buckeye running back Eddie George in 1995 (Associated Press, 2006).

Smith, the Big Ten offensive player of the year who led the Buckeyes to a 12-0 season, threw for 2,740 yards and a school- record of 30 touchdowns (Gardiner, 2006). He also received the Davey O'Brien Award for best quarterback and the Walter Camp player of the year honor. (Gardiner, 2006).

Smith racked up the second-most first-place votes and second-largest margin of victory in Heisman history (Whiteside, 2006c). In the meantime some fans explained their disagreement with Smith’s selection. In a letter to the sports editor of The NYT, Andrew Levy wrote that “the sports media demonstrated their short memory and a disregard for the integrity of amateur sports by awarding Ohio State University quarterback Troy Smith the Heisman Trophy on Dec. 9. To Smith's credit, he has made the most of every moment since by playing well and acting maturely. But a disservice is being paid to amateur sports by rewarding him” (Levy, 2006). As others

expressed their disdain, early NFL draft predictions had Smith going to the Oakland Raiders (King, 2006). Troy Smith would go on to face Florida in the national championship. The media coverage showed the power duo effects of Troy Smith and Ted Ginn, Jr. (Carey, 2006). Like Reggie Bush, Troy Smith was also described as electric before the season could even start although they did not play the same position. The media coverage also honed in on Smith's celebrity and hero status among the people of Ohio, as he become one of the most recognizable figures in the state.

Tim Tebow, 2007

Despite winning the national championship the season before, preseason rankings put the SEC's Florida Gators at No. 3 as the 6'3", 235-pound Tim Tebow planned to take over the Gators (USAT Board of Coaches, 2007). Danny Wuerffel, the Gators' 1996 Heisman-winning quarterback, told Tebow, "Just relax and play your game. Don't worry about all the hype" (Anderson, 2007). Tebow promised to hold onto the advice as he became a "full-blown folk hero" in the city of Gainesville (Anderson, 2007). Before Tebow's Heisman winning season could start, there were over three-dozen tributes to Tebow on YouTube, and hundreds of requests to speak to more than 200 organizations since January of that year (Anderson, 2007).

Coverage delves into the personal life of Tebow who was born in the Philippines, where his family runs a mission and an orphanage (Whiteside, 2007a). Eventually, the Tebows moved to Jacksonville where his father, Bob, continued to run the Bob Tebow Evangelistic Association. The Tebows go back to the Philippines to mission trips where Tebow said, "It's taught me that there are more important things than football" (Whiteside, 2007a). Whiteside continued the story with Tebow's speaking engagements where he visited two prisons to speak during the offseason (2007). According to Whiteside, offensive coordinator Dan Mullen said that when he initially

met Tebow, he wondered, "It can't be that good. Where's the chink in the armor? Your dad's a missionary and your mom's a teacher of five children at home." But the Tebows were really as genuine as they appeared to be, and it surprised Mullen. The frenzy around Tebow started to build after a documentary called "The Chosen One" aired on ESPN, chronicling his senior year in high school in 2005 (Whiteside, 2007a). Whiteside also said that Tim is his mother's "miracle baby" who was born after being advised to have an abortion after she became ill with amoebic dysentery, was briefly in a coma, and took medication to control the infection, which caused problems with the pregnancy (Whiteside, 2007a).

Tebow "lifted the team with his intensity", and before the season could start again, his brother said that Tebow was a "legend" on campus (Thamel, 2007; Whiteside, 2007b). His brother Peter continued, "He's more of a legend than a person, actually" (Thamel, 2007a). Based on the coverage Tebow was already receiving, no one seemed to believe he would struggle on or off the field due to the documentary that chronicled his work in the Philippines and the time leading up to his college choice, so by the time he got to Florida, he was already a household name (Thamel, 2007a). Tebow's competitiveness is his hallmark, but he said, "When it's all said and done, people aren't going to remember how many championships you won, they're going to remember what you were like off the field, how you treated people," which is why he speaks and preaches in as many places as possible (Thamel, 2007a).

In his first game of the season, Tebow threw for 300 yards and 3 touchdowns and ran for another score in No. 6 Florida's 49-3 victory against Western Kentucky in Gainesville (Associated Press, 2007a). Even when playing against Tennessee, Tebow's play and athleticism were able to defend his "prodigious" hype with a larger-than-life performance (Thamel, 2007b). Skeptics who questioned his throwing ability were silenced when he completed 14 of 19 passes

for 299 yards and 2 touchdowns and ran for two other touchdowns and threw one interception. Thamel said Tebow's day was filled with “big plays” and a “superstar's flair” (Thamel, 2007b). Tebow’s ability to lead was never questioned. “There's not many other players I trust more than Tim Tebow," head coach Urban Meyer said about his star quarterback (Thamel, 2007b).

By mid-September Tebow was second in the nation and first in the SEC in passing efficiency (228.2) while also leading the conference in total offense (333.5 yards a game) and completion percentage (73.8 percent) (Carey, 2007a). Florida experienced its first loss of the season against Auburn in the last weekend of September, ending its 11-game winning streak for and giving the Gators their first home loss under Coach Urban Meyer. Reliance on Tebow to carry the win backfired (Associated Press, 2007b; Thamel, 2007b).

Tebow was listed as a candidate for the Heisman in SI in the beginning of October (Beech, 2007). By mid-October Boston College's Matt Ryan, Kentucky's Andre Woodson and Tebow were the quarterbacks receiving the most attention for the Heisman Trophy (Thamel, 2007e). By late October, Tebow had thrown for 13 touchdowns and ran for nine while collecting over 2,000 yards of total offense (Murphy, 2007). If the Gators win out, Tebow would be among the top three candidates for the Heisman (Murphy, 2007). Tebow played with the “delicacy of an armored personnel carrier” (Lopresti, 2007a).

Tebow’s Heisman candidacy started to waiver after a third season loss to the Georgia Bulldogs, but as the main running option while also playing quarterback, Tebow was still able to stay in the run for the Heisman (Associated Press, 2007c; Bierman, 2007). In the game against South Carolina, Tebow lead the team to another win while accounting for all seven of Florida's touchdowns, a team-record five rushing and two passing (Associated Press, 2007d). Tebow went 22 for 32 for a career-best 304 yards and ran for 120 yards, accounting for more than three-

quarters of Florida's offense, placing him on the USAT Heisman Hotsheet (Associated Press, 2007d; "Heisman Hotsheet," 2007a).

During the mid to late November period, the Heisman campaign quickly neared its climax, so Florida's sports information office sent out an e-mail message pushing for support of quarterback Tim Tebow (Thamel, 2007f). Some of the numbers are "pretty startling," and Thamel noted that it was clear that Florida's push for Tebow would revolve around trying to prove that he is truly the country's most outstanding player (2007f). Season updates and recaps occurred throughout the season, giving updates on Tebow's success and stats including him accounting 46 touchdowns (Lopresti, 2007b).

Meanwhile analysts were comparing divisions and teams. In a USAT/Gallup Poll, respondents favored the SEC, with 30 percent of respondents saying the conference had been the best of the past decade (Carey, 2007b). ESPN analyst Lee Corso believed the SEC had been the best league of the past decade but over the course of time, the Pac-10 division surpassed the SEC in talent (Carey, 2007b). This also led Corso to say that although Tebow was "the best quarterback in the SEC, "nobody else is really that close to some of the quarterbacks in the Pac-10 (Carey, 2007b)."

During rivalry weekend, Tim Tebow threw three touchdown passes, ran for two scores to help lead Florida to a 45-12 victory (Associated Press, 2007e). Tebow broke his right (non-throwing) hand when playing against Florida State and would result in a cast for two weeks, but the injury played no effect in Tebow's ability to play as he finished with 262 passing yards, 3 touchdowns and 88 yards ("Heisman Hot sheet," 2007b; Thamel, 2007g).

The Heisman Trophy race seemed to be between Tim Tebow and Darren McFadden (Taylor, 2007). If Tebow won the Heisman, it would undoubtedly add to his "legend" status,

which was furthered by “Tebow-isms,” the jokes about his “seeming omnipotence and perfection that were proliferating on the Internet” (Taylor, 2007). Among the jokes were: "Before the bogeyman goes to sleep, he checks his closet for Tim Tebow," and "Some people wear Superman pajamas. Superman wears Tim Tebow pajamas” (Taylor, 2007).

When Tebow was announced as a Heisman finalist, the debate about sophomores and freshmen winning the trophy were once again brought up (Pennington, 2007). No freshman or sophomore had won the trophy, even though Heisman voters have been debating whether one should, with controversial results since the 1940s (Pennington, 2007). One by one the members of the media and former Heisman winners began to fill out their completely blank ballots, and when the night came, Tebow would become the first sophomore to win the Heisman (Brennan, 2007; Robinson, 2007). Some say if Tebow were to have been an upperclassman, he probably would have won the award in a landslide (Robinson 2007).

With Tebow's humble nature and his “grounded priorities (faith, family, academics, football, he listed in that order),” Meyer said all the inevitable talk about winning two or three Heismans won't be a distraction as the 2007 season came to an end and the next season begins (Whiteside, 2007c). In the meantime, Tebow would lead the Florida Gators through an unbeaten season and another national championship (“Predictions for 2008,” 2007). In doing so, Tebow would try to avoid underperforming in the post season after winning the Heisman, otherwise known as a Heisman hangover (Murphy, 2007).

By the start of Tebow’s Heisman winning season in 2007, the media was aware of both his talent on the field but also his persona off. That coverage continued but was amplified as his leadership role became more predominant throughout the season. From his dedication to his faith to his success on and off the field, it was made prevalent that Tebow was not only reliable, but

also a much-needed leader and hero for the city of Gainesville. The idea of the hero was followed throughout the season, but it was centered on both his faith and genuine personality. The media also concentrated on the fact that Tebow was a sophomore in college competing for the Heisman, and once awarded, he broke the barrier between the upperclassmen who generally win the award.

Sam Bradford, 2008

Before the season could start, Sam Bradford was the nation's top-rated passer as a 20-year-old, and returned back along with his entire offensive line (Wieberg, 2008a). The Big 12's Oklahoma Sooners ranked fourth in the preseason after previously winning the conference championship and losing the Fiesta Bowl, but the team was hoping to accomplish more success with the guidance of quarterback Sam Bradford, who previously led the nation in passing efficiency (USAT Coaches Poll, 2008).

Since many of the starting offensive linemen returned, the offense was said to be in good hands with Bradford, who as a freshman had led the nation in pass efficiency that was also reported in USAT (Carey, 2008a) and SI (Staples, 2008).

Listed in NYT, as a Heisman hopeful, Bradford's candidacy rested on the Sooners' competitive drive and ability to make it to the national championship (Evans, 2008a). After losing several road games last season, Bradford had said that the team was working on making itself better to win on the road and prove to fans that they (the Sooners) were now different (Evans, 2008b). In the previous season, the last five of the eight regular-season games had been road games, and the Sooners were aware of the criticism for their poor performance on the road, even wearing t-shirts declaring, "Be Road Tough" (Evans 2008b).

By mid September, Sam Bradford led the Sooners to a 55-14 win over Washington after completing 18 of 21 passes for 304 yards, and matching his career high by throwing five touchdown passes and running for a sixth (Associated Press, 2008a). Then, Sam Bradford threw a career-best 411 yards and 4 touchdowns to help the Sooners beat No. 24 Texas Christian, 35-10 (Associated Press, 2008b).

Off the field, Bradford made headlines after it was revealed that he was part Cherokee and that, as a finance major with a near 4.0 grade-point average, Native American tribes were celebrating his academic and athletic success as an example of a positive role model for the community (Lopresti, 2008; Wieberg, 2008b). As a quarterback, Bradford was No. 2 in the country in passing efficiency and becoming a Heisman favorite (Lopresti, 2008, Michaelis, 2008). As Bradford helped lead the Sooner team, Oklahoma's offense was categorized as aerial assaults against defenses (Timanus, 2008; Whiteside, 2008a).

Later on in the season, Bradford's Native American heritage made headlines again when the Cherokee Nation principal chief, Chad Smith, told Phil Fontain, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, that Bradford was a Cherokee Nation citizen (Evans, 2008c). According to Evans, the two North American Indian leaders had been called to discuss international issues, but the topic of Bradford had come up and he wanted to confirm that Bradford was one-sixteenth Cherokee (Evans, 2008c). But until Oklahoma publicized his heritage during the previous season, Bradford had only talked to his dad about the topic a few times as a child and was not fully involved in the traditions that surround the Cherokee nation (Evans, 2008c). Regardless, Bradford's father Kent said his great grandmother, Susie Walkingstick, was a full-blooded Cherokee (Evans, 2008c).

Despite not being heavily tied to his Native American heritage, Bradford was still closely followed at Sequoyah Schools, an Indian boarding school for grades 7-12, because his success provided a “much-needed inspiration for Cherokee youth” (Evans, 2008c). In addition to the inspiration given to the youth, Smith said that Bradford's demeanor is similar to that of the Cherokee elders and that he is a great example of “simple, quiet, humble leadership” (Evans, 2008c). In addition to his family’s ethnic lineage, Bradford was following his father’s legacy, a tackle for the Sooners during the 1977 and 1978 seasons (Murphy, 2008a).

In late October, the Texas Longhorns and their quarterback Colt McCoy were ranked No. 1 in every poll and Heisman depth chart, but Bradford kept himself in the running after throwing a school-record 468 yards and three touchdown passes to help the fourth-ranked Sooners beat No. 16 Kansas, 45-31 (Associated Press, 2008c; Whiteside, 2008b). Then, in a game against Nebraska, Bradford threw for 311 yards and 5 touchdowns to help the Sooners win 62-28 (Associated Press, 2008d).

The three leading Heisman contenders, Texas Tech Quarterback Graham Harrell, wide receiver Michael Crabtree, and Bradford, were to play each other in mid- November (Whiteside, 2008c). Bradford had fallen below the radar after a loss to Texas, so his performance against Texas Tech could create the biggest impression and argument for voters who were to receive their ballots (Whiteside, 2008c). In late November, the Sooners had a 42-7 halftime lead against Leach (Evans, 2008d). Before leaving the game early due to a blowout, Bradford completed 14 of 19 passing for 304 yards and 4 touchdowns (Evans, 2008d). Bradford also broke the 2003 Heisman Trophy winner, Oklahoma’s Jason White's single-season team record for touchdown passes after throwing his 41st and 42nd touchdowns of the season (Evans, 2008d).

During his 2008 season, NFL scouts analyzed Bradford and his capabilities. One NFL personnel expert considered Bradford to be “the best pro prospect of the group and will go the highest when compared to others in the same position” (Murphy, 2008c). The source also goes on to say, "He's got the height. He's got a good arm, not a great arm. A functional NFL arm. But he's very accurate, has very good timing and great intangibles. He is undoubtedly a starter in the NFL” (Murphy, 2008c).

“Sooners supersophomore” Sam Bradford put himself in the lead of the Heisman discussion after passing for 304 yards in just 14 completions and throwing four touchdowns during the 65-21 win against Texas Tech (Carey, 2008b, Murphy, 2008c). By early December, the Sooners quarterback was considered a top candidate along with the 2007 winner Tim Tebow, Graham Harrell and Colt McCoy (Smith, 2008).

Around the time of the Heisman presentation, USAT reflected on Bradford’s road to the Heisman and how he was “hardly a top national recruit” when he was offered a scholarship to the University of Oklahoma before his senior year of high school in 2005 (Evans, 2008e). Offensive Coordinator Chuck Long told Evans, that he was brought in because “the school needed depth,” but three years after his arrival, he became one of college football's “most recognizable players” (2008e). Bradford’s chance of playing at Oklahoma was essentially luck. Bradford’s father also said, "Sam is a prime example of a guy that was in the right place at the right time. He's actually playing at the place he truly wanted to play at. It's worked out fine” (Evans, 2008e).

In a rematch and revenge game against Texas for the Big 12 conference title game, Bradford led the Sooners to victory by throwing a Big 12 Conference title-game-record 384 yards (34-for-49) and threw two TDs (Whiteside, 2008d). When comparing Bradford to Tim

Tebow, the previous season's Heisman winner, Sam Bradford stood as the favorite to beat him, but not by much. One reason was because Bradford had thrown 48 touchdowns during the season whereas Tebow, "a strong runner and passer," had 28 (Thamel & Evans, 2008). Bradford had thrown six interceptions and Tebow threw two, but both were in the top five ranks in regards to pass efficiency (Thamel & Evans, 2008).

In the closest finish since Eric Crouch beat Rex Grossman in 2001, Bradford became the second sophomore, fifth Oklahoma Sooner, and the first American Indian to win the trophy since Jim Plunkett of Stanford in 1970 (Thamel, 2008). It was mentioned that Bradford's dad Kent, a former starting OU offensive lineman turned insurance agent, is something of a "conflicted hero," in Oklahoma whereas Bradford was considered a leader, role model and hero among the Cherokee nation (Thamel, 2008). Meanwhile, Sam Bradford was the "centerpiece of a ridiculously prolific" Oklahoma offense whose post-football plans included becoming a corporate attorney (Thamel, 2008, Wieberg, 2008c).

When it came to voting for Bradford, there were some mixed reviews among voters and fans who did not think Bradford deserved to win. Some fans expressed their sentiments in USAT saying that runner-up Colt McCoy should have won (Hiestand, 2008). In the meantime, Bradford would take on Tebow and the Gators on Jan. 8 in Miami for the national title ("Bradford wins Heisman by hair", 2008).

As NFL Scouts looked early into the draft, CBS's Charley Casserly, an ex-NFL general manager, gave his opinion on where the three Heisman finalists and quarterbacks would go (Hiestand, 2008). Casserly predicted that the All-American Sam Bradford could become the draft's "first pick," while Colt McCoy would become a "late first-round pick" and Tim Tebow wouldn't go in the first two rounds (Hiestand, 2008). By the time the players declared for the

draft, both Tebow and Bradford went in the first round, and Bradford fulfilled Casserly's prediction of being drafted first overall. Meanwhile, McCoy fell to the third round. Final media coverage concluded with the match up between Tebow and Bradford in the post-season bowl games.

Overall the media coverage started with Bradford being at the top of the list for the Heisman Trophy. Bradford's Native American heritage was brought up only twice, as he served as a role model to those watching his success. It seemed, though, that his role in the community a greater impact than what he realized. Although, there was no evidence of the same kind of hero narrative observed in the coverage of Tebow's year of the Heisman win, there were mentions of Bradford's function as both a leader and role model. His offense was also described as being an aerial assault against defenses, a war-like metaphor for the impact Bradford and his offensive line made.

Mark Ingram, Jr., 2009

In preseason rankings, Mark Ingram was listed as the starting running back in the depth chart of the fifth-ranked Alabama Crimson Tide, which had lost the bid to the BCS championship by losing the Southeastern Conference title game (USAT Coaches Poll, 2009).

Alabama won their season opener in which Ingram rushed for 150 yards on 26 carries after he and teammate Julio Jones were cleared by the N.C.A.A. after facing possible suspensions because of allegations that two athletes had received improper benefits from a booster (Glier, 2009a). Those benefits included a paid fishing trip in the Gulf Coast during the previous spring semester (Anderson, 2009). It was also mentioned that Ingram was the son of former first-round pick and New York Giants wide receiver "Super Bowl hero" Mark Ingram, Sr. (Thamel, 2009a), so called in 1991 after "eluding five tackles and hopping on one leg to make a

key first down” that helped lead the Giants to a Super Bowl victory (Associated Press, 2008).

Mark Ingram, Sr. also played at Michigan State, where the Alabama Crimson Tide Head Coach Nick Saban was serving as an assistant coach (Whiteside, 2009b).

Heisman talk began in October, when Ingram was averaging nearly 6 yards per carry and scored six touchdowns in the first five games of the season for the third-ranked Crimson Tide (Falgoust, 2009). Falgoust also reported that Ingram’s performance against Mississippi could bolster the Heisman case for the running back, who stated that he was humbled by the talk of Heisman candidacy (2009). Ingram’s off-the-field issues were again reported. On top of the eligibility issues that stemmed from earlier in the year, the legal troubles of his father were mentioned. Falgoust reported that Ingram’s father, Mark Ingram, Sr. was sentenced in September of 2008 to seven years in prison for federal money laundering and bank fraud charges (2009), a story that, combined with questions regarding Ingram Jr.’s eligibility issues, recurred throughout the season.

By mid-October, Ingram’s play had begun to be described by journalists in terms of his abilities help lead the Crimson Tide to victory. Ingram’s play style was said to be punishing while also “epitomizing Alabama’s ground game” because it took so many tackles to take Ingram down (Thamel, 2009b). By mid October, Ingram was a leader in the “11th-best rushing offense” (Timanus, 2009). His style continued to be described as “punishing, tackle-breaking and defender-dragging” as he rushed for a career-high 246 yards and “powered” No. 2 Alabama to a 20-6 victory over No. 22 South Carolina (Associated Press, 2009a). USAT’s Mike Lopresti, described Ingram’s same performance as “destroying” while also leading the Crimson Tide to No. 1 (2009a).

Despite being named a candidate in the race for the Heisman, in The NYT's weekly Heisman watch chart due to his "dominating" performance on the field and during the game against Tennessee, Ingram lost a fumble for the first time in 296 carries (Ennis, 2009; Glier, 2009b). It was after this game, where the relationship between Ingram and his father was mentioned again. Ingram's father, who watched the game from the Queens (N.Y.) Correctional Center called his son to discuss the game, a weekly ritual (Whiteside, 2009b). "You have to live and learn," was the advice Ingram, Sr. had given to his son, who when asked about his father's legal troubles, used the same phrase (Whiteside, 2009b). Whiteside described how "Little Mark," a name given to Ingram by his family, learned everything from his father. Ingram, Sr. taught his son about football and instilled the competitive drive seen in him as he plays on the field (Whiteside, 2009b). When trying watch his son complete his freshman season, Ingram, Sr. tried to postpone his jail sentence, but when the judge denied the request and ordered him to report to prison in December, he intentionally failed to report so he could watch his son play, adding an extra 2 years to the original term (Whiteside, 2009b).

By the first week of November, Tebow and Ingram were the only two players on every Heisman watch ballot (Smith & Jones, 2009). When talking to his grandfather about the media coverage and fame that came with being on the Heisman watch, Ingram "seemed suspicious of fame's grip, almost as if it helped bring down his father" (Glier, 2009c). Ingram's grandfather told Glier that the family "preached that nothing good came from self-promotion, and that it was right not to become enchanted with the Heisman speculation" (2009c). For that reason, Alabama told Ingram's grandfather that they were not going to promote him for the Heisman (Glier, 2009c).

Despite Ingram's ability to run through defenses, the season continued as he tried to clinch the top spot in competition for the Heisman with his dominating performances, but Ingram continued to face a "fierce competition" against other candidates. Heisman voters considered the race so close that it was predicted to be a race where the decision comes down to the final minute (Whiteside, 2009c). By mid-November, the Heisman was said to be a two-man race between Ingram and the 2007 Heisman winner Tim Tebow (Thamel, 2009c). The Southern Methodist head coach even commented on the race saying, "I never seen one this wide open... I can't ever remember one this wide open. It's anybody's game right now" (Thamel, 2009c).

Ingram's candidacy took a major hit against Auburn, when the running back ran for only 30 yards against the school's biggest rival (Glier, 2009d). Ingram was called "Bama's backbone," while trying to help lead the Crimson Tide to a quest for an undefeated season and national title (Roberts, 2009). Ingram's father is brought up again in NYT as the Tide would soon move on to play Florida in the SEC championship. Roberts reports that Ingram's family tried to live normally and that it took "a lot of maturity" to help Ingram deal with his father's choices (2009). His maturity and humility helped lead the team and teammate Robby Green said that because of his those traits, "He's still just easygoing Mark (Roberts, 2009)."

The 2009 season marked the first time that voting would be done completely electronically, and the race seemed as though it narrowed down to four potential winners: Texas's Colt McCoy, Florida's Tim Tebow, Stanford's Toby Gerhart, and Ingram (Thamel, 2009). Ingram, who was said to be part of the "heart and soul of the Crimson Tide" could redeem his Auburn performance and Heisman candidacy in the SEC Championship after rushing for 113 yards, receiving for 76 yards and 3 touchdowns (Evans, 2009; Lopresti, 2009b). The finalists

who received their invitation included Tebow, Ingram, Gerhart, McCoy, and Ndamukong Suh of Nebraska.

Ingram became the third consecutive sophomore to win the Heisman and defeated Toby Gerhart by 28 points, the “closest contest of the Heisman’s 75-year history” (Whiteside, 2009d). He received nearly 32 percent of the possible first place votes (See Appendix A). Ingram also gave a heartfelt speech about bringing the first Heisman back to Alabama and thanked his father for helping become the man he was (Armstrong, 2009). "This was the first Heisman race of the information age that was affected by Twitter, Facebook and blogging. Voters took their time and processed more information than ever," said Chris Huston, the publisher of HeismanPundit.com (Armstrong, 2009). Armstrong also reported that most (nearly 90 percent) of the Heisman voters were so torn over who to vote for that they waited until after conference championship games to place their votes (2009).

In published letters to the SI editors, reader Christopher Bleakly (2009) wrote about Ingram’s relationship with his father and his ability to overcome adversity saying, “Mark Ingram's never giving up on his dad is truly inspiring. His ability to overcome family issues and still have such athletic success is remarkable” (Bleakley, Lyman, Lind, Samm, de Ruiter, Sweeney & Petrenko, 2009).

Ingram’s campaign spurred media coverage of his father throughout the season that carried through the end of December, and although Heisman winners had had a 2-7 record in bowl games since 2000, Ingram went on to help lead Alabama to the national title against Texas. Despite, the legal issues, the bond between Ingram and his father was intertwined in coverage of his game play and stats and seemed to play a heavy role throughout the coverage of his season. When it came to the mention of Ingram’s role, his humility and maturity is what helped prove his

leadership ability among teammates, but the brute and physical words used to describe his play style are what helped make Ingram memorable on the field.

Cam Newton, 2010

Cam Newton started his college career at the University of Florida, where he played five games and earned the nickname, “Tebow’s heir” (Anderson, 2010a). In 2010, after an incident involving a stolen laptop, Newton transferred to Blinn College, where he was said to have done some “soul searching” and “maturing.” From there he transferred to the SEC’s Auburn University, providing for Auburn a “dangerous pass-run threat” that the program had lacked and for Newton an opportunity for redemption (Anderson, 2010a).

In the season opener, Newton accounted for five touchdowns in his first start at Auburn, leading the Tigers to a 52-26 victory against Arkansas State (Associated Press, 2010). Newton led the team to an undefeated 3-0 start. By October, SI reported that Newton was becoming one of “most dynamic, dangerous players in the country,” and one who “will surely play a major role in determining who wins the SEC” (Anderson, 2010b). Even offensive coordinator Gus Malzahn said that with each week Newton became more comfortable with the game. By early October, Newton became a player to watch in the race of the 2010 Heisman (Whiteside, 2010a). By mid-October, Newton was not only leading Auburn to a 6-0 start, but he was also the SEC rushing leader at 112 yards a game and ranks 17th nationally (Carey, 2010). On October 18, Kelly Whiteside of USAT, named Newton that week’s leading Heisman Trophy contender after he rushed for 188 yards, passed for 140, and accounted for four touchdowns (2010b).

The coverage looked at Newton as an upcoming star and “monster” of a quarterback (Glier, 2010a; McCartney, 2010). Newton became known as a “bruising runner” and “effective passer” that went from being a candidate for the Heisman to being at the “front of the pack”

(McCartney, 2010). By the end of October, Newton had passed Heisman winner Pat Sullivan's 40-year-old school mark of 26 TDs rushing and passing in a season (Whiteside, 2010c). By early November, the 6'6", 250-pound quarterback appeared as the obvious front-runner for the Heisman with a skill set and athleticism that was helping him become the second player in Division I-A history to both pass and rush for 20 touchdowns each in a single season (Anderson, 2010c). Despite leading the midseason polls by a landslide and having media coverage that raved about Newton's talent and record-breaking season, the coverage would take a sharp turn as it was revealed on November 5 in the NYT that the NCAA was investigating the recruitment of Newton (Thamel, 2010a). There were reports that former Mississippi State Bulldogs player, John Bond, had come out saying he was approached by another former teammate, Kenny Rodgers, about a "specific payment" that was to be made in order to "secure Newton's commitment to the Bulldogs" (Rhoden, 2010a, Thamel, 2010a). The payment was roughly about \$180,000.

During the investigation, Auburn fans "wrapped their arms around Newton and made it easy for him to parade into the stadium, as always, like a hero; he was even said to play like a hero" (Glier, 2010b). Fans continued to support Newton, despite the negative connotation and press surrounding the athlete. As games progressed, the Heisman and game conversations minimized as the NYT, USAT, and SI gave constant updates that ranged from single line investigation headlines to fully developed timelines of what happened and when. It was reported that the investigation began the summer that Newton enrolled at Auburn; as the news continued to break throughout the first week of November, Southeastern Conference Commissioner Mike Slive mentioned that he hoped the case, revolving around a "purported effort to sell Newton's services out of junior college was settled 'sooner rather than later'" (Whiteside & Wieberg, 2010; Wieberg, 2010a).

In published letters written to SI many explained their disdain toward Newton, saying things like, “Given his alleged redemption and desire to be a leader, how disappointing it is that this pastor's son still seems to display no loyalty, service or scholarship. A lifetime of privileged treatment is one way to build a winner, but it can also create a monster,” said David O’Connell in response to an article written about Newton wanting redemption (“Letters,” 2010).

On November 10, further news broke that Newton left Florida after the fall of 2008 instead of facing suspension or expulsion due to three instances of academic cheating (“Inside The Times,” 2010). It was then that the “redemptive” season of Cam Newton was brought up again as more negative press surrounded him (Glier & Thamel, 2010). Newton’s father Cecil was placed on a gag order from lawyers while Newton denied allegations that he left Florida due to academic issues and instead told reporters that he left the university when Tebow had returned from an injury, but the narratives of Newton's academic problems “contrast sharply” with the story that both Newton and his father had told about his redemptive time in college (Glier & Thamel, 2010).

Heisman voters began voicing their opinions on the several scandals surrounding Newton and his father. For example, Christine Brennan said she could look past the single laptop incident at Florida because it was two years before, and she’s “voting for a football award not ‘sainthood’” (2010). Other opinion pieces discussing the pros and cons of pay for play began to get published as well, especially in NYT, where it was claimed that schools already make millions with the athletic department so student athletes should be able to benefit off their name (Belson, 2010).

Despite the accusations, Newton still excelled on the field and continued to be listed at the top of the USAT Heisman watch list (Kimball, Smith, & Gardner, 2010). More news broke

when the man linked to the money solicitation of Newton told a Dallas radio station in an interview that it was Newton's father, the Georgia pastor, who "shopped his son around" (Wieberg, 2010b). Despite the negative press, the scandal ended up drawing higher ratings of Auburn games shown on CBS (Hiestand, 2010). Newton was the clear winner for the Heisman, but as voters received their ballots, they watched Newton's games closely and kept track of stories to keep a close eye out on his eligibility (Pennington, 2010). Voters were also reported to be nervous to award Newton with the Heisman as they were reminded of 2005 Heisman winner Reggie Bush who forfeited his trophy after it was revealed after he went to the NFL that he accepted gifts and payments in exchange for playing at USC (Pennington, 2010).

When it came time to play rival Alabama, Newton continued to be adored by Auburn fans, but when he took the field at Bryant Denny Stadium, the songs "Take the Money and Run" by Steve Miller and "Son of a Preacher Man" by Dusty Springfield rang through the speakers as a reminder of the controversy that surrounded him (Thamel, 2010b). Finally, on December 1, 2010, the NCAA ruled that Newton was in fact eligible to play and that he was unaware of his father's doing (Thamel 2010c; Wieberg & O'Toole, 2010). In light of the ruling, some, including NCAA President Mark Emmert, acknowledged his desire for stricter regulations to avoid situations like Newton's and that of Reggie Bush, who by that time had forfeited his Heisman due to findings that he was part of a "pay-for-play scheme" that involved Bush receiving thousands of dollars in gifts ("NCAA president wants to amend rules, acknowledges outrage over decision," 2010).

Despite his clearance, voters still held grudges against Newton and went so far as to openly explain why they would not be putting Newton on their ballot (Reid & Weir, 2010). Despite all of it, Newton received 82.2 percent of the first-place votes and won the Heisman even

though prior to the before the SEC title game and N.C.A.A restoring Newton's eligibility, Auburn had ruled him ineligible for three days due to his father's actions (Sandomir, 2010; Whiteside, 2010d).

The coverage of Newton began as a redemption season for an athlete who messed up at Florida and found his way back on top. Although he was a superstar from the beginning, Newton's Heisman winning season became a "docudrama" among other things (Lopresti, 2010). Filled with details of a potential pay-for-play opportunity set up by his father, Newton was cleared of all wrongdoings. Despite the negative press, Newton still had a stellar season and went on to win the Heisman and later lead the Tigers to the national championship.

This was one of the first instances where members of the media who voted on the Heisman came out and discussed their opinion on Newton's situation and described why or why not they would name Newton on their ballot. This may be in part because of the social media reaction but also the overall media reaction of the allegation of Newton's father soliciting payments for his son's commitment. In many voters' opinion, Newton was the front runner for the Heisman, but there was a possibility of his scandal tainting what the Heisman was worth. There was also continual evidence, mentioned both at the beginning and amidst scandal, of Newton's 2010 season being one of redemption as he had both legal and team issues at the University of Florida. The coverage also portrayed Newton as somewhat of a fallen hero and even mentioned it as Auburn fans continued to cheer for the scandal-ridden athlete while the rest of the country chastised and questioned his eligibility.

Robert Griffin III, 2011

Before the season started, Robert Griffin III, also known as RG3, was returning to the Big 12's Baylor University as the starting quarterback in 2011. He first arrived in the spring of 2008

after graduating high school early and he quickly became a Big 12 champion, NCAA All-American and Olympic trials semifinalist in the 400-meter hurdles before even getting the chance to play football (Torre, 2011a). Around Waco, Texas, Griffin was had made several names for himself, as he was also known as Superman, Black Jesus, the Ambassador, and the “Most Exciting Player in College Football” (Torre, 2011a). RG3 was “making Baylor football relevant again” by becoming the Bears' career leader in 14 categories that include 6,073 passing yards, 7,628 total offense yards and 209 consecutive attempts without an interception (Litman, 2011). After getting approved as a medical redshirt after his tearing his ACL during his true sophomore season Griffin was able to lead the school to its first winning season since 1995 when he returned the following season in 2010 (Litman, 2011). The young quarterback earned a political science degree and was working on his master’s in communications with the intention of going to law school post-football (Litman, 2011; McGarr, 2011a). Born of two military sergeants, Robert Jr. and Jacqueline Griffin, RG3 spent his time volunteering with five charities and says he “doesn't ‘drink or smoke or any of that stuff” (Torre, 2011a). Torre compared Griffin’s athletic ability to being built in a “secret military lab” (Torre, 2011a). Griffin helped lead the Bears to a 50-48 opening win against TCU, a first in 20 years, which immediately moved him into the Heisman Trophy discussion (Lopresti 2011a; Torre, 2011a).

One major theme that resonated in coverage was that RG3 enjoyed being different and was known for his colorful socks (Whiteside, 2011a). Halfway through the season Griffin led the country with an 80.3 percent completion rate and 19 touchdown passes (Whiteside, 2011a). he was second in passing efficiency, with a rating of 212.9, and well on his way to breaking the NCAA season pass-efficiency record of 186 while being halfway into his third full season (Whiteside, 2011a). During his three seasons, Griffin had broken or shared 43 school records

(Whiteside, 2011a). Some readers called Griffin's dedication and leadership a "breath of fresh air" in their letters to the editor (Haulman, Chirgwin, Wong, Ingersoll, Wehrmeister, Woodward, & Amkraut, 2011).

In late September, Griffin's season was marked by his statistic of him throwing more touchdowns than incompletions (Timanus, 2011). By mid-October, the Heisman race was said to be crowded with five or six candidates that included Stanford's Andrew Luck and Alabama's Trent Richardson (Mandel, 2011). During the 2011 Griffin's coverage was not as prolific as previous winners. His main coverage included one-to-two sentence recaps of games or his overall performance. Despite leading his team to a winning season and being considered a "local celebrity" Griffin also saw a drop in coverage (65 articles), from previous winner Cam Newton who had 126. This could also potentially be due to the social media buzz surrounding Griffin and the clean-cut image he had with the media. But by mid-November, RG3 was known as the "most dangerous pass-run threat in the nation" and for the first time in 20 years, he helped lead Baylor to an eight-win season (Anderson, 2011; Lopresti, 2011).

When the time came around, five finalists were chosen for the Heisman, including LSU's Tyrann Mathieu, Alabama's Trent Richardson, Stanford's Andrew Luck, Wisconsin's Montee Ball, and Griffin ("LSU, Alabama in Heisman final, too," 2011). When accepting his award, RG3 showed his unique side by wearing a pair of collector Superman socks, which also went with his "superhero kind of season" (Viera, 2011; Whiteside, 2011b). Despite winning the Heisman, draft analysts ranked RG3 lower than Heisman runner-up Andrew Luck (Weir, 2011). Although, RG3 couldn't lead his team to the national championship, he could lead Baylor to the best season they had in years, and for that he was able to turn the program around and put it back

on the map while also being a “media darling” as he cracked jokes on late night television shows after winning the Heisman (Curtis, 2011).

From the beginning RG3 was predicted to be a Heisman candidate while helping salvage the struggling Baylor football team. From being known as “black Jesus” to a “once-in a lifetime quarterback,” Griffin captivated both Heisman voters and fans with his athleticism and leadership while he led the Bears to their best season in over twenty years, a team whose success has been decimated by allegations of rampant sexual assaults and deviance under Head Coach Art Biles.

Johnny Manziel, 2012

With the departure of Ryan Tannehill as quarterback for the newest member of the Southeastern Conference, Texas A&M found itself in a quarterback predicament, but the team was willing to put its faith in an “untested” Johnny Manziel who became the first freshman quarterback to start at Texas A&M since 1944 (Spousta 2012). From August through September, coverage was relatively scarce, most likely due to the uncertainty of success in the season with a freshman quarterback. But by the end of September, Manziel had helped the Aggies get their first SEC win after throwing for a team-record 453 yards and 3 touchdowns (“The Day's Best,” 2012). By mid-October, Manziel was taking the football world by the hands (Schroeder, 2012a). Formerly a Texas high school legend, Manziel had originally committed to Oregon, but then chose A&M when offered a scholarship because of its proximity to his hometown (Schroeder, 2012a). He was considered a football phenomenon and given the name “Johnny Football” after starting the season 5-1 record (Schroeder, 2012a). Although unavailable for interviews due to the team rule that freshman are not allowed to talk to the media, Manziel’s game highlighted showed his talent: he had twice broken the SEC record for total offense in a game, averaging 392.7 yards,

while his playing style was described as “scrambling, freelancing and wondering what he’ll do next” (Schroeder, 2012a).

Manziel led the Aggies to a 63-21 victory against Auburn when he ran for three touchdowns and passed for two more (Associated Press, 2012). In the beginning of November, the “phenomenon” known as Johnny Manziel helped lead the aggies in a shocking win against Alabama (Glier, 2012). Since the Aggies were new to the conference, many did not think they would be able to beat a team who, within the past few year, had become the predominant leader of the conference. The Aggies moved to an 8-2 record with their losses being by 5 points or less (Glier, 2012). Glier described the Aggies as being the SEC’s “rude new comers” who may have ended the SEC’s run of six national titles after Manziel completed 24 of 31 passes for 253 yards and did not throw an interception despite facing one of the country’s “highest ranked defenses” (2012). After the win against Alabama, Manziel finished third in USAT’s Heisman watch list and was labeled as a “must-name” candidate on everyone’s ballot (Lopresti, 2012a). Even though Manziel was establishing himself as one of the “most dynamic players” in college football, mentions of the internet buzz that surrounded Manziel’ disorderly conduct arrest made its way back into the coverage (Staples, 2012).

Greg Bishop (2012) reported that in an industry where Heisman Trophy campaigns can “resemble political campaigns,” Texas A&M's method lacked what would seem to be an “essential element: an actual campaign,” including a critical voice: Manziel himself. Texas A&M took a subtle approach, partly because he was a freshman and first-year athlete and as such was not allowed to talk to the media and partly because he was not considered a strong contender until halfway through the season, leading A&M to victories over the top teams in the SEC (Bishop, 2012). But, Bishop (2012) writes, the media narrative of Manziel wasn’t needed

because people already were talking on Twitter, and the buzz was due in part to Manziel's outspoken ways of life on and off the field.

Dubbed as the "Alabama-killer" after the win over Alabama, Manziel remained a focus of Heisman discussions (Lopresti, 2013a). Other coverage and media buzz delved into what it was like being Johnny Manziel, who was arrested for disorderly conduct and made headlines for his party-boy ways, such as photos released of him in a Scooby Doo costume posed next to scantily dressed women (Staples, 2012). And yet, only a couple of days later he threw for 311 yards and ran for 129 in a 38-13 win over Mississippi State (Staples, 2012).

The NYT's Tim Rohan detailed how Johnny Football was living like his father, who was also mischievous and adventurous, participating in fights and other questionable behavior (2013b). Rohan wrote how Manziel occasionally had "fun, skipping class and sweet-talking his way out of trouble" and even during high school was arrested for underage drinking (2012b). Manziel's father John Paul discussed how keeping Johnny in check meant giving him incentives to stay out of trouble. In order to keep Manziel out of trouble, A&M followed suit but created a "mapped out to the minute" schedule for Manziel to follow after his arrest in June, that subjected the quarterback to drug testing, drug and alcohol counseling, and community service. (Rohan, 2012b).

Manziel later discussed his offseason arrest for disorderly conduct and presenting false identification as "a critical mistake" and said he had learned from it (Schroeder 2012b). Manziel also talked about how much his life has changed as he went from a relatively unknown to an instant star during a record-setting season (Schroeder 2012b). The young quarterback joked about his nickname, Johnny Football, and said, "I don't know if it's a legend. It's probably more of a folk tale -- and I don't really see it that way" (Schroeder, 2012b).

Once ballots were distributed, Manziel was set up to be the first freshman to win the Heisman Trophy and on December 16, he did just that. Despite his preseason behavior and social media buzz, neither the NYT, USAT, OR SI voiced their concerns on how his character could affect winning the Heisman. Instead, his season was marked by shock, concern, and a sense of heroism, especially after knocking off No. 1 Alabama (Murphy, 2012). Many did not believe the SEC newcomers could hold up to a highly competitive conference. Manziel's talent on the field helped lead Texas A&M to the Cotton Bowl.

Starting as a freshman, Manziel's coverage was scant but as he led his team to a 5-1 start reporters were full of amazement because of his unpredictable play style and outspoken personality. He was a hidden gem who helped bring a school who had just switched to one of the most dominant football conferences in the country become a leader in the division (Gramling, 2012). Despite the overwhelming notoriety of Manziel captured on social media and other outlets, coverage in USAT, the NYT and SI of the Heisman winner tended to avoid those stories and did not cover much of his partying or scandalous off field activities during the 2012 season. As mentioned in the coverage, the social media buzz and conversation was already surrounding Manziel, so the lack of coverage surrounding his character during the season could have been mainly within digital platforms. Although it was reported a couple of times, journalists of the outlets examined for this study seemed to be more impressed with Manziel's ability to lead the Aggies to victory and were anxious to see what the next season could bring for the Heisman winner.

Jameis Winston, 2013

From the very beginning of the 2013 season, the ACC's Florida State quarterback Jameis Winston said if he ever "gets Manziel disease that he wants the media to smack him in the head,"

referring to Manziel's party behavior that ensued after the 2012 football season ("First Word," 2013). Winston made headlines earlier in the year after impressing both fans and the media during the Seminoles' spring practice game (Ellis, 2013). As the season began, Winston continued to impress fans with his debut against Pittsburgh, after he passed for 356 yards and threw for 4 touchdowns (Associated Press, 2013c). After a successful first game, Winston was already considered one of the top players in the country, and by the third week of the season, he was a top contender for the Heisman Trophy (Myerberg, 2013a).

Throughout the season, Winston put up "stellar" stats including throwing for 393 yards and 5 touchdowns against Maryland, but faced competition with Oregon's Marcus Mariota who was considered the front-runner of the Heisman race (Associated Press, 2013a; "College Midseason Report," 2013). Some reports considered Winston to be the new Manziel in regards to both "talent and athleticism," saying he was having an "electrifying" season (Glier, 2013; Rohan 2013). Florida State offensive tackle Cam Erving, however, learned about the "two sides" of Winston when he was assigned to mentor the freshman during the summer of 2012 (Staples & Bechtel, 2013). Erving had said that at first he thought Winston was just "goofy" but after watching him do workouts and yell at a senior in practice after he failed to make a catch that should have been caught, Erving said Winston had that "it factor" (Staples & Bechtel, 2013).

November was full of Heisman updates, where Winston continued to come in behind Mariota (Uthman, 2013a). Winston didn't fall into the first-place spot for the Heisman race until after he ironically played his worst game (statistically) against Wake Forest (Uthman, 2013b). In that game, Winston threw 2 touchdowns and completed 17 of 28 passes for 159 yards in the win against Wake Forest (Uthman, 2013b). But it was only a few days after he was ranked as the top contender that the NYT reported Winston as being under investigation in connection to a sexual

assault that happened the prior year (Associated Press, 2013b). Florida State announced that since no charges had been filed against Winston, his standing and eligibility on the team was unchanged (Rossman & Burlew, 2013).

Several of USAT's Heisman voters indicated that Winston's investigation wouldn't hinder his chances of earning the Heisman, unless the investigation concluded by pressing charges or deeming the quarterback to be ineligible (Uthman, 2013c). Journalists compared the media coverage and scandal to that of Cam Newton and Johnny Manziel because the player's issues became larger than the face of the team (Wolken, 2013a). In this case, the coverage was torn between Winston's memorable season and his scandal. The scandal of sexual assault "collided" with the hero rhetoric of Winston leading Florida State to an undefeated season and first national championship since 1999 (Brady, 2013). As the investigation continued and the "wild antics" of Johnny Football heightened, voters began looking for other options for the Heisman (Wolken, 2013a). Much of the coverage of Johnny Football included his playing ability and keeping Texas A&M under the same amount of success from the previous year, but not of his off-field behavior that was covered more in depth in social media buzz and topics.

Heisman voter Christine Brennan wrote about the scandal and how the Heisman intended to award the athlete who not only "exemplifies great athleticism but excellence and integrity as well" (2013a). Due to the allegations against Winston, Brennan said, she could no longer consider him for the award, and she began rallying for Alabama quarterback AJ McCarron, who per Brennan, embodied the integrity meant to go alongside the great athleticism of the Heisman (2013a). Brennan also mentioned Manziel who had won the Heisman as a Freshman, and she states that voters were given the opportunity to see what awarding a young athlete looks like, "autographs, arrogance and all...He's a fabulously entertaining athlete... But has he pursued

excellence with integrity? Not exactly” (2013a). Manziel was even mentioned as being the “first pop culture phenomenon from college football in the era of social media, making him the most talked about, Tweeted-about, Instagrammed player” college football has ever seen (Wolken, 2013c).

A few weeks later, the prosecutor overseeing the investigation of the sexual-assault allegations said there would be no charges filed against the quarterback (Brennan, 2013b). However, the victim’s attorney Patricia Carroll mentioned in a statement that the victim is worried about other victims’ willingness to file a report because hers had unfolded in the eyes of social media (Drape, 2013). Throughout the coverage, no other mention of Winston’s case regarding the coverage in social media was mentioned and after allegations were cleared, coverage still reported on its aftermath and how it could affect both Winston and the team as the negative publicity still surrounded the Florida State organization (Staples, Bechtel, & Gorant, 2013). After the charges were dropped, the question was no longer about whether or not Winston would face charges but about “how much of a margin would Winston win the Heisman Trophy by” (Meyerberg, 2013b).

In regard to Winston’s athleticism, a defensive coach for a team that faced Winston told USAT Sports that Winston was “the most NFL-ready quarterback that I’ve had the privilege of preparing for” (Pelissero, 2013). But by the end of December, the media circus surrounding Winston’s talent as a quarterback continued to be overshadowed by the allegations of rape and sexual assault.

As they did with Auburn’s Cam Newton, Heisman voters and media members voiced their opinions and rationales about voting for Winston for the Heisman. Similar to Newton’s coverage, opinion pieces from voters and other members of the media were published since the

integrity of the trophy was being questioned. The sexual assault dwelled in the coverage of Winston, and the actual coverage of the Heisman took a back seat. Although the weekly updates were still there, updates of the investigation became more apparent among the NYT, SI, and USAT. As with Newton, scandal struck and became the main focal point during Winston's Heisman season and would continue to be mentioned throughout the end of the season and even became a focal story in "The Hunting Ground," a documentary that depicts the culture of sexual assaults on college campuses.

Marcus Mariota, 2014

From early on in the preseason of 2014, Oregon Duck Marcus Mariota was considered a top Heisman candidate. As a leading contender for the Heisman the previous year, Mariota fell to a knee injury and put Winston at the top of the Heisman list. The PAC 12's University of Oregon was ranked fourth in the early AP polls ("Amway Coaches Poll," 2014) and from the very beginning of the season Mariota was depicted as a genuine guy, "almost too nice to lead a football team" (Uthman, 2014). Mariota, for example, made surprise visits to the Boys & Girls Club, and his diligent and intelligent character was marked by his insistence on taking 20 or more class credits during the season to graduate early (Uthman, 2014). Oregon's offensive coordinator Scott Frost had said that there "were several times where they had to kick Mariota out because he would close the academic center down" (Uthman, 2014). As a Hawaii native, Mariota had strong ties to his family and friends back at home and tried to implement those values into his everyday life so, for example, on top of his academic perseverance Mariota always made sure to give a Cliff bar and a bottle of water to a homeless person asking for help on the corner of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Coburg Road in Eugene (Uthman, 2014). Former teammates commented that Mariota's actions and attitude were "eye opening" and that

his “willingness to always learn” helped him get a science degree on the pre-med track, which was “usually not advised to other athletes” (Jenkins, 2014; Uthman, 2014).

In September Mariota was the top all but two of the first-place votes in the USAT Heisman survey (O’Toole, 2014a). And still, during the 2014 season, Mariota was considered one of the best quarterbacks in the country (Schonbrun, 2014). He was the front-runner for the Heisman for three consecutive weeks, but fell after a loss to Arizona (Schroeder, 2014). But by early November, Mariota was back on top with over 45% of the first place votes in Heisman polls (O’Toole, 2014b). By mid- November, Oregon had an 8-1 record and there were early speculations that both Mariota and 2013 Heisman winner Jameis Winston would declare for the draft early and forego their senior and junior seasons (Associated Press, 2014; Tracy, 2014).

Mariota led the country in passing efficiency while his two interceptions were the “fewest of anyone in the top 30 in efficiency rating,” and his 29 touchdown passes were “tied for third among those in the top 30” (O’Toole, 2014c). By early December, Mariota received every first-place nomination from writers and editors who worked at properties owned by Gannett, the parent company of USAT (O’Toole, 2014d). When the finalists were announced, Mariota, Alabama’s Amari Cooper, and Wisconsin’s Melvin Gordon, all juniors, were the three finalists for the Heisman.

The “quiet and good-hearted down to earth” Mariota became the first Hawaiian to win the Heisman, an award he dedicated to his friends and family while wearing leis as a tribute to Hawaii (Rohan, 2014b). Mariota was the same athlete who “when told to yell at another teammate or sprint, chose to sprint and helped create workouts and tutor his teammates in high school” (Rohan, 2014b).

Mariota received 2,534 points, or 90.9 percent of the maximum possible votes for a winner, making his win the “second-highest percentage of the modern era” (Rohan, 2014a). His win became an inspiration to his home state and to his family, and he also was viewed as the “NCAA’s ideal student-athlete,” especially because of past winners whose award was surrounded by controversy: Jameis Winston, Johnny Manziel, and Cam Newton (Rohan, 2014a). Despite Oregon not having a single Heisman campaign for Mariota, after he asked the school to not do one, his off-field activities garnered a tremendous amount of positive attention (Rohan, 2014a). Some of that being, Mariota’s determination to finish his degree early and tutoring his teammates. After winning the Heisman, Mariota prepared to play Jameis Winston in the semi-finals for the college football national championship. The NYT’s John Branch, mentioned how both Oregon and Florida State were trying to overcome the headlines of the “bad guy” versus “good guy” and “flawless-versus-lawless” duel that was to happen between the two athletes (2014). Even Mariota tried to deflect the headlines by saying "I don't think about it that way... My interactions with him [Winston] have been good” (Branch, 2014).

From start to finish Marcus Mariota dazzled the press not only with his athletic ability, but also with his endearing personality that embodied and changed the face of the Heisman after years of scandal. Portrayed as the poster child for the Heisman, Mariota also broke barriers for the Hawaiian community, becoming the first islander to win the award. Even, when not tarred by scandal, Mariota received equal or more coverage than some of the other Heisman winners who were immersed in scandal, e.g., Mariota was included in 104 articles for this study whereas Newton had 126. Rather than scandal or socks, the breakout media narrative for Mariota was his quiet, but profound leadership, personality and likeability that won over the press and fans. He would later defeat Winston in a blowout game against FSU, but lose the national championship

to Ohio State. Mariota and Winston became back to back No. 1 and 2 picks in the subsequent 2015 NFL draft.

Derrick Henry, 2015

In the preseason Top 25 rankings it was reported in SI that the Alabama quarterback's job would be made easier with senior Kenyan Drake and junior Derrick Henry who was an upcoming favorite for the Heisman (Ellis, 2015a; Staples, 2015a). Alabama would be facing the problem of having to find a starter quarterback after the departure of A.J. McCarron. But at the start of the season Henry was leading No. 3 Alabama in rushing again and was labeled a nightmare for Southeastern Conference defense teams due to his 6'3", solid frame (Associated Press, 2015a; Ellis, 2015a). Before playing Mississippi, Henry was labeled a "fast and bruising running back" in the middle of the Heisman race (Bierman, 2015a), but then Alabama lost to Mississippi.

Nevertheless, even though the Heisman was thought to be a quarterback-winning award, since only 1 of the past 14 winners were not quarterbacks, Henry remained a contender in the 2015 early Heisman race with fellow running back Louisiana State's Leonard Fournette (Myerberg, 2015). Some feared that Henry's campaign would fall short once Alabama solved their quarterback problem, but Henry soon became the Crimson Tide's leading rusher (Associated Press, 2015a; Meyerberg, 2015). And although Henry was performing to the standard of the Crimson Tide, others Heisman contenders from other teams were outperforming him in the beginning of the season (Ellis, 2015a).

Henry had consistently been ranked as a potential candidate for the Heisman in NYT, but within USAT's early October Heisman Trophy survey, he had not received any votes for his candidacy; however, that changed after Alabama playing Georgia and Henry outrushed the

Bulldog's Heisman candidate Nick Chubb (O'Toole, 2015). During week seven of the season, Henry ran for a career high 236 yards and two scores (Associated Press, 2015b), yet he continued to be a low-tier contender for the Heisman as Fournette and Boykin continued to lead the race. It was stated, however, that if Henry could have a breakout game against LSU, it could propel him to the top of the Heisman list (Bierman, 2015c).

Henry's size and stature was a focal point of all media outlets. His 6'63and 236-pound frame was not common for most running backs as many commented that he towered over defenses. In one instance, his running style was described as "brute strength" and Alabama quarterback Jake Coker observed that during "some of those plays, I see him punish people. I sit back there and I'm like, gosh, I feel bad for that guy" (Ellis, 2015d). Even LSU's Fournette said, "He's huge, man. Like he's three times bigger than me. Man, if I played defense, I wouldn't want to tackle him" (Guilbeau, 2015). These themes of Henry's powerful frame and athleticism continued as it was mentioned to help me be overpowering for defenses to tackle.

Henry attributed his success to the "Alabama standard," which per Ellis, was due to the long line of greatness that was expected of the Crimson Tide due to their success and standards of the fan base and coaches (Ellis, 2015d). After the game against LSU, Henry shot up to the top of the Heisman race after the Crimson Tide's defense limited Leonard Fournette to only 31 yards (Staples, 2015b; Tracy, 2015). But it was Henry's size and success that helped put Alabama in contention for the national title as the Tide continued its winning streak after its loss to Mississippi. Pete Thamel (2015d) wrote that the dominance of both Henry and the defense "further brandished its bruising identity" as Alabama beat Mississippi State.

Henry continued his Heisman run by becoming the first player in Alabama history to rush for 200 yards three times in a single season and was even mentioned as being better than

previous Heisman winner and Alabama running back Mark Ingram (Ellis, 2015b). By mid-November, both Clemson and Alabama were predicted to head to the national championship, as Henry set another program record for touchdowns in a season and was two short of the SEC record after beating Charleston Southern (Bierman, 2015b). Henry became a finalist for the Maxwell Award, which is given to the nation's best player, and rose to being the leading candidate for the Heisman by late November (Bierman, 2015b). In between, Henry's skill and play set Kransoo deemed Henry the "best player in college football" for the month of November (Kransoo, 2015).

During the SEC Championship, Henry broke the SEC record for rushing yards in a single season and also tied the record for rushing touchdowns in a single season (SI Wire, 2015). The win propelled Alabama to the post season and to the national championship (Staples, 2015c).

As for the Heisman, there were mentions of Mark Ingram and the legacy set forth by him as Derrick Henry made his mark for the award. In comparison to Ingram's run for the Heisman, it was said that the 2015 recipient would be slightly easier to pinpoint despite it being another close race (Ellis, 2015c). The finalists were Henry, Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson, and Stanford running back Christian McCaffrey. Ultimately, Henry won both the Maxwell Award and the Heisman. Other than Mark Ingram, Henry was the only other non-quarterback who had won the award since 2000 (running back Reggie Bush had forfeited his 2005 trophy) (Ellis, 2015e).

Soon Alabama would prepare to play Michigan State in the playoffs in the next step towards the national championship. In the meantime, coverage revisited Henry's successful season and how his contributions to the team helped lead the Tide to another successful season. Since there were predictions of Henry forgoing his senior year for the NFL draft, *USAT*

highlighted several of the freshmen who could fill the shoes of several Alabama players including Henry's. One of those players included running back Bo Scarbrough who, according to Crimson Tide defensive tackle Jarran Reed, is the "next Derrick Henry" (Uthman, 2015).

After Henry won the Heisman, *USAT* reflected on the previous year when a picture Henry posted on the social media site Instagram went viral and stirred a small controversy (Josh, 2015). It was a picture of a brand new red Dodge Challenger that seemed to imply that in violation of NCAA rules, Alabama had bought Henry a car. However, J.T. Medley, Henry's former middle school football coach, told Josh (2015) that he quickly called Alabama's NCAA compliance department and explained that it was registered in Medley's name and paid for with the help of Henry's parents. The photo was removed from Henry's account. Josh continued with Henry's story, describing his upbringing in Yulee, Florida, and the criminal past of his father, Derrick Henry, Sr. As a sophomore in high school, Henry eventually moved in with his coach, J.T. Medley who helped develop the athlete by serving as a father figure and mentor and taking him to football camps around the area (Josh, 2015). When Henry won the Heisman, he thanked his former coach, along with everyone who helped pay for his red Challenger that he named Fiona, and was predicted to declare for the draft after the end of the 2015 season (Josh, 2015).

Media coverage began with the anticipation of Henry being a strong contender for the Heisman in late August of 2015. He consistently stayed on the list in *The NYT* and *SI*. Henry's size was used to describe his abilities where he bulldozed, rolled, and stormed his way through defenses and onto victory. *SI* played a heavier role in reporting both Heisman and team news and victories. From weekly game previews and updates to post game interviews and coverage, *SI* was one of the more dominant sources in provided information about Henry's Heisman race. Since print version of articles were analyzed, the reasoning could in part be since both the *NYT* and

USAT were posting more articles do their respective websites as readership has become more digital and mobile.

From Chris Weinke to Derrick Henry, this analysis of 16 years of Heisman Trophy winner coverage provided insight into what was covered and how the winners were portrayed in three of the top print-media outlets for sports coverage in the U.S.: *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Whether the focus was on one or a combination of factors, such as personality, athleticism, or personal situation, each player was depicted as being unique whereas the aggregate coverage of the Heisman winners revealed some common themes and words choices that became prevalent across the time-period of this study

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Upon analyzing the sources in this study, the NYT seemed to run more feature pieces about candidates, their team and its overall success. It was not until the middle of the season (around October) when coverage included highlights of the players who had outstanding games from week to week as well as hard breaking news and features. Much of that hard-breaking news followed the candidates who had the most scandal throughout the season: Winston and Newton. A large portion of the coverage originated from the Associated Press as the NYT aggregated much of its information from the source and published it into the paper. From 2000-2003, much of the hard-hitting stories of Heisman candidates and winners was written by Joe Drape, but in 2003 that began to switch as Pete Thamel began writing for the NYT, and again in 2006 when Thayer Evans began writing for the NYT. By 2015, Thayer and Thamel had essentially taken over the coverage and there was not nearly as much information from the Associated Press.

As seasons progressed, sources like *USAT* homed in on the Heisman race in a “hot and cold” comparison that was updated weekly with new contenders. Within those *USAT* articles, athletes who had great games were “on fire” and athletes who had a subpar performance were “cooling down” or on a steady pace, focusing throughout the season on Heisman candidates and their post-game statistics and standings among the other candidates. *USAT’s* Heisman weekly updates were usually led by Kelly Whiteside who was also a member of the media who voted on the Heisman ballot. Her writing and weekly Heisman updates were prevalent through each of the 16 seasons, making hers a predominant voice in the coverage as she addressed a broad spectrum

of topics from full editorial pieces to weekly snippets of game day coverage. Although other writers such as Eddie Timanus, no one had quite as influential of a voice as Whiteside did. Until 2010, a clear majority of the content published in USAT was written by Whiteside, thus her voice was the most prominent.

SI coverage was substantially less when compared to USAT and the NYT. When the analysis began, coverage of both college football and Heisman candidates did not start until early September. Austin Murphy had one of the biggest voices in the coverage of the Heisman as he provided weekly updates of the season. Although in 2011, stories from Murphy began to decrease as the articles were published by a large variety of authors instead of just one. Lars Anderson and Andy Staples also became prominent voices for SI, but not in the same sense that Murphy was prior to 2011. SI's coverage was also a combination of USAT and the NYT, with both editorial pieces and fast fact news. It was not until 2004 that *SI* published a preseason article about Heisman favorites for the season. The publication was the most involved in its coverage throughout the seasons of Tim Tebow and Derrick Henry, presenting preseason Heisman favorite analyses by detailing Tebow's character and Henry's athleticism.

As certain journalists emerged in the coverage of the Heisman, it may be inferred that those people not only vote for the Heisman, but they are the gate keepers of what is said about the candidates and who is worthy of the award. In the circumstance of a Heisman campaign, the information should be directed to the journalists covering the topic, rather than the new source itself. This is different from Seltzer and Mitrook (2009) who state that the media may have some influence on how media coverage frames the Heisman Trophy race. Seltzer and Mitrook (2009) also stated that there is a difference between expert opinion and media coverage, but in this study, those who hold the expert opinion are also the ones writing the stories. Journalists like

Kelly Whiteside, Christine Brennan, Eddie Timanus, or Pete Thamel are the content creators for news regarding collegiate football and are on the receiving end of the promotional materials that schools send. In addition, it had been mentioned before that journalists such as the NYT's Joe Drape, would rather not deal with gimmicky and over the top campaigns. Drape's opinion of promotional materials is also confirmed in Salmon (2005) whose study concluded that voters tend to think press conferences, websites and emails with bullet points and simple "fast facts" are the most useful for Heisman promotion, while over-the-top materials like bobble heads and ties were negatively received. So when pitching stories of a candidate to journalists, it would be best to use simple and direct facts while also providing the statistics that make a candidate worthy of the Heisman.

RQ1: What are the thematic elements that emerge from the content of coverage of Heisman winners from 2000-2015?

It was typical to find that more detailed media coverage zeroed in on candidates around mid-October when the competition became more dominant. The coverage included full editorial articles and Heisman worthiness from the perspective of the journalist, who was also more than likely a voter of the Heisman.

There was no significant change in the amount of coverage found among the athletes, even if the Heisman winner was subject to a lot of criticism, such as Johnny Manziel and Jameis Winston. As a matter of fact, USC's Reggie Bush and Auburn's Cam Newton recorded the most articles with 145 and 126 articles, respectively, whereas Marcus Mariota, with a scandal-free season garnered 105 articles. Coverage of Reggie Bush's season had been full of admiration and wonder as he was described as a perfect double threat alongside former Heisman winner Matt Leinart, but then his Heisman win was forfeited to his pay-for play scandal. Cam Newton's

coverage was filled with scandal and potential eligibility issues alongside his season's accomplishments on the field.

When analyzing the coverage of the 13 quarterback winners there was one prevalent theme and word that was apparent among all of them: leadership. Based on the coverage, the quarterback position is a position of leadership, maturity, skill and decision making. This could be why it was noted in the coverage that voters had difficulty voting for quarterbacks Cam Newton and Jameis Winston: because their off-field dilemmas and scandals made voters question the integrity of the trophy and their leadership ability on the field. Although many said that the character of the athlete did not significantly play a big role, the character issues plaguing these men had led to some voters deleting the names of certain athletes from the ballot. Although style varied among the quarterbacks, such as Chris Weinke as the "old and wise man" and Marcus Mariota as a "good guy," each quarterback was faced with the task of becoming a leader that would either guide the team to a national championship or help build the team back to national predominance. Another case that supports that idea would be Robert Griffin III, whose willingness to stand out, based on his sock preferences and his athletic skill, led Baylor to a winning season. The play style of the quarterbacks was also essential, from having laser-fast passes to committing aerial strikes on defenses, the leadership style also helped shape the way the team was described as well. Although the candidate's playing style may differ, such as being a pocket passer with great skill (Palmer and Weinke) or a running quarterback who keeps defenses guessing (Manziel and Newton), the playing style of a quarterback goes hand in hand with how the candidate leads his team to national prominence.

When compared to the coverage of non-quarterback winners Reggie Bush, Mark Ingram, and Derrick Henry, some elements remained the same and some changed. For example, while all

the outlets recorded the athletes' abilities on the field, as they did with the quarterbacks, the wording in the coverage was brutish and forceful, as if the running backs were almost going to war, carrying the weight of the team on their backs, such as running down defenses and bulldozing through them. There are some things that set each player apart. Reggie Bush was known to be fast and light on his feet, whereas Ingram's coverage homed in on the relationship between he and his father and how it built him up to be the strong force that "rolls with the tide" (Falgoust, 2009). Derrick Henry's differentiating factor was his size and how he was a "monster" against the defense he played against. When discussing quarterbacks, the coverage tends to focus on the athlete's ability to run and dominate defenses. Although size can be a factor, such as the case with Henry, skill and finesse are what helped bolster Bush and Ingram.

One common word that arose in the coverage across different outlets and journalists to the point of overuse was "electric" or "electrifying." From finessing defenses with fine foot skills to being able to make near impossible throws, the words were used to describe more than 10 of the winners' seasons throughout the analysis of the coverage.

RQ2: How does the coverage differ among the winners?

The coverage among winners varied based on the following: Personal issues (such as scandal or family dynamics), personality, and athleticism, which is similar to the conclusions of Warnke (1992), who stated that media exposure is heavily affected by performance, individual athlete and team. Although in this study, the team was not the focus of the media coverage. When the team was mentioned regarding the Heisman candidate, it was in regard to pre-and post-game stats and reviews.

Some athlete's coverage contained a mix of personal issues, personality, and athleticism, while that of others contained much of one category. Each of these aspects contributed to the

story of the Heisman. For example, Chris Weinke's age was a defining characteristic of him as an athlete. It affected how he played, how he carried himself, the decisions he made as an athlete, and how his teammates viewed him. Matt Leinart and Reggie Bush were a dynamic duo who rose to greatness and won back-to-back Heisman Trophies for USC as their athletic abilities surpassed the rest of college football. Tim Tebow's genuine personality and whirlwind athleticism created a "Tebowmania" craze that followed him well beyond his college career. Mark Ingram, Jr.'s personal story with his dad, a former NFL star, took over media outlets as their undying bond became an inspiring force behind Ingram.

Similar stories about the winners and their families became apparent among other athletes, such as Johnny Manziel and his father, who had a similar personality and lifestyle as his son growing up. Another personal element that occurred in the media was Sam Bradford's ties to the Cherokee nation. Although he was not fully involved in the tribe, his heritage did become a focus within the media coverage. Marcus Mariota had similar coverage in regards to his Hawaiian background, which was said to help shape who he is as an athlete.

The SEC led the conferences with five Heisman winners. The PAC 12 was second with four winners, and the Big 12 was third with three winners. USC had three of the four conference winners while Oregon had one. This helps defend against the criticism that west coast candidates do not have the same likelihood of winning as candidates on the east coast. Although some schools are concerned over a geographic bias, the top three conferences range from the southeastern, central, and west coast states. This may imply that although voters (especially those on the east coast) may be able to watch highlights and give candidates the opportunity to win the Heisman despite geographical differences.

Oklahoma, USC, Florida State and Alabama all had multiple players win the Heisman during the 2000-2015 of the study. Very seldom, though, did coverage extend into a Heisman comparison between the two players. The only time there was a comparison of winners within the same football program was with Alabama's Ingram and Henry. The mention was brief and it described Henry's skill and athleticism as better than Ingram's. When it came to FSU, not once was Chris Weinke mentioned during Jameis Winston's season. Instead, Winston's season was marked with the allegations of sexual assault. Similarly, there were no mentions or comparisons of the play or leadership style between Oklahoma quarterbacks Jason White and Sam Bradford.

Occasionally, voting patterns or results of past Heisman elections would be mentioned when the race came to an end. For example, Newton's win was mentioned during Griffin's race because of the amount of first place wins Newton had received. This was also probably reported to show the difference in Griffin's race to the Heisman versus Newton's. Another comparison that arose in the coverage is when there is the potential of Heisman winners to play each other in the game. One example would be Jameis Winston and Marcus Mariota. As the team prepared to play each other in the semi-finals, in a quest for the national championship, there were a couple of articles that depicted the game between the Heisman winners as the bad boy versus the good boy.

An overriding similarity, however, is that in nearly every year of this study in which there was a definitive leading contender for the Heisman, there was a defining point during the season that made the athlete more than likely to win the Heisman. For example, Reggie Bush's defining Heisman-winning moment was when he pushed Matt Leinart, the 2004 Heisman winner, into the goal line in a nail-biting game. On the other hand, Jameis Winston's defining moment was when the primary investigators of his sexual assault allegations said there would be no files charged.

RQ3: Is there evidence of a Heisman campaign within the media coverage of the Heisman winners from 2000-2015?

Warnke (1992) also stated that SIDs used their role to create pre-season buzz around potential candidates by created controlled media such as newsletters, handbooks, videos, faxes and posters, but throughout there is no evidence of preseason (late July and early August) articles until around 2003. Many of the preseason articles were early rankings and Heisman watch lists. In 2003, that changed when The NYT published an article about Texas and Oklahoma needing new quarterbacks for the season and Jason White was mentioned. The trend continued with Matt Leinart and Reggie bush in 2004 and 2005, respectively. Since stories of the candidates started showing up earlier in the preseason, SIDs (or potentially coaches) could have been trying to stir pre-season buzz as concluded by Warnke (1992).

Although mentioned only a few times, there were articles that reported on school football programs that engaged voters with last-minute initiatives. One such example is Florida, which sent last minute informational e-mails to Heisman voters before the voting deadline because there was a close race between candidates and because Tebow was a sophomore at a time when many voters thought Heisman winners should be upperclassmen. That was the year that Tebow won; it's not clear, however, what influence Florida's efforts might have had in that outcome.

There was no mention, however, in the coverage of any of the schools conducting an active campaign during the middle of the season. As media began to closely follow the Heisman candidates in mid to late-November, the competition between candidates intensified, as did the media coverage that followed them. This does not mean those efforts did not exist, only that they were not reported in these Heisman stories. Schools like Texas A&M said they did not have to spend a lot of money on Johnny Manziel because the buzz was already around him, especially on

social media. It was also mentioned that Manziel had taken social media by storm as he essentially merged the line between pop culture and sports news with his partying behavior. Although there was no direct evidence of a campaign, there could be some implications that the coaches can help control the exposure of athletes to the media with certain policies. One policy could include Manziel's inability to speak directly to the media due to a team rule that states that freshmen cannot speak to the media. On the other hand, Oregon also mentioned that they did not do a campaign as Mariota wanted his athletic ability to speak for himself, but there were still stories of his personal life and persona that stayed in the headlines throughout the 2014 season.

Similarly, Alabama told Ingram's family that they would honor the family's wishes and not do a formal campaign but rather let his athleticism and gameplay on the field be Ingram's campaign, and there was no mention in that season's coverage of Alabama conducting a campaign for Henry. On the other hand, Robert Griffin III took on the role of being the face of the school and the school openly used the quarterback as a local celebrity in a campaign posted on Baylor's website.

All the USC winners, Palmer, Leinart and Bush, were mentioned as not having Heisman campaigns either. From a school usually known as Tailback U, who had previous Heisman winners such as O.J. Simpson, the school may have been leaning on its reputation of building Heisman winning caliber athletes to help bolster the reputation of their respective candidate. On the other hand, schools like Oregon and Alabama were open about not having campaigns for Mariota, Ingram, and Henry but the athletes' personal life did end up making it into the headlines. Specifically, Ingram and Mariota's personal life were greatly reported on, so although their schools did not openly have a campaign, they may have been pitching stories and sending out releases that discuss their character, values, and leadership roles on their teams.

Conclusion

The analysis of the coverage is important in understanding the 21st-century coverage of the winners of the Heisman Trophy, the highest individual accolade in college sports. In turn, these insights can help sports information directors develop more targeted narratives in telling the stories that are most likely to resonant with sports reporters and other Heisman voters. Journalists are engaged with the Heisman story before, during, and after the season, and their coverage can differ greatly. Starting from late July and early August, preseason predictions and watch lists make their way to the forefront. Occasionally, such as in the case of Marcus Mariota, coverage can begin in early July and closely follow a candidate throughout the season. But the coverage tended to peak in mid to late November, when the candidates of the Heisman have been narrowed down to four or five athletes.

From personal issues (such as scandal or family dynamics), personality, and athleticism the coverage of the Heisman winners from 2000 to 2015 bare similar traits. Some athletes have all three like Mark Ingram, whose great talent on the field were marked with the issues with his father that helped form his leadership ability when playing for the Crimson Tide. Some winners only have one or two of those traits such as Troy Smith whose athletic ability surprised everyone as he became a front runner in the Heisman race. The same goes for Carson Palmer, who was not even featured in promotional material for fans because it was not thought that he could live up to the standard of leading a football team as a quarterback.

Importantly, the mention of Heisman campaigns occurred very seldom throughout the duration of the study. As a matter of fact, during Jason White's season in 2003, Joe Drape from the NYT stated that most voters tend to focus on the best players on the team and ignore a school's communication efforts especially if it is gimmicky and over the top (2003). Most of the

mentions of campaigns came during late night or last minute efforts from the school, including the campaign of Tim Tebow, where informational e-mails regarding his character and game stats were sent to voters.

Other mentions included Palmer, Leinart, Bush, Mariota, Manziel and Ingram's lack of a campaign. With each of those candidates, their athleticism and performance on the field played a big role in the coverage, except for Mariota, whose coverage (regarding his personality) was occasionally contrasted against Newton and Manziel. This may mean that there has been a shift in how and when schools promote their candidate. Since voters may be turned off by gimmicks and heavy promotion, this may prompt a more straightforward approach in promoting the Heisman, where the material given to voters is more information and statistically based.

There were other times where the race was considered incredibly close between candidates, such as during the seasons of Palmer, Ingram and Henry, that coverage varied with long feature stories regarding the candidates and their path to playing on their respective teams and detailed news stories, describing their game play.

A symbol of athletic success and excellence, the Heisman has been awarded for over 80 years. As the business of college grows, so does the media coverage and buzz surrounding a program and its athletes. In the case of the Heisman, not only is the media writing the stories of the candidates and the Heisman, they are also voting for the winner. For SIDs, the journalists are the publics who can directly affect the coverage of a Heisman campaign because of what they write. From 2000-2015 the media coverage focused on three main subjects: personality, athleticism, or personal situation and in some cases, all three. Those elements are what made the candidate unique. Being able to present those characteristics of a candidate to journalists can

help bolster media coverage and potentially persuade members of the media to vote for a specific candidate when ballots are released.

Limitations

Because SID's were not contacted and asked about their specific intent, RQ3 could not thoroughly be answered due to the complexity of finding campaign and intent. Although, there are some instances where it appears the schools may have pitched certain stories to the media (such as Mariota's good guy persona and Manziel's upbringing being like his father). There is also the possibility of coaches ultimately being the gatekeeper of the information sent out to the media.

There are a few limitations that preceded the research, such as the limited access to website and broadcast archives such as CBSSports.com and ESPN.com. As sources begin to archive those materials, it would be beneficial to see how the coverage pans out across different platforms such as television, print and digital media. As the coverage continued from 2000-2015, the development of social media began to take place, so the reaction of fans, voters, other schools and digital publications has not been considered in this study. It could however be beneficial to do a contrast analysis between coverage of the winners pre-social media and post social media (using one or more outlets such as Twitter and Facebook). This could also help determine if the online media coverage mirrors or is like the coverage seen in print. Since the study did not include winners from before 2000, the findings cannot be used to generalize the coverage of those who won the trophy prior to the turn of the century.

Future Research

To build upon the future of this line of research, there are various routes one could take, including adding in an analysis of not just the Heisman winners, but the finalists who went to their respective ceremonies, to see if there are any common themes that occur among winners and their respective finalists. One could add in the analysis of online or local media outlets of the Heisman winner to see if location affects the coverage of certain candidates and if there are inadvertent geographic biases within media coverage. Also, gathering the opinions of the public relations professionals who worked on creating Heisman campaigns through interviews can be used to gain insights on the strategic intent of the information given to the media and to see if the coverage matched the intent of the campaign. Potentially adding in the opinion of those who not only receive those promotional materials, but write or vote during the Heisman race could add potential value in how journalists interpret communication materials.

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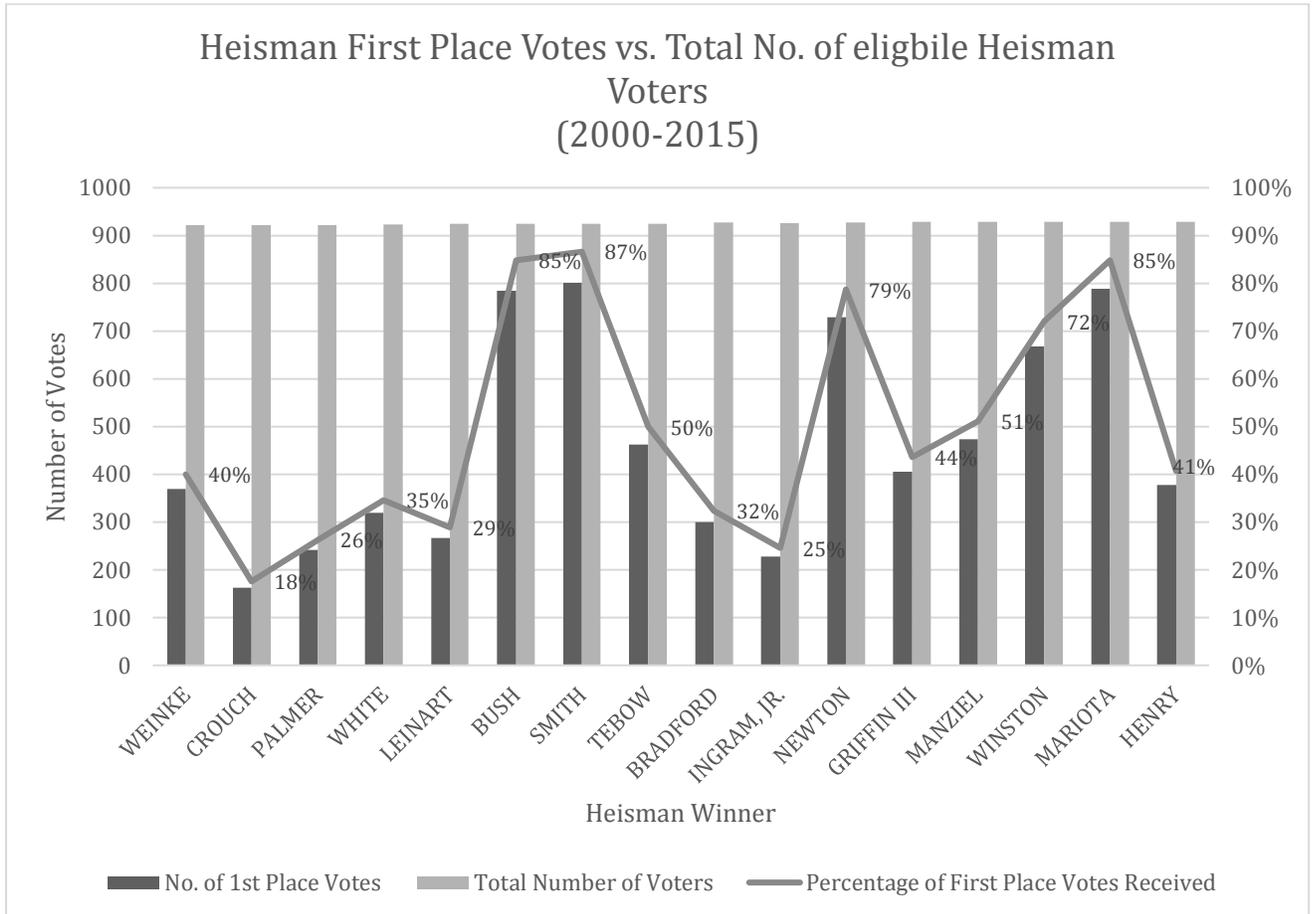
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APPENDIX A



*Note: Crouch received nearly 18 percent of the first-place votes in one of the closest races in Heisman history. That year the votes were spread among the top three finalists: Crouch, Rex Grossman and Ken Dorsey. Crouch beat Rex Grossman with a total of 770 points over Grossman's 708. The margin of victory over Crouch and second runner-up was 132 points. The closet margin of victory was Mark Ingram who had close to 25 percent of the first-place votes.

APPENDIX B

Example of Data Collection

Source	Date	Author	Title	Article	summary	notes	notable quotes/ excerpts	Side Notes:
Sports Illustrated	7/29/09	Anderson, Lars	NO LONGER JUST	EC WEST: ALABAMA THE CRIMSON TIDE	mentioned as starter in dept chart			
Sports Illustrated	7/29/09	Completed Andy	SI's 2009 ALL-SEC TEAM	Section: SEC 2009 OFFENSE DEFENSE SPECIAL TEAMS	mention of SECOND TEAM: MARK INGRAM S			
USA Today	8/7/09	Sample: USA Today's Coaches Poll	USA TODAY Top 25 Coaches' Poll: College football	Preseason poll. 2008 records in parentheses. Times p.m. Eastern. Outlook by USA TODAY's Jack Carey. 1. Florida (13-1)	Preseason poll.	the article looked at the overall ranking of schools, particularly Alabama and its returning team members	none	
NYT	9/6/09	Glier, Ray	Crimson Tide Wears Down Hokies: [Sports Desk]	Poins: 1,466 (53 first-place votes). Previous ranking: 1. Alabama's football team was sometimes a fast-moving train and sometimes a train wreck at the Georgia Dome on Saturday night against Virginia Tech. Skill was followed by folly, smooth jazz by sour notes. "In the first half, we were not only punching them, we were punching ourselves," said Nick Saban, the Alabama coach. The fifth-ranked Crimson Tide did not manage itself well, with penalties, turnovers and a lack of poise, but in the final stretch of the fourth quarter, Alabama gathered itself and put away the seventh-ranked Hokies, 34-24, in the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game.	A recount of the game opener with quotes from HC Nick Saban. The feature includes play by plays and game stats of key players including Ingram, who was also mentioned to be cleared from an NCAA investigation.	game stats and game play reporting	The sophomore running back Mark Ingram rushed for 150 yards on 26 carries. "the complement for the all-Southeastern Conference receiver Julio Jones is not going to be a receiver on the other side of the field, but one running routes in the middle of the field"	
NYT	9/7/09	Thamel, Pete	One Week's Worth of Lessons. Surprising and	The gluttonous and cowardly nature of big-time college football tends to fog the crystal ball in the season's first week. Almost half of the 78 games played by major colleges last weekend were so-called buy games against Football Championship Subdivision teams. That means the bigger universities sent fat checks to smaller ones, beat them up	mention of Ingram emerging as a star and an image of him in the article/ photo caption. He rushed for 150 yards after a win against VA Tech.	ingram was also featured in the image for the article	A star emerged at Alabama. Mark Ingram rushed for 150 yards in the weekend's biggest game	
Sports Illustrated	9/14/09	Anderson, Lars	Thirty-Minute Delay	Section: OPENING WEEK New quarterback Greg McElroy and sophomore running back Mark Ingram needed two quarters to get the Alabama offense rolling over Virginia Tech He was the last player left on the field, jogging alone toward the northwest corner of the Georgia Dome late last Saturday night. But before Greg McElroy reached the portal that would take him to the locker room, the Alabama quarterback looked up at the thousands of lingering Crimson Tide fans in the stands and waved his right index finger in the air. Alabama isn't the best team in the country. In fact, it's not	Recount of the season opener for the Alabama/VA Tech game. The article primarily focused on QB Greg McElroy and the Tide's slow start (hence the 30 minute delay title). The mention of Ingram is about his eligibility for the season and how it was questioned along side teammate Julio Jones, who were both being investigated by the NCAA.	ingram was also featured in the image for the article	Ingram, whose father, Mark, is a former NFL wideout, set a freshman team record for touchdown. Said Ingram outside the locker room in a voice barely louder than a whisper, "I'm just trying to make a name for myself."	mentioning of the "rolling over" roll tide image of the tide