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Deflategate and Image Repair Theory: A Case Study

Erica Alejandra Rivas Cruz

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Deflategate and Image Repair Theory: A Case Study

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This study employs qualitative research methods to identify crisis communication strategies utilized by Tom Brady and the New England Patriots during the cheating scandal, Deflategate. Informed by Benoit's image repair theory, this case study analyzes 14 statements made or released in response to developments throughout the scandal, as well as newspaper articles published throughout the scandal. The findings support the theory of image repair in that transparency in communication and public relations are important aspects in the world of professional sports as offenders work to deter or repair any damage to their reputation in the midst of a scandal. In addition to providing a unique perspective on image repair strategies, this study also offers a foundation for additional research.

Keywords: public relations, image repair theory, professional sports, crisis communication, Deflategate, case study

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## Introduction

Barriers between an organization and the public's view of that organization's image and legitimacy are created when a scandal breaks. These unanticipated events are handled with crisis communication strategies implemented by either the public relations (PR) department of the organization or an outside PR agency hired to help. The pressure placed on the PR departments in the realm of professional sports is the same as or even more so than that of other kinds of companies. Because high-level media coverage plays an integral part in professional sports, scandals and crises in this field often receive widespread coverage and criticism.

Apart from athletic ability, image is particularly important in the high-profile world of professional sports. When major scandals hit, reputation is the first thing that gets tarnished and the hardest thing to recover for athletes and organizations (teams and leagues) alike. The first major reported crisis/scandal in professional sports occurred in 1919, when eight players on the Major League Baseball Chicago White Sox team conspired with gamblers and threw the World Series in order to make money. The scandal became known as the "Black Sox Scandal" (Linder, 2007). Since then, scandals have become anything but rare in the world of sports: the year 2015 alone witnessed over 12 scandals from different sports, organizations, and athletes. In particular, the National Football League (NFL) teams are no strangers to the world of scandals. The NFL teams have dealt with a number of scandals involving their athletes throughout the decades, from assault to drugs and even murder.

In 2007 the quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, Michael Vick, was convicted of running a dog fighting operation. He was sentenced 23 months in prison, which resulted in his immediate termination from the team. Before the scandal and criminal charges, Vick was one of the highest paid players in the NFL, making over \$13 million per season. But when Vick returned to the

NFL in 2009, he signed a contract with the Philadelphia Eagles at a base annual salary of \$1.6 million (Piquero, A. R., Piquero, N. L., Gertz, Baker, Batton, & Barnes, 2011; Coogan, 2012). The same year, a cheating scandal broke when the New England Patriots were caught videotaping the New York Jets' coaches' signals from an unauthorized location during a game. The Patriots' head coach, Bill Belichick, was fined \$500,000 and the team was fined \$250,000 and docked their original first-round selection in the 2008 NFL Draft (Dockterman, 2015). In 2008 and again in 2010, Ben Roethlisberger, a Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback, was accused of sexual assault. Neither case led to any criminal charges, but Roethlisberger was punished by the NFL. For violating the league's personal conduct policy, Roethlisberger was suspended for six games of the 2010 season, a punishment that was later reduced to a four-game suspension for good behavior (Coogan, 2012; Meng & Pan, 2013). In 2012, The NFL discovered that the New Orleans Saints had a "bounty" program in which players were paid bonuses if they hit players from the opposing team hard enough to knock the other player out of the game. The NFL's subsequent investigation revealed that as many as 27 players and at least one assistant coach were involved. This scandal damaged the team's reputation; Sports Illustrated later declared: "Make no mistake: the New Orleans bounty saga will go down as one of the worst chapters in NFL history" (Benoit, 2014). In 2013, Aaron Hernandez, a player for the New England Patriots, was arrested and charged with murder. The Patriots immediately severed ties with Hernandez (Price, 2015; Candiotti, 2015) In 2014, Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice was arrested and charged with assault for striking his then-fiancée and knocking her unconscious in a New Jersey hotel. He pleaded not guilty, and in order for charges to be dismissed, Rice agreed to a pretrial intervention program. The initial punishment handed down by the NFL was a two-game suspension from the regular season, but after a video of the assault was released, Rice was

suspended indefinitely and has not played since (Moritz, 2016). These are just a few examples of the scandals that have occurred in the NFL.

More recently, in 2015, one of the most recent major scandals broke when the New England Patriots, a multi-billion-dollar professional football team based in Boston, Massachusetts, found themselves accused of tampering with the footballs used in the American Football Conference (AFC) championship game against the Indianapolis Colts.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the New England Patriots and Tom Brady handled a threat to their image and legitimacy that resulted from the 2015 scandal. Through a case study of “Deflategate,” this paper will analyze what public relations strategies both the team and Tom Brady used in response to the scandal and whether these strategies were effective.

## Significance to Field

The well-known phrase “any publicity is good publicity” assumes that any kind and any amount of public awareness created or solicited is worth the exposure and consequences it brings. In the case of sports, however, bad publicity can and does ruin careers and can severely damage organizations. An effective public relations strategy is necessary for any successful organization in any industry, but especially in an industry as prominent as professional sports. The world of sports no longer has a space of its own. It has become a part of society, manifesting itself “in our clothing, in our media, in our textbooks and schools, in our music and in our language” (Downey, 2011). As its scope expands, so does the focus and scrutiny of athletes, teams, and organizations. The consequences these parties undergo after a high-profile scandal or reputational crisis can vary in degree. The entity accused of an offensive act could see a “trickle down” effect in which they lose valuable endorsements and sponsorships. As stated before, apart from athletic ability, an athlete’s image is almost everything in professional sports, especially in regard to sponsorships and endorsements. Research shows that negative information impacts consumers more than positive information. Brands often end sponsorships and endorsements with athletes accused of an offensive act when the connection between the athlete’s image and their products has been threatened or damaged (Carlston & Skowronski, 1989). For example, after news broke that golfer Tiger Woods had engaged in affairs with over 100 women, companies like Gatorade, Accenture, Gillette, and AT&T—all of whom were sponsoring or endorsing him—lost \$5 to \$12 billion and “began dropping him like hotcakes” (Benoit, 2013). In addition to facing financial consequences, athletes can also face discipline from the sports they compete in, which was the case for Tom Brady in Deflategate. Other athletes have also been stripped of their titles, records, and awards, including Lance Armstrong, who was stripped of his

Tour de France titles as a result of his doping scandal. An athlete “can impact the lives of others to such a degree that they can shape the values and behaviors of those that admire them” (Sassenberg & Johnson, 2010). This is why sponsors are willing to invest incredible amounts of money to have athletes endorse their products, but also why they are severe when a crisis occurs.

Crisis communications strategies are necessary tools for any organization needing to eliminate, or at least reduce, negative public views while also preserving its image and legitimacy. This particular case study will be important because, while there is a considerable amount of information available and research conducted on crisis communication strategies for organizations, the amount of information and research concentrating on crisis communication strategies applied to the world of professional sports is lacking.

This case study will be of interest to those working in the field of public relations within professional sports leagues and teams because it will provide public perceptions of different strategies applied to crisis communications that have either already occurred or could occur within their own industry in the future. It also explores what strategies were effectively utilized and which could be improved. “The public relations function for a sports league in selecting and framing mass media content is of interest because the most common involvement people have with sports is through the mass media” (Fortunato, 2000).

An athlete’s image will continue driving their status and, in part, their careers, requiring a competent level of protection. Professional sports’ status in the media means that most crises and scandals are rarely handled behind closed doors, making an examination of the crisis communications strategies used by Tom Brady and the Patriots a valuable area of analysis, meriting research of the crisis communication strategies they used in this particular scandal.

## Literature Review

### Crisis and Scandal

Public relations practitioners are familiar with the expression, “Expect the best, but prepare for the worst.” The term “public relations,” which originated in the early 20th century, is a field of communications driven by crisis. Scholars of the field contend that public relations programs are created for two reasons: to prevent a crisis or to recover from a crisis. Practitioners of the field understand the importance of protecting organizations, companies and individuals from threats to their image and reputation. The reason the threats to these groups are taken so seriously is because if they are not handled appropriately and in a timely fashion, any seemingly small threat has the potential to turn into a devastating crisis (Jerome, 2008).

What constitutes a crisis? Over the years, scholars have come up with different definitions for the word. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998) defined crisis as “a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization’s high priority goals.” Pearson and Clair (1998) write that many times, crises can be ambiguous with an unclear connection between cause and effect, they don’t happen often but when they do they can have severe consequences. Crises require an immediate response, a decision that will have a positive or negative effect. Dowling (2002) thought a crisis altered the social order and affected the relationship of the stakeholders with the organization. Coombs and Holladay (2004) defined a crisis as “an event for which people seek causes and make attributions.” Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) provided another description, stating:

For organizations, crisis most often conveys a fundamental threat to the very stability of the system, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and risk to high priority goals,

including organizational image, legitimacy, profitability and ultimately survival. These threats to organizational legitimacy and image occur with some amount of frequency.

Coombs (2007) defined a crisis as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens the important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes.” Later, Seeger and Padgett (2010) stated that a crisis is an unpredictable situation that is negative or threatening. And more recently Nicholson, Kerr, & Sherwood (2015) offered up the following:

Derived from the Greek *krisis*, in its most literal form, the term ‘crisis’ means decision.

At its core, a crisis event is a decisive or critical turning point, a moment of rupture. If the everyday workings of an organization are perceived as continuous, relatively stable and normal, then crises are moments of discontinuity, in which the threat of change necessarily defines them as abnormal. By their very nature, crises are the antithesis of the status quo.

Despite the differences of definition, scholars agree that a crisis is an unpredictable event that threatens the image and goals of an organization. They do not agree, however, on an exact, universal definition or the best way to handle it. And even though the “best” way or method to handle a crisis hasn’t been agreed on, research has shown that crisis communication strategies can aid in defending or even restoring an organization’s reputation or image. Crisis communication strategies assist PR specialists in protecting an organization’s image and reputation while simultaneously trying to defuse any crisis.

Most crises involve an organization or an individual, either within the organization or separate from it. Coombs (1996) presents a two-by-two matrix based on attribution, and with it he attempts to define the intentionality of a crisis situation and to see if causal attribution in a

crisis situation is internal or external. Intent can be either deliberate or inadvertent and crises can occur internally or externally of an organization, meaning that the crisis can be caused by someone within the organization (internal) or the crisis can be caused by an individual or organization outside of the organization that is being accused (external). Using his matrix, Coombs explains the four types of crises: accidents, which are unintentional and internal; transgressions, intentional and internal; faux pas, unintentional and external; and terrorism, intentional and external. “Each crisis type can vary along the stability dimension. A one-time crisis should be perceived as unstable and less intentional. A repeated crisis should be perceived as stable and more intentional” (Coombs, 1996).

Identifying one’s audience or audiences is important in crisis communication because allows for the prioritization of those audiences. An organization’s audiences are the groups of people that can influence an organization or be influenced by an organization; whether they know it or not, audiences are the ones who give an organization its legitimacy, making an organization dependent on their approval (Metzler, 2001).

What constitutes a scandal and how does it differ from a crisis? Scandals violate social norms; a scandal results when an action or an event is regarded as morally or legally wrong which then has the potential to cause general public outrage, especially if it garners media attention. Both crises and scandals result in disruption, but while a crisis has the capacity to cause disruption without media attention, a scandal’s disruption is fueled by the attention of the media (Nicholson, et al., 2015). Lull and Hinerman (1997) propose 10 criteria to separate a scandal from a non-scandal:

The first of these is that (1) social norms reflecting the dominant morality must be transgressed...The transgressions must be performed by (2) specific persons who carry



out (3) actions that reflect an exercise of their desires and interests...Further, individual persons must be (4) identified as perpetrators of the act(s). They must be shown to have acted (5) intentionally or recklessly and must be (6) held responsible for their actions. The actions and events must have (7) differential consequences for those involved...The revelations must be (8) widely circulated via communications media where they are (9) effectively narrativized into a story which (10) inspires widespread interest and discussion.

One real example Lull and Hinerman (1997) give to demonstrate these criteria is the Aberdeen Scandal in which 12 military drill instructors were charged with sex crimes and several high-level, senior officers were accused of fostering an environment of sexual harassment and abuse of women in the military. This happened after several women came forward. This example met the first criterion of social norms reflecting morality must be transgressed: sexual abuse and rape is wrong. The second is met when charges are brought against the government/military. The third is met with the allegations of sexual abuse and rape. The fourth is met when the persons involved are identified. The fifth is met when those involved acknowledged their actions as intentional. The sixth is met when those accused are held responsible by the public and later the military. The seventh is met when not only were the accused held responsible, but those involved in the coverup were held responsible as well. The eighth, ninth, and tenth criteria are met when the military was put under scrutiny by the media and other information was unearthed, including personal accounts from women who were alleged victims, unfavorable backgrounds of individuals involved, cover ups, and a recanting of statements by women who blamed the military for coercing them into lying, all of which led to continued coverage and public interest

(Lull & Hinerman, 1997). “Treatment of a potentially-scandalous event must take the form of a story complete with believable characters, motives, and plot lines” (Lull & Hinerman, 1997).

As scandal is the source or the fuel of what threatens an individual or an organization facing a crisis. When a scandal breaks and a crisis ensues, the opinion of the organization held by different audiences—like citizens, government officials, stockholders, employees, and activist groups—is all that matters. According to Benoit (1997), opinions or perceptions are more important than reality. Actual guilt and responsibility for an act does not matter; what matters is whether a relevant audience perceives that they are guilty. The same applies in determining if the act was offensive or not—the audience’s perception of the act matters more than its actual offensiveness. As long as guilt is perceived, or offense is taken, the image and reputation of the organization is at risk (Benoit, 1997).

If crisis communication strategies are implemented correctly and effectively, they will not only defuse or eliminate crises, but they can sometimes help bring an organization an even better image than the company had before the offensive act occurred. But if a crisis is handled incorrectly and there is no good implementation of crisis communication strategies, the already unfortunate situation will be made worse (Kauffman, 2005; Marra, 1998). The media thrives off scandals and reporters are often working to gain more information while PR departments are at the same time attempting to ameliorate the situation. Arpan and Pompper (2003) examined the effectiveness of a proactive strategy in crisis communications. The authors suggest that the general rule for dealing with crises is to be honest and make all the facts and information available as quickly as possible, because the goal for the organization during a crisis is to be as transparent as possible, no matter what public response will be. Arpan and Pomper (2003) present three factors that can complicate communication during a crisis: risk, timing, and control.

Risk deals with the fact that the strategies associated with legal responsibilities fly directly in the face of the crisis communication strategies associated with social responsibilities. Timing deals with the struggle between the media and an organization to control the flow of information.

Control deals with what information will be reported and how the information will be produced by media outlets (Arpan & Pomper, 2003).

Much of a league's or team's publicity happens through media coverage and, because of this, the publicity the team/league receives is less controllable than paid advertising or sales campaigns. This has its advantages and disadvantages: on one hand, the high levels and credibility of media coverage helps create and strengthen solid bonds between teams and their fans, which in turn feed an "insatiable appetite for sport material" (McGregor & Harvey, 1999); but on the other hand, "negative" stories can cause devastating damage to the reputation and image of a team and affect areas like attendance, merchandising, sponsorship, and endorsement deals (Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeek, 2003).

Professional sports and the media are seen as being involved in a relationship in which "each depends on the other for its commercial success and its prominent place in the popular culture" (Coakley, 1998). Live broadcast sports is a key arena for positive public relations for sports organizations, in large part because broadcasting rights holders "are not in the business of casting aspersions on the event for which they have forked out large sums of money" (Barnett, 1990). But unlike live sports broadcast media, newspapers and other forms of broadcast news media are much more likely to focus on scandals and crises than exceptional athletic performance (Barnett, 1990). Sports public relations practitioners cannot afford to ignore the news media because of the combination of public interest and extensive media coverage it creates, resulting in a focus on reactive public relations rather than proactive public relations.

This means, in most instances, sports organizations must react and respond to unplanned events that may have a negative influence public perception instead of proactively working to positively influence public perception (McGregor & Harvey, 1999; Shilbury et al., 2003).

The intense media scrutiny of professional sports doesn't mean that public relations practitioners have absolutely no control over how their organization, athletes, or sport is represented. Several studies of professional sports organizations suggest that the relationship between sports journalists and sports public relations personnel actually offers "a measure of control over what becomes sports news and how it is reported" (Lowes, 1999, p. 49; Fortunato, 2000) despite sports organizations' dependence on the distribution of their messages in crisis situations by news broadcast media. Further, the growing use of team/league websites and social media platforms introduces a controllable and more direct form of communication with fans and the media (Sallot, Porter, & Acosta-Alzuru, 2004). Even though the specifics of public relations in sports still lack proper research, there isn't much doubt that public relations in professional sports is a unique realm of communications (L'Etang, 2006).

### Image Repair Theory

Several models provide strategies for effective response by an organization or individual dealing with a crisis, scandal, or potential threat to its reputation. This section provides a review of previous literature on the theory of image repair.

Usually, an organization will see a more positive public response when three important concepts are applied to its response/reaction to a crisis: 1) quick response time, 2) consistency, and 3) transparency. Crisis communicators need to inform stakeholders (especially media outlets) about the situation as soon as possible in order to control the message instead of letting

others control it, thus allowing space for the creation of speculation and assumptions that will be harder to defuse once the general public perceptions are cemented. Messages distributed should be consistent and contain no contradictions that could threaten the organizations credibility and the public's trust. The organization should also be as transparent as it can in order to avoid stakeholders feeling misled or deceived in any way (Coombs, 2007).

Image repair theory was first introduced by William Benoit (1997) as image restoration theory. The term "restoration" was later changed to "repair," as restoration implies a returning to the state it was before the crisis, and sometimes that just isn't possible depending on the reputational damage done. This theory is based on the assumption that image is essential to organizations and individuals. Under this theory, an attack is made up by two factors: 1) the accused is held responsible for an action, and 2) the act is considered offensive. It's only when an organization or individual is believed to be responsible for the act that an unfavorable impression is formed (Benoit, 1997). The organization or individual is held responsible for any acts performed, instructed, supported, or allowed to happen, including any acts of omission (Coombs, 2006). Often, perceptions are more important than reality. Public perception heavily influences who the public holds responsible. If the audience thinks an organization or individual is at fault, their image is at risk. Accordingly, it matters very little if the act was actually offensive or not. Instead, it matters more if the audience believes the act to be offensive (Coombs, 2006). Once an organization's image is threatened by actual or perceived responsibility for an act that is viewed to be offensive by relevant publics, the need for image repair emerges (Benoit, 1997).

Once the crisis occurs, it is important for the organization to analyze the crisis, determine what kind of crisis it is, and deduce what audiences/stakeholders will be affected so its response

to the crisis can be tailored to meet the needs of each group affected. Different audiences will be affected by the crisis in different ways and must be approached in individualized ways in order to repair the image (Coombs, 2007). Organizations don't always need to respond to an attack. The attack may not present a real threat to the organization's image if the attack is not credible, is low-profile, or is not serious. In some cases, the organization or individual may even find it advantageous to refocus attention on other issues. The accused must decide whether the threat is important enough to justify any allocation of resources to implementing crisis communication strategies (Coombs, 2006).

Image repair theory is made up of five strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action, and mortification, with each strategy having a set of positions within them (Benoit, 1997). The first strategy, denial, involves either simple denial, which is simply contesting the accused action, or blame shifting, which involves identifying an offender or placing blame on someone/something else. The use of denial was demonstrated by cyclist Lance Armstrong and his steroid use scandal (Hambrick, Frederick, & Sanderson, 2015). Armstrong at first stayed silent on the issue and when he finally addressed the allegations, he denied them, even though they were true. (Hambrick et al., 2015). Blame shifting follows an "It's their fault, not mine" approach, suggesting that the image of the initial entity accused should not be tarnished and that the responsibility of handling the crisis now falls unto another entity (Benoit, 1997). Benoit explains that if the public perceives that someone else is at fault or to blame for the crisis, then the organization's image should be restored (Benoit, 1995). An example of the use of blame shifting can be seen in Texaco's racial controversy in 1996, when in the midst of a racial discrimination lawsuit, reports of tape recordings of Texaco top executives using racist language and discussing plans to destroy evidence related to their current

lawsuit broke and graced newspapers and news broadcasts (Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). As a form of crisis communication and in an attempt to restore their image, Texaco chairman Peter Bijur was quick to discipline the executives involved and shifted the blame by separating the company and its policies from those employees, stating that what those executives had said were not representative of Texaco and that only a few “bad apples” had a problem with discrimination (Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

The second strategy is evasion of responsibility, which means finding an explanation for the offensive act without taking responsibility for it. Evasion of responsibility consists of four variations: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions. Provocation is when the accused claims the act was a result of or reaction to an earlier act, also known as scapegoating. Though this variation seems similar to shifting blame, this one does not look to blame or penalize another, instead it just looks to remove responsibility from the accused. Defeasibility is when the accused claims that the act occurred outside of their control or they lacked control over the vital parts of the situation. The accused was perhaps misinformed or did not have enough information to act in a different way (Benoit, 1997). An example of this variation can be seen in the e. coli scandal Odwalla, a drink/smoothie company, dealt with in 1996 when a young girl died, and others became sick after drinking their smoothies (Thomson & Rawson, 1998). Health officials found that the outbreak was a result of e. coli poisoning from Odwalla’s apple juice. The company’s image of providing their customers with fresh and healthy beverages was threatened. The company’s executives defended their sanitation and preparation process, stating that they had acted on information from industry experts indicating that the high level of acidity in their apple juice would eliminate any e. coli bacteria. They argued that they lacked the “new” information suggesting that the level of acidity in apple juice may not be enough to eliminate the

threat of e. coli in their juices. Odwalla utilized defeasibility to evade responsibility (Thomson & Rawson, 1998). Accident is when the accused claims that the act was not done intentionally, thereby reducing responsibility and lessening the damage done to his or her image. Good intentions is when the accused claims that the act was done with good intentions that somehow went wrong or weren't meant to be perceived as offensive (Benoit, 1997). Both Accident and good intentions variations demonstrate that the accused is aware of the offensive act and is not trying to deny it or blame another, but instead expresses that the intention was not to offend.

The third strategy of image repair is reducing offensiveness, which can consist of various different approaches including bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking accusers, and compensation. Bolstering is when the focus is shifted away from the offensive act and onto the positive attributes of the accused in order to generate positive feelings (Benoit, 1997). Texaco also used this strategy during its scandal by promoting their "equal opportunity" workplace (Benoit & Brinson, 1999). They attempted to shift the focus away from the offensive act by highlighting their policy of being an equal opportunity employer and separating the sentiments of the company from those executives accused of racism. Minimization is when attempts are made to reduce the severity of the offensive act by demonstrating that it is not as serious or offensive as it appears to be. Differentiation attempts to compare the offensive act to other much more offensive acts and demonstrate that it could have been much worse. Transcendence is an attempt to shift the negative aspects of the offensive act into positive aspects. Benoit (1995) gives the example of legend Robin Hood. "Robin Hood might suggest that his actions be viewed not as theft but as assistance to the poor and downtrodden" (Benoit, 1995). Attacking the accuser attempts to turn the tables and threaten the accuser's credibility. This variation was used heavily by actor Hugh Grant, when he was caught being unfaithful and



involved with a prostitute (Benoit, 1997). Grant's strategy was to attack the British media for its treatment of himself and his family and their inappropriate and extreme methods of reporting.

The last variation of reducing offensiveness is compensation, in which the accuser offers something to make up for the offensive act. An example of this is when a business's services fail to meet their promised standards, they may offer up something to make up for it, like a discount or a free service or product.

The fourth strategy of image repair is corrective action, meaning the organization offers a way to correct any damage caused by the offensive act and makes sure it will never happen again. However, taking corrective action does not always equate admitting guilt. An example of this was how Tylenol responded after the Chicago murders in 1982, in which seven individuals died after taking Tylenol due to cyanide poisoning carried out by an unknown party. The scare led to a national recall and discontinuance of all Tylenol capsules. Tylenol was in no way responsible for the tampering of their product, but in response to the crisis they designed a new tamper-resistant capsule as well as a tamper-resistant container. The company not only provided corrective action but also transparency as they aided in the ensuing investigation (Benoit & Lindsey, 1987).

The final strategy for image repair is mortification. This strategy entails the taking of complete responsibility for the offensive act, with the accused offering an apology and asking for forgiveness (Benoit, 1997). This strategy was used by Olympic athlete Michael Phelps in response to a photograph that appeared on a London tabloid showing him smoking from a marijuana pipe (Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011). On the day the picture was published, Phelps released the following statement: "I engaged in behavior which was regrettable and demonstrated bad judgment . . . I acted in a youthful and inappropriate way, not in a manner that

people have come to expect from me. For this, I am sorry. I promise my fans and the public—it will not happen again” (Crouse, 2009). Phelps utilized mortification by admitting to the offensive behavior and also provided corrective action by promising his fans that it would never happen again.

Benoit (1997) suggested that along with the list of image repair strategies, each organization should create a crisis contingency plan before any crisis ever occurs in order to respond quickly and to avoid making any mistakes in their response. The purpose of creating a crisis contingency plan that prepares organizations for any type of crisis is to prevent further damage to their image during reactions to a crisis. Preparing a contingency plan involves anticipating any type of potential crises and creating a strong plan to tackle any possible threats to an organization’s image. Image repair theory provides a number of strategies that can be utilized in different ways, with other available resources (Benoit, 1997).

## Key Individuals and Deflategate Timeline

There were various key individuals who played a role in the Deflategate scandal and were involved in the handling of it in varying degrees. It's important to know more about their background in order to contextualize them and better understand the part they played during and in the aftermath of the scandal. Those individuals are Tom Brady, Robert Kraft, Roger Goodell, Ted Wells, and Bill Belichick.

### Tom Brady

Tom Brady is the current starting quarterback for the New England Patriots. Brady was the starting quarterback for the team when the scandal broke and was the main person of interest in the scandal, the investigation, and the crisis that followed.

Brady was born in San Mateo, California in 1977 and has had an interest in football since he was young. He was recruited to play football for Michigan University in 1995 where his college football career struggled to take off, but during his third year it eventually did. Brady became Michigan's starting quarterback, setting records and ranking third in Michigan University history.

After college, he was selected by the New England Patriots in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft. Brady became the team's starting quarterback during his second season in 2001 and since then Brady has had a successful 18-season career with the Patriots. He has led the team to eight Super Bowls, winning five of them. He currently holds the NFL records for the most games won by a quarterback, most Super Bowl appearances by a quarterback, most Super Bowls won by a quarterback, and many more ("Tom Brady").

Brady's role in Deflategate was that of having an alleged involvement or at least knowledge of deflating footballs below the NFL standards for better grip, which is cheating. ("Brady", 2016). Brady rarely spoke on the scandal, making a few public statements in which he defended his innocence.

## Robert Kraft

Robert Kraft is the current owner, chairman, and CEO of the New England Patriots and was the owner, chairman, and CEO in 2015 when Deflategate broke. Kraft was the most vocal representative for the team and Tom Brady in the aftermath of the scandal.

Kraft was born and raised in Massachusetts. He attended Columbia University as an undergraduate and then earned his MBA at Harvard University. He began his business career at Rand-Whitney Group Inc., a manufacturing company, which he acquired in 1972. He then founded International Forest Products (IFP) and afterwards founded the Kraft Group to serve as the holding company for his family's diverse business interests comprised of companies in different sectors.

Kraft became the owner of the New England Patriots in 1994, when he bought it for 172 million dollars. Since its purchase, Kraft has transformed the team into a 3.7-billion-dollar franchise and has led it to five Super Bowl wins in 15 years. And in 2000, Kraft also privately financed and constructed Gillette Stadium, providing the team with their own permanent home venue (before Gillette Stadium, the team would play in various different venues).

Kraft is a long-time football fan, more specifically, a New England Patriots' fan. As a Massachusetts native, Kraft held season tickets every year, and after purchasing the team, he was passionately committed to transforming the then unsuccessful team into a success. When he took

ownership he pledged, "My objective in buying the Patriots is to help bring a championship to New England" ("Robert Kraft"). Kraft's history with the team demonstrates that in addition to having a financial interest in the reputation of the franchise after the scandal, he also had a strong personal interest in it as well.

## Roger Goodell

Roger Goodell is the current commissioner for the National Football League (NFL) and was commissioner at the time of the scandal. Goodell was born in Jamestown, New York in 1959. He graduated from Jefferson and Washington College in 1981 with a degree in economics. After college, Goodell became an administrative intern at an NFL office in 1982, marking the beginning of his career with the league. In 1987, Goodell became the assistant of the president of the American Football Conference (AFC), where he gained experience working different aspects of the industry, and in 2001 he was appointed the NFL's Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. He became the league's commissioner in 2006.

Goodell believes his main responsibility as commissioner is to protect the integrity of the game and to make it safer ("Goodell Named Commissioner", 2006; "New Commissioner", 2006). However, since he was chosen as commissioner, he has been involved in a number of scandals in which his decisions have been highly criticized. Some critics and journalists believe this may have played a role in the way Goodell handled Deflategate and the decisions he made in regard to discipline.

## Ted Wells

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. is an American lawyer specializing in the field of criminal law. In November 2013 he was hired by the NFL to investigate and report on a bullying incident involving a player on the Miami Dolphins team. The report to that investigation was released in early 2014 and made headlines for its finding of “a pattern of harassment.” In 2015, Wells was asked again by the NFL to investigate into the infraction allegations of Deflategate and to produce a report on his findings (Kaplan, 2015; “Theodore”). The report was released, and it found Tom Brady “generally aware” of the “tampering” that took place with the footballs used for the AFC Championship Game (Wells, 2015). After the report was released, Wells’s impartiality was called into question because of his past relationship with the NFL and his reputation for using scientific consultancy to provide results that favor his clients. In the end, the Patriots and Tom Brady were disciplined based on the report’s findings.

## Bill Belichick

Bill Belichick is the current head coach of the New England Patriots. Belichick was born in Nashville, Tennessee and raised in Annapolis, Maryland. Belichick began his coaching career after earning a bachelor’s degree at Wesleyan University when he accepted a staff assistant position with the Baltimore Colts in 1975. He then accepted an assistant special teams coach position with the Detroit Lions where he moved up the coaching ladder. In 1979 he joined the New York Giants coaching staff where he spent 12 seasons, and in 1990 he became the NFL’s youngest head coach when he accepted the position of head coach for the Cleveland Browns. When the Browns relocated to Maryland after the 1995 season, Belichick did not join them in their move, and instead joined the New England Patriots as an assistant coach. After four years,

Belichick became the Patriots' head coach and during his second season the team won the Superbowl. Belichick has directed the team through their most prosperous era, a winning record for 17 consecutive seasons, and is currently the coach with the most wins and more years of coaching experience among all the active coaches ("Bill Belichick").

In 2007 Belichick was fined \$500,000 by the NFL for his involvement in Spygate, another New England Patriots cheating scandal in which the team was also fined. However, unlike with Spygate, Belichick was found to have had no involvement with Deflategate (Wells, 2015). Belichick was not vocal about the scandal, addressing the media about it only once during a press conference.

## Deflategate Timeline

The AFC championship game was played on January 18, 2015, in Massachusetts at the home field of the New England Patriots. The Patriots defeated the Indianapolis Colts and advanced to the Super Bowl XLIX. However, questions were drawn when the 12 footballs used during the first half of the game were replaced by 12 backup footballs after the second-half kickoff. The following day, Indianapolis sports columnist Bob Kravitz broke the news that the NFL would begin investigating the Patriots for deflating footballs (Deflategate, 2016). Ted Wells, a Manhattan attorney who had previously worked with the NFL on another scandal, was put in charge of the investigation (Gershman, 2015). The report of that investigation was released in May of 2015. The investigation determined that the Patriots' staff "more probable than not" deliberately deflated the footballs and that Tom Brady, the Patriots' quarterback, was "generally aware" of the deflations, and that the Patriots' head coach, Bill Belichick, and the rest of the coaching staff had no involvement in the deflation (Wells, 2015).

Following the release of the report of the investigation, the NFL suspended Tom Brady without pay for four games of the 2015–2016 season for his role in the scandal, and the team was fined one million dollars and had to give up their first round pick in the NFL draft for that year, 2016, and their fourth pick for the draft the following year, 2017 (Deflategate, 2016; Hirschhorn, 2015; Reiss, 2015). On May 14, 2015, the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) filed an appeal of Tom Brady's suspension and on June 23, 2015, Tom Brady appealed the suspension at his hearing at NFL offices in New York (Deflategate, 2016; Melvin, 2015). On July 28, 2015, it was announced that Brady's suspension would be upheld. The following month, Tom Brady, along with the NFLPA, met with the NFL in a United States District Court in New York to discuss the possibility for a settlement and on September 3, 2015, the judge, Richard M.



Berman, nullified Brady's suspension. The NFL appealed Judge Berman's decision on October 26, 2015 (Deflategate, 2016). Six months later on April 25, 2016, the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit reinstated Brady's suspension (Orr, 2016). Brady petitioned for a rehearing on May 23, 2016 (Deflategate, 2016; Tom, 2016), but it was denied on July 13, 2016 (Hohler & Volin, 2016). Two days later, Brady announced he would no longer appeal and would serve his suspension (Deflategate, 2016; Hohler, 2016).

This scandal came almost 10 years after "Spygate." Both of these scandals threatened the Patriots' image and their legitimacy as a team that competes fairly, and posed problems for the NFL, putting in question the league's ability to effectively discipline offenders, as Deflategate was not the Patriots' first infraction.

When professional athletes, coaches, and teams commit an offensive act, they are not only damaging their own image, but also the image of the league for which they play. A study looked at the use of punishments in professional sports and commented:

People have a choice where they are going to spend their entertainment dollars. All of the professional sport leagues recognize the importance of protecting their brand equity. Negative public perceptions of a league and its players could lead to reduced revenue (Fortunato, 2000).

This study will examine how the Patriots, a multi-billion-dollar business, handled the threats to their organizational legitimacy that arose because of the Deflategate scandal using the crisis communications function of public relations.

## Research Questions

Based on previous research on crisis communications and public relations strategies, this study is designed to answer the primary research question, “Do the crisis communication responses demonstrated by Tom Brady and the Patriots during Deflategate, in light of their organizational success, high-profile platforms, and their history with cheating scandals, point toward the need for changes in how they handle cheating scandals?” In order to answer this question, this case study will address the following research questions:

RQ1: What communication/public relations strategies, in regard to image repair theory, were used by the Patriots response to the “Deflategate” scandal?

RQ2: Were the communication/public relations strategies used by the Patriots effective in regard to the image repair theory?

## Methodology

Research can be used to verify and validate a theory, but it can also challenge and discredit it, depending on the results of the analysis of the data collected. The literature review presented earlier explored the theoretical concepts of image repair theory proposed by Benoit (1997) and gave a general overview of crisis communication and its importance. Sutton and Staw (1995) state that there needs to be a theoretical foundation in order to tell “a [hypothetical] story about why acts, events, structure, and thoughts occur” (as cited by Yin, 2014). In other words, a theory can serve as a starting point or foundation of a study or analysis, and then once a starting point/foundation is determined, the next step is to examine the theory and its propositions through an exploratory study or case study.

This study serves as an exploratory study of image repair theory strategies as proposed by Benoit. It explores whether image repair strategies can be effective in the world of professional sports. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that there are some events that cannot be fully understood “without reference to the context in which it is embedded.” Studying public relation strategies used in the real world helps to better understand the diversity of public relations and crisis communications across different cultures and helps clarify its use within specific areas, like professional sports.

Qualitative research methods were used in this study, specifically the case study method, to explore the value and the elements of image repair strategies as they are used in crisis communications. In doing so, this study aims to support or amend the theory of image repair. Stacks (2002) defined case studies as in-depth of “particular people, organizations, events, or even processes” (p. 71). A case study can be used during the exploratory phase of a research study and can generally be considered appropriate for the exploratory phase of an investigation

(Yin, 2014). It can also be used as a preliminary research method (Yin, 2014). When determining whether a case study is an appropriate method to use, Yin (2014) offered three qualifications to judge. The first qualification is that the research questions posed should deal with the ‘how’ and ‘why’ aspects instead of focusing on frequencies or incidence, which would require quantitative methods. For this case study, the purpose was to explore if image repair theory strategies play an important role in helping the individual or organization accused of an offensive act reach its goal of maintaining a favorable reputation, and to examine how professional sports teams/entities communicate with their audience. The other two qualifications refer to the extent of control the researcher has over behavioral events and the degree of focus on the present rather than the past, which is the case with this study.

The world of professional sports deals with scandals frequently. Given how many categories make up professional sports (sports, leagues, teams, players, etc.), a complete research on the overall use of the image repair theory in the world of professional sports would take a lifetime to complete. Instead, this case study focuses on one scandal involving one sports team in one sports league to examine the public relations strategies used during a crisis in regard to image repair theory.

Deflategate was chosen because it fit the two main criteria set by the image repair theory: the “accused” was held accountable for an action and the act was considered offensive. (Benoit, 1997). The New England Patriots and Tom Brady were held accountable by the NFL for the alleged deflation of footballs—an offensive act.

Case study research also relies on the use of conclusions gained from multiple sources of information in order to triangulate findings and reach conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an attempt to understand the narrative of the scandal, to get a glimpse at how fans and the general

public reacted to Deflategate, and in order to help answer the question of whether or not the communication/public relations strategies used by Tom Brady and the Patriots were effective in regard to the image restoration theory, this case study also analyzes the framing of the statements given by the Patriots' side and newspaper articles written and published after each development in the scandal and after each response from the accused. The next few paragraphs will describe the subject of the case study and outline the procedure for data collection and its analysis.

### Data Collection

Statements from Robert Kraft, the Patriots' owner, Bill Belichick, the Patriots' head coach, and Tom Brady, the Patriots' quarterback, were collected and analyzed to determine which image repair theories were utilized throughout the scandal and how these theories were received, using the following timeline (fig. 1):

<b>Event/Development</b>			<b>Response</b>
	<b>2015</b>		
The NFL finds that footballs used by the Patriots were underinflated.	<b>Jan. 20</b>		
		<b>Jan. 22</b>	- Belichick press conference - Brady press conference
Ted Wells investigation is announced.	<b>Jan. 23</b>		
		<b>Jan. 24</b>	Kraft statement
		<b>Jan. 26</b>	Kraft media session
The Ted Wells report is released.	<b>May 6</b>	<b>May 6</b>	Kraft statement
		<b>May 7</b>	Brady interview
NFL hands down punishments to the Patriots and Brady.	<b>May 11</b>	<b>May 11</b>	Kraft statement
		<b>May 19</b>	Kraft press conference
NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell upholds Brady's suspension.	<b>July 28</b>		
		<b>July 29</b>	- Brady Facebook post - Kraft press conference
Judge Richard Berman overturns Brady's suspension.	<b>Sep. 3</b>		
		<b>Sep. 4</b>	- Brady Facebook post - Kraft statement
	<b>2016</b>		
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals reinstates Brady's suspension.	<b>April 25</b>		
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals denies Brady petition.	<b>July 13</b>		
		<b>July 15</b>	- Brady Facebook post - Kraft statement

The statements were collected from the NFL's official website, the Patriots' official website, and Tom Brady's page on Facebook. The statements collected were chosen because they were all a

response to a major development in the official Deflategate case (see fig. 1 for a list of major developments throughout Deflategate). A combined total of 14 statements, made or released between January 20, 2015 and July 15, 2016 as responses to these developments, were collected.

The timeline above was also used in the collection of newspaper articles used to analyze public perception. The newspaper articles analyzed for this case study were collected from three newspapers: The Boston Globe, the New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times. These specific newspapers were chosen based on either their location or number of newspapers circulated. The Boston Globe was chosen because of the proximity of the newspaper in relationship to the New England Patriots; the Patriots are based in the Greater Boston area where the main newspaper is based out of. The New York Times was chosen based on the top average weekday individually paid print circulation of select newspapers in the United States in 2015, the year most of the scandal unfolded. The New York Times was at the top of the list with 528,000 papers sold on an average weekday as of September that year (“Circulation”). The Los Angeles Times was also chosen because of its location to the Patriots. The Los Angeles Times is based out of the opposite side of the country, the furthest from the scandal out of the other two newspapers, in hopes that it would add a bit of insight to reactions to the scandal from another region.

Based on the timeline (fig. 1) of developments made and responses given throughout the scandal, any article focused on Brady or the Patriots published on the day something new developed or on the day Kraft, Brady, or Belichick issued a statement as a response to any of those developments were analyzed, with the addition of articles published the day after any of those instances. In addition to the date published, articles were found and chosen by a search for keywords like “Deflategate,” “Tom Brady,” and “Patriots.”

This case study research uses different approaches in analyzing the image repair strategies used by the Patriots and Tom Brady during Deflategate and their effectiveness. The statements offered by the accused are analyzed to determine what image repair strategies are utilized, and then the framing of those statements were analyzed to determine if it was a positive, negative, or neutral coverage and news articles is analyzed to provide a narrative for public perception of the scandal, of the statements from the accused, and in turn, of the image repair strategies used to determine their effectiveness. A total number of 168 articles were analyzed and categorized, 100 from The Boston Globe, 48 from The New York Times, and 20 from the Los Angeles Times.

#### Data Analysis

Each of the statements from the Patriots or Tom Brady that were collected were then analyzed to determine which strategy/strategies they fit into: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and/or mortification (see fig. 2 for the typology of image repair theory strategies). The search for and collection of all the statements issued by the Patriots and Tom Brady took about a week, and the analysis itself also about a week to complete. Both the framing of statements given by the Patriots and Tom Brady throughout the scandal and the framing of newspaper articles from different sources were analyzed. Framing is the way in which information is presented to its audiences. It is the “schemata of interpretation” by which individuals can identify, understand, interpret, and categorize issues, events, and information in general into a meaningful way (Goffman, 1974). In media, it is the presentation styles used, words and images chosen, or focus selected to tell the story (Druckman, 2001; Kian & Hardin, 2009).



The framing of the statements given by the Patriots and Tom Brady was analyzed to determine what type of exposure they each gave them. This was done by analyzing the framing and determining the tone or attitude conveyed in each statement. The statements were categorized into three categories of framing: positive, negative, or neutral. A statement was categorized as being positive when the statement conveyed an overall hopeful, optimistic, supportive, or transparent tone/attitude. A statement was categorized as negative when the statement conveyed an overall accusatory, aggressive, or defensive tone/attitude. And finally, a statement was categorized as neutral when the statement was purely informational.

The framing of the articles was determined by the tone and attitudes expressed by the author, and categorized into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral press/exposure for Brady and the Patriots. An article was categorized as positive if it expressed support or sympathy for the accused, if it expressed acceptance of strategies utilized in the statements, if it criticized another party besides the Patriots or Tom Brady, like the NFL or the commissioner, or if it defended or protected Brady/the Patriots. An article was categorized as negative if it criticized the Patriots or Tom Brady, if it rejected the strategies utilized in the statements, or if it expressed support or praised another party, like the NFL or the commissioner. And finally, an article was categorized as neutral if it was purely informational and did not express support or criticize any party. A total number of 168 articles were analyzed and categorized, 100 from The Boston Globe, 48 from The New York Times, and 20 from the Los Angeles Times.

## Analysis

### Analysis of Tom Brady/Patriots Statements

Tom Brady, often referred to as the NFL's golden boy, began his career with the New England Patriots in 2000 and has played as the team's starting quarterback since 2001. Over his current 18-season long career with the Patriots, Brady has led the team to 15 division titles and eight Super Bowls, winning five of them, making Brady the player with the all-time most Super Bowl appearances and making the Patriots one of the teams with the most Super Bowl wins and the most Super Bowl appearances (10). For the most part of his career, Brady was admired, and his reputation and character had been perceived positively, until Deflategate tarnished his seemingly spotless career.

Most of the following statements were obtained from the New England Patriots' official website, the NFL's official website, and Facebook. One statement was obtained from an online news source. Each statement was released in response to a development in the scandal from January 2015 until July 2016. Each statement will be described, noting when it was released, by whom it was released, and which development it was released after. Following each description, each statement will be broken down and examined to determine which image repair strategy or strategies were utilized.

Rumors of the deflated footballs began circulating after the Patriots won the AFC Championship game against the Indianapolis Colts on January 18th, 2015. It wasn't until two days later, after there was talk of an investigation happening, that the Patriots released their first statement. On January 22, 2015, the Patriots held a press conference in which head coach Bill Belichick issued a statement in response to reports on the team's use of deflated footballs (see

fig. 3). Belichick's use of several image repair strategies can be identified throughout his statement.

In particular, Belichick utilizes the image repair strategies of evading of responsibility and reducing offensiveness. He evades responsibility by expressing that he had no knowledge of the steps taken to prepare the footballs for games. He attempts to shift perception by sharing his coaching philosophy as an explanation as to why footballs wouldn't need to be deflated, and as compensation, he offers to take the necessary steps to avoid this type of situation in the future. Belichick then expresses disappointment in the lack of focus on the team's performance in recent games and on their preparation for the upcoming Super Bowl (see Table 1 for strategies).

In that same press conference, Tom Brady answered questions from reporters in response to the rumors of him using deflated footballs (see fig. 4-4.3). There were three image repair strategies utilized throughout the statement (see Table 2). The first strategy used is denial. He expresses confidence in the equipment staff and their ability to do their job well and ensure that the footballs have the appropriate air levels, and then denies doing anything wrong. The second strategy used is evading responsibility. Brady states he doesn't know what happened before the game while he was in the locker room doing his job. The third strategy used is reducing offensiveness through bolstering. Brady states that he's always believed in fair play, that he's always played fair, and that he will continue to play fair.

The day after the Patriots addressed the media for the first time regarding the scandal, the NFL officially announced an investigation into the deflated footballs. Attorney Ted Wells was put in charge of the investigation. Robert Kraft issued a statement on January 24, 2015, utilizing the image repair strategy of reducing offensiveness through compensation (see fig. 5 for Kraft's

statement, see Table 3 for strategies). He assured that the team and staff would be cooperative and transparent.

A few days after, on Jan 26, 2015, Kraft issued a more defensive statement regarding the investigation (see fig. 6). He expressed his team's innocence and that he expected an apology from the NFL for the way the league handled and reported on the issue, employing the strategies of denial and reducing offensiveness through transcendence (see Table 4).

The investigations spanned three months and on May 6, 2015, after questioning Brady and Patriots staff regarding any alleged involvement in the deflation, the Wells Report, named after Ted Wells, was released. The report concluded that it was "more probable than not" that two members of the Patriots' equipment staff deliberately deflated the footballs and that Brady was "generally aware" of the deflation, but that Belichick and other members of the coaching staff were not involved (Wells, Karp, & Reisner, 2015).

Kraft issued a statement the same day upholding the team's innocence and criticizing the lack of evidence the report used, but nonetheless accepting the findings (see fig. 7). Kraft utilizes denial and then reducing offensiveness as he questions the reliability of the evidence provided by the investigation and offers his acceptance and willingness to continue working with the league, despite his personal opinions about the case, as compensation (see Table 5).

On May 7, 2015, Tom Brady had a speaking engagement scheduled at Salem University where he was interviewed by sportscaster Jim Gray. When asked about the controversy, Brady responded that it was not time for him to address it and that he hadn't had enough time to digest it. When asked how he was handling the controversy and whether it bothered him, Brady talked about his past and his career and of his friends' and family's support. This could be considered

reducing offensiveness through bolstering. Brady chose to focus on overcoming adversity in the past and how he was raised (see Table 6).

Five days after the Wells Report was released, on May 11, 2015, the NFL announced the punishment for the Patriots and Tom Brady. According to the Wells Report, Brady failed to cooperate with the investigation by not handing over relevant electronic evidence (emails and texts), so the NFL suspended Brady for four games without pay for the upcoming season, and the Patriots were fined one million dollars (the largest fine in NFL history) and had to forfeit their first-round pick for the 2016 NFL draft and their fourth-round pick for the 2017 NFL draft. Kraft issued a statement the same day, expressing his disappointment concerning the severity of the punishment, his appreciation for the fans, and his continued support of Brady (see fig. 8). In this statement, Kraft uses the reducing offensiveness strategy by attempting to shift the perception of the audience through expressing gratitude to Patriots fans for their support and uses the denial strategy as he refutes the NFL's findings (see Table 7).

In an act to further help prove their innocence, the Patriots issued an official statement outlining the inconsistencies in the Wells Report and providing supporting documents addressing its scientific conclusions on May 14, 2015. This rebuttal in itself demonstrates direct denial and reducing offensiveness through the questioning of the league's judgement in the face of "inconsistencies" in the investigation's findings. The statement described the investigation's conclusions as incorrect, incomplete, and lacking context. Tom Brady filed an appeal for his suspension on the same day, another act demonstrating direct denial.

Five days later, following Brady's motion to appeal on May 19th, Kraft issued another statement announcing that he would not be appealing the one million-dollar fine and draft-pick forfeits on behalf of the Patriots (see fig. 9). However, even though Kraft decided to accept the

punishment, he states that he does so reluctantly. In this statement, Kraft utilizes denial as he continues maintaining his team's innocence, and he utilizes reducing offensiveness as he tries to shift the perception of the audience by talking about the moment he became owner, his decision-making process, and his acceptance of the NFL's decided punishment for the good of the team and the sport (see Table 8).

After Tom Brady's appeal hearing with the NFL on July 29, 2015, where Goodell, and in turn the league, decided to uphold Brady's suspension, both Brady and Kraft issued statements expressing their disappointment in the league's decision and upholding their alleged innocence. Throughout his statement, posted on his personal Facebook account, Brady addressed specific points to explain why he did nothing wrong, such as the reason why he didn't hand over his phone and the measures he took to fully cooperate with the league and its investigation (see fig. 10). He finished by stating that he would not accept the league's decision and expressed gratitude for the support from his family, friends, and fans.

The first image repair strategy clearly showcased in this statement is denial, as shown when Brady blatantly states he did nothing wrong. The second strategy showcased is evading responsibility. It is utilized when Brady expresses not being made aware that he would be disciplined for not turning over his phone, which from his understanding, he had no obligation to do. Lastly, the third strategy showcased is reducing offensiveness. This strategy is shown when Brady accuses the NFL of dragging out the controversy to avoid admitting that it has no concrete evidence of any wrongdoing (see Table 9).

In his statement to the media on the same day, Kraft apologized to the team's fan base for accepting the league's punishment in May (see fig. 11). He explained that he accepted the

punishment hoping it would help absolve Brady. He criticized the commissioner's and the league's agenda, and again underscored his faith in Brady.

Kraft applies various methods of the reducing offensiveness strategy throughout his statement. The transcendence method is shown when Kraft victimizes Brady and the team. According to Kraft, the commissioner and the league failed the Patriots. The method of attacking the accuser is showcased when Kraft questions the league's agenda and accuses it and the commissioner of intentionally working toward undermining Brady's reputation. Finally, the bolstering method is showcased when Kraft underlines Brady's integrity both off and on the field (see Table 10).

Then on September 3, 2015, the Patriots and Tom Brady had a breakthrough. Judge Richard Berman ruled in favor of Brady during his appeal and nullified his suspension. Both Brady and Kraft issued statements the following day expressing their appreciation and upholding their belief that no wrongdoing had taken place (see fig. 12, 13). The compensation method of the reducing offensiveness strategy can be seen in Brady's statement, as he offers to do his best in positively representing his team and the league (see Table 11). Kraft's statement shows the bolstering method of the reducing offensiveness strategy, as he describes and applauds Brady's character, especially throughout the controversy (see Table 12).

Unfortunately for Brady and Kraft, the good sentiments in Foxborough did not last long. On April 25, 2016, Brady's suspension was reinstated, four months after the NFL filed an appeal on the overturning of Brady's punishment. Brady filed for a rehearing, but in July 2016, it was denied, and on July 15, 2016, Brady announced through a post on his personal Facebook account that he would not seek another appeal and would serve his four-game suspension. In his statement, Brady expresses his gratitude for the support he received from Kraft and mentions that

he looks forward to returning after serving his suspension (see fig. 14). In this statement, there was no mention of his feelings toward the court's refusal of his appeal request or anything resembling the sentiments he expressed in previous statements. However, Brady still did not admit that he or his team had done anything wrong, especially something meriting severe punishments like the ones handed down by Goodell and his staff.

Kraft also issued a statement on July 15, 2016, once again defending and supporting Tom Brady, and criticizing the league and its decision, clearly showcasing various different strategies like reducing offensiveness and denial (see fig. 15). The denial strategy is demonstrated when Kraft states that there was no evidence showing Brady had doing anything to violate any rules at any time during the scandal and when he expresses his support for Brady during the scandal. The attacking one's accuser method of the reducing offensiveness strategy is illustrated when Kraft accuses the league of having a hidden agenda and the investigation of being "biased from the start" and lacking concrete evidence (see Table 13).

Tom Brady served his four-game suspension and made his debut for the 2016–2017 season on October 9, 2016 against the Cleveland Browns, and then led the Patriots to their fifth Super Bowl win.

#### Analysis of Framing and Public Perception

A total number of 14 statements were analyzed and categorized into three categories: positive, negative, or neutral exposure for Tom Brady and the Patriots. Out of the 14 statements, 11 were positive, three were negative, and none were neutral. The first statement was given by Bill Belichick, head coach, and it was categorized as positive. In his statement, Belichick explained his knowledge or lack of it on the processes the footballs go through. He focused on



his coaching methods and why there would have been no need to underinflate any footballs. He offered transparency, cooperation, and an assurance that steps would be taken to ensure this would not be an issue in the future. The second statement was Tom Brady's first on the scandal. This statement was categorized as positive. In his statement, Brady answers 47 questions from the press. While Brady did defend himself and his team during the interview, he also offered transparency and focused on the importance of finding answers, and out of the 47 questions, there were only 5 questions in which he did not provide an answer or gave little information. Brady expressed no knowledge on why the air pressure of the footballs had changed but expressed confidence in the process and his belief in fair play. The third statement came from Patriots CEO Robert Kraft. This statement was categorized as positive. He provided steps he took to insure his team would be "cooperative and transparent" (see Fig. 5) through the investigation and expressed support for the NFL and his respect for integrity and competitive balance. The fourth statement was from Kraft and it was categorized as positive. In this statement, Kraft continued the sentiment and dialogue he shared in his previous statement, but in this statement, he defended Brady and the team and vouched for their character and integrity. He also expressed his expectation of an apology if the investigation did not find conclusive evidence of tampering of footballs by anyone from his organization. The fifth statement came from Kraft after the report from the investigation was released. This statement was categorized as negative. In this statement, the focus was on criticizing the methods and processes of the investigation. He expresses his disappointment of the results, and even though he ends the statement by accepting the findings and any ensuing discipline from the league, which was positive, this was not the focus. The sixth statement was an interview from Brady, and it was categorized as positive. He again defended himself and his team, but the focus of his answers was on how he was dealing

with the scandal. He focused on overcoming adversity and praising his support system. The seventh statement was from Kraft and it was categorized as negative. In his statement, Kraft reaffirms his support for Brady and his belief in the organization's innocence, however, the focus of the statement is on his disappointment of the "circumstantial" evidence and "one-sided" investigation (see Fig. 8). The eighth statement was a press conference held by Kraft. This statement was categorized as positive. In this statement, Kraft focuses on doing what was best for the team and the league, despite his own disappointment and personal feelings about it and accepts the league's punishment. The ninth statement was from Brady on his Facebook page. This statement was categorized as negative. In his statement, Brady focuses on listing all the points in which he disagreed with the investigation and its results. He provided his side of things and his cooperation throughout the investigation but did not provide explanations for his actions, instead he focused on accusing the NFL. He ended the statement by stating that he would fight the commissioner's decision for himself and future players and by expressing his appreciation for the support he had received. The tenth statement came from a press conference held by Kraft. This statement was categorized as positive. In his statement, Kraft expresses his disappointment of the league's decision and the discipline handed down to Brady. He calls into question the league's motives and offers an apology to Patriots fans for his previous decision to accept the league's discipline. The focus, however, is on Brady and his character. Kraft defends Brady and reaffirms his belief in his innocence. The eleventh statement came from Brady on his Facebook page after a judge had overturned the league's decision. This statement is categorized as positive. In his statement, Brady focuses on thanking his support system and those who played a role in the decision. He expresses his sadness over the whole situation and expresses his love for the league and the sport. The twelfth statement came from Kraft and it was categorized as positive.

In this statement, Kraft took a dig at the league and the investigation, but primarily focused on praising Brady and his appreciation for the judge's decision of overturning the league's discipline. The thirteenth statement came from Brady on his Facebook page. This statement was categorized as positive. In his statement, Brady focused on thanking those who supported him throughout the scandal, his decision to not proceed with the legal process, and on his future with the team. The fourteenth and final statement came from Kraft and it was categorized as positive. In it he expresses his disappointment with the court of appeals and the NFL but focuses more on praising and expressing support for Brady and expressing appreciation for the support of the team's fans. What this analysis means, and its implications will be further explored in the discussion section.

A total number of 168 articles were analyzed and categorized into three categories: positive, negative, or neutral coverage of Deflategate for Tom Brady and the Patriots. Out of the 168 articles, 62 (36.9%) were categorized as positive, 66 (39.3%) were categorized as negative, and 40 (23.8%) were categorized as neutral. Breaking it down by each newspaper, of the articles from The Boston Globe, 46 (46%) were categorized as positive, 31 (31%) were categorized as negative, and 23 (23%) were categorized as neutral. Of the articles from The New York Times, 14 (29%) were categorized as positive, 24 (50%) were categorized as negative, and 10 (21%) were categorized as neutral. Of the Los Angeles Times, two (10%) were categorized as positive, 11 (55%) were categorized as negative, and seven (35%) were categorized as neutral. An example of an analysis of an article categorized as positive is the article titled, "Nothing to Lose, so Fight" by Ben Volin published on July 29, 2015 in The Boston Globe. This article expressed support for the Patriots and Tom Brady and its criticism stating, "It's time for Tom Brady to get tough. Brady and the NFL Players Association need to take Roger Goodell and the league to

court.” The article focuses on the unfairness of the NFL’s proceedings and decision and the steps Brady can take to succeed in appeals court. The article titled “Stick a Pin in Credibility of Brady, Patriots” by Bill Plaschke published on May 12, 2015 in the Los Angeles Times is one example of an article categorized as negative. This article criticized and mocked Brady and the Patriots, and the statements made by Robert Kraft. This article in particular responded to a statement in which Kraft criticized the evidence found by the investigation. “The evidence, highlighted by text messages between Brady and the two team employees who doctored the footballs, was more than enough. Could it have been more conclusive? Sure, maybe if Brady had not actively hindered the sleuths by refusing to release texts and emails, which is considered conduct detrimental to the league.” Lastly, an example of an analysis of a neutral article “Patriots Won’t Appeal N.F.L. Punishment, Owner Says” by Bill Pennington published on May 19, 2015 in the New York Times. This article just reported on Kraft’s decision to accept the league’s punishment and what those punishments were. I did not elaborate on any other details and the quotes used were ones pulled from Kraft’s own statement. Each article was analyzed and then categorized this way. What the analysis means in regard to public perception and reaction to the developments and image repair strategies will be discussed in the next section.

## Discussion

An analysis of the crisis management strategies used by Tom Brady and the New England Patriots in the wake of the high-profile scandal Deflategate reveals a clear use of traditional image repair techniques within the realm of professional sports. The fallout of this scandal demonstrates the level of prominence Tom Brady and the Patriots are given. Their actions were heavily scrutinized not only by the NFL but also by the national media and fans across the United States. Because of the high-profile nature of the scandal, Tom Brady and the Patriots were forced to respond to the scandal while facing criticism and scrutiny.

The first research question asks which image repair strategies were utilized by the Patriots throughout the “Deflategate” scandal. Tom Brady and Robert Kraft, the Patriots owner and main spokesman throughout the entire scandal, openly displayed Benoit’s theory of image repair in varying respects. In the following timeline (Fig. 1.1) we can clearly see that they both relied heavily on denial and reducing offensiveness (with Brady and Belichick briefly utilizing evading responsibility):

		<b>2015</b>	
The NFL finds that footballs used by the Patriots were underinflated.	<b>Jan. 20</b>	<b>Jan. 22</b>	- <b>Belichick press conference</b> Evading Responsibility Reducing Offensiveness - <b>Brady press conference</b> Evading Responsibility Reducing Offensiveness Denial
Ted Wells investigation is announced.	<b>Jan. 23</b>	<b>Jan. 24</b>	<b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness
		<b>Jan. 26</b>	<b>Kraft media session</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial
The Ted Wells report is released.	<b>May 6</b>	<b>May 6</b>	<b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial
		<b>May 7</b>	<b>Brady interview</b> Reducing Offensiveness
NFL hands down punishments to the Patriots and Brady.	<b>May 11</b>	<b>May 11</b>	<b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial
		<b>May 19</b>	<b>Kraft press conference</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial
NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell upholds Brady's suspension.	<b>July 28</b>	<b>July 29</b>	- <b>Brady Facebook post</b> Evading Responsibility Reducing Offensiveness Denial - <b>Kraft press conference</b> Reducing Offensiveness
Judge Richard Berman overturns Brady's suspension.	<b>Sep. 3</b>	<b>Sep. 4</b>	- <b>Brady Facebook post</b> Reducing Offensiveness - <b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness
		<b>2016</b>	
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals reinstates Brady's suspension.	<b>April 25</b>		
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals denies Brady petition.	<b>July 13</b>	<b>July 15</b>	- <b>Brady Facebook post</b> No strategy utilized - <b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial

They were adamant in defending their innocence and denied any wrongdoing. In turn, they

offered no apologies.

The main image repair strategy utilized was reducing offensiveness. In various statements Kraft put the act into a different context and attempted to shift the perception of the audience. Kraft criticized the league's investigation and brought into question the league's motives behind the investigation. He continuously praised Brady's character and integrity and that of his team. Brady also stressed his belief in fair play and asserted his integrity of the game. In his one statement, Bill Belichick, the Patriots' head coach, expressed no knowledge of anything regarding deflated footballs and expressed his willingness to cooperate with any investigation and to take measures to make sure the team does not find itself in a similar situation in the future. Finally, both the team and Brady had to accept the NFL's punishments, forcing them into compensation. They both released statements confirming they would accept the NFL's sanctions and their desire to move forward.

Early in course of the crisis it also became apparent that denial was going to be another main strategy used throughout the scandal. Denial was manifested in the first statements Tom Brady and Robert Kraft issued. In each of their statements, they reiterated their belief in their organization's innocence. Tom Brady insisted he had no involvement in the deflation of any footballs and that the staff had no involvement either. He denied having had any kind of communication relating to football air pressure with anyone and insisted he had cooperated with the NFL's investigation. Robert Kraft continuously expressed his belief and faith in Brady's innocence and publicly supported his player and team.

When the accused utilizes corrective action, mortification, or tries to reduce offensiveness, he/she is seen as being more trustworthy and caring. However, when the accused denies the crisis, he/she is perceived as lacking those traits, affecting his/her credibility, which in

turn impacts the audience's attitudes toward the strategies being used (Haiman, 1949; Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Haigh & Brubaker, 2010). So why were the other strategies not utilized in this case?

As outlined previously, the two strategies not used, corrective action and mortification, require, to an extent, some form of accountability. With the strategy of corrective action, the accused promises to fix the issue. Corrective action may look like actions taken to restore the situation to the state it was prior to the offensive act, a "mending" of one's ways, or it may take the form of assuring that it will never happen again and providing changes or actions that ensure those changes take place. The accused engages in mortification when they admit to the offensive act and offer an apology/plea for forgiveness. The only time any of those strategies were utilized was in the very beginning when Patriot's head coach Bill Belichick stated that measures would be taken to make sure his team would not be found in this kind of situation again in the future. So why did Brady refuse to offer an apology or accept accountability after an investigation found evidence of some involvement by his part in the deflation of footballs and then the courts upheld his suspension? In his book, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies, Second Edition : Image Repair Theory and Research*, Benoit (2014) offers up a possible explanation for why an accused party may refuse to admit guilt. "Ethically, a person or an organization that is guilty ought to confess and apologize to try to repair its image. However, such an admission might help with one goal (repairing reputation) while interfering with other goals (avoiding criminal or civil action)." In the end, the Patriots were fined \$1 million and Brady was forced to serve a suspension. Had there been more concrete evidence discovered against Brady and the team or an admission of guilt, the punishments handed down may have been more severe. The NFL was not unfamiliar with cheating scandals, having fined and suspended numerous players, coaches, and teams in



various degrees. However, as outlined in the literature, corrective action does not always mean an admission of guilt. Had Brady offered up corrective action of some sort or even been more transparent, the ensuing suspicion and criticism of his character may have played out differently. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine what may have happened with so many factors at play, including the personal relationships between the league, the team, and Brady, or the pressure the league felt to make an example of Brady after their own reputation was in crisis. Whatever the factors, image repair studies and findings point out that by utilizing corrective action, mortification, or the reducing of the offensiveness of the event, the accused is seen as being more trustworthy than when the accused denies the crisis.

The second research question asks whether the image repair theory strategies used by the Patriots were effective in regard to the theory's criteria. With image repair, it is important to see the transition of damaged images from denial to mortification, but in this case, Brady and the Patriots went through an image repair process without accepting blame.

As the timeline in (fig 1.1) shows, mortification or corrective action were not displayed because they consistently denied the issue. In many image repair cases, the accused/offender eventually admits to the offense, but because Brady and the Patriots believed they had nothing to apologize for, it negated the need for corrective action. The only corrective action that was taken was the acceptance of the NFL's sanctions, but even then, they were forced to accept that. In the end, Brady released a statement as a restorative close, providing somewhat of a transition to something resembling mortification, but not quite.

Looking back once more at Fig. 1.1, we can also look at trends, if any, in the strategies used throughout the scandal. The timeline shows that the strategy of reducing offensiveness was used in every single statement. The strategy of evading responsibility was used in the very

beginning, but was not used again until the NFL Commissioner upheld Brady's suspension. I do not think this holds any more meaning other than it was the first time Tom Brady chose to make a statement to give his side of the story, in which he went over what was asked of him by the attorneys and what his obligations, or lack of thereof, were as a member of a union. In the timeline we can also see that denial was used throughout the scandal, from the very beginning to the very end. But what is evident in the timeline is that Brady and the Patriots used a reactive crisis communications strategy rather than a proactive strategy. They waited for things to develop before making a statement, which is not the most successful crisis communication strategy. But at the same time, if indeed they were guilty of something, what information or statements could they have made before developments were made that would have helped? Maybe a reactive and defensive strategy was the best option they had, but best does not always mean successful. Either way, the reactive strategy they utilized did not easily resolve the scandal.

Adding the findings of the analysis of the framing of the statements and news articles, it shows an almost even amount of positive and negative coverage by both The Boston Globe and the New York Times, even though the great majority of the statements from Brady and the Patriots were positive, drawing the assumption that the image repair strategies utilized by Brady and the Patriots did the minimum for journalists on their coast. While on the other side of the country, the Los Angeles Times drew worse numbers respectively, further strengthening the conclusion that their reactive strategy was not successful.

The Boston Globe had the highest number of articles reporting on the scandal, with the New York Times in second with almost half of The Boston Globe, and the Los Angeles Times in third with almost half of the New York Times. Separating the articles by newspaper, The Boston Globe had 46% of all their articles categorized as positive while the New York Times had 29%

of their articles categorized as positive and the Los Angeles Times had 10% of their articles categorized as positive. This begs the question of whether the proximity to the location Brady and the Patriots reside in played a factor in how developments in the scandal were reported, as evidenced by 50% of the New York Times articles and 55% of the Los Angeles Times articles were categorized as negative. The Los Angeles Times also had a higher percentage of neutral articles with 35% versus the 23% from The Boston Globe and the 21% from the New York Times. Another observation was that many of the articles of categorized as negative were categorized as such not because Brady or the Patriots were defended or praised but because the NFL was being criticized.

In the end, the scandal received a large amount of media scrutiny due to Brady's success and the growing debate of the NFL's ability to appropriately discipline its players and teams, but did it really damage Brady or the team's image? The Patriots went on to win another Super Bowl in 2017, after starting off the season without Brady due to his suspension, and another one this year, 2019, making Brady the most successful quarterback in history and making the Patriots' franchise the most successful one in history as well. Was there need for repair? Being the extremely wealthy and successful team that they are, was their biggest and only threat throughout this scandal just losing things that may have affected their performance or stats a bit, like Brady losing playing time? Maybe so, because their reputation or public perception definitely didn't seem to have any effect on their ability to perform or on the results they got on the field, if anything it may have just fueled them. Or maybe the way the threat of scandal to their reputation and public perception in general was not ideal as Patriots fans were going to stick by them and support them regardless. The bottom line is that if they did cheat and underinflate

their footballs, they waited, did the minimum in regard to crisis communication, rode the scandal out, and just kept winning, essentially getting away with it.

## Conclusion

The landscape of professional sports is a unique section in American society. Professional athletes, sports teams, and sports leagues perform and operate on a stage most individuals and organizations do not. Therefore, when scandals and crises occur, it is important for all parties involved to respond effectively.

The first research question asked, “What communication/public relations strategies, in regard to image repair theory, were used by the Patriots response to the ‘Deflategate’ scandal?” This was answered with the analysis of the statements given by the Patriots and personal statements from Tom Brady—throughout the scandal, the accused relied heavily on denial and reducing offensiveness. The second question asked, “Were the communication/public relations strategies used by the Patriots effective in regard to the image repair theory?” This question is not as easily answered.

The goal of image repair, once the conditions of an offensive act are met, is to repair one’s reputation. In addition to properly utilizing image repair strategies, the accused needs to be trustworthy by being quick to respond, consistent, and transparent. Denial can be successful if there is evidence or explanations that absolve the accused of the offensive act, but both the Patriots and Tom Brady were held accountable for the deflation of footballs. The team was fined and Brady was suspended, and even though Brady’s suspension was argued, the evidence to prove him innocent was lacking. It left questions unanswered and because Brady was not transparent, he came across as untrustworthy. The image repair strategy of reducing offensiveness includes all attempts to reduce the degree of any negative perception the audience may have produced as a result of the offensive act. “None of [the] strategies of decreasing offensiveness denies that the actor committed the objectionable act or attempts to diminish the

actor's responsibility for that act. All attempt to reduce the unfavorable feelings toward the actor by increasing the audience's esteem for the actor or by decreasing their negative feelings about the act." (Benoit, 2014). Robert Kraft praised the team and especially Brady, and the NFL commissioner's intentions were attacked. But these were too little and because Kraft was the one heavily addressing the issue instead of Brady, the strategies were not as successful as they could have been. This then leads to the primary research question: Do the crisis communication responses demonstrated by Tom Brady and the Patriots during Deflategate, in light of their organizational success, high-profile platforms, and their history with cheating scandals, point toward the need for changes in how they handle cheating scandals?

Speaking from within the realm of image repair theory, the findings indicate that yes, there is a need for change in how cheating scandals are handled. Strategies that may have helped were not used and the strategies that were used were not successful. But image repair theory has a limited domain and does not address questions specific to this case, like fan loyalty.

#### Suggestion for Future Research and Limitations

The limitations of this study are largely the same as those for any case study. The issue of time constraint is significant here. In order to more accurately gauge public perception and public response to Deflategate, an analysis of other outlets of media would have been ideal. Involving a larger sample size of those different media like more news articles from other sources, tv and radio broadcasts, and even posts on social media regarding Deflategate would aid in providing a more thorough analysis of public perception. However, Tom Brady and the Patriots compete in a national league, meaning one would need to look at many different sectors across the country to measure public perception of those affected by the scandal nationwide. And

if social media were to be analyzed, it could prove difficult to provide an accurate sample of the public perception of those affected by the scandal due to the demographics of social media usage, as many older sports/football fans may not even be on social media, let alone discussing the scandal.

Since no two scandals are ever exactly the same, the issue of generalization was also a limitation, meaning that the conclusions reached in the study cannot necessarily be applied to other sports scandals. However, this study was designed to analyze Deflategate and the statements made by and on behalf of Tom Brady in order to gain a better understanding of how image repair theory was utilized, not to analyze or prove generalization.

Another limit in this study is the Patriots' history with scandals. Deflategate was not the team's first cheating scandal. In 2007 the Patriots were disciplined by the NFL for videotaping opposing coaches' signals from an unauthorized location. Measuring the impact or effect this scandal may have had on the Patriots', and in turn on Tom Brady's image during Deflategate and how it may have influenced public perception or influenced the framing of the scandal in the media would have been difficult to execute. Along the same lines, measuring the impact fan loyalty had on the reception of the initial offensive act and the developments that followed would have provided more insight, but would have been difficult to execute. Though these factors may have proved to be limitations for this analysis, these limits also create avenues for future research, especially with the development of yet another scandal involving Patriot owner Robert Kraft. Earlier this year, after this study was completed, Robert Kraft was charged with prostitution for which he pleaded not guilty. The scandal is currently still unfolding.

Deflategate shows the level and intensity of the fallouts that follow these types of public transgressions. Tom Brady's and the New England Patriots' public relation strategies used within

the realm of image repair theory could have been executed better. Their initial statements on being transparent and cooperating with the NFL and its investigation were appropriate, but they failed to continue that dialogue, and instead denied and attacked the NFL's findings, which did not play out in their favor. The NFL's sanctions were upheld, and Brady and the Patriots had to accept the punishments, making them seem guilty and defiant in the eyes of their audience.

The importance and benefit of this research is twofold. The findings of this specific case study provide different look into the realm of professional sports and the importance of effective public relations strategies used by any offender to repair any damage to their image and reputation. More significant, however, may be what this specific research adds to the existing literature of crisis communication in professional sports and the foundation it lays for future research on future sports scandals. Scandals in professional sports are reoccurring, so the question is not if another one will occur, but rather when. This research has the potential to serve as a foundation for public relations practitioners and the world of professional sports as a whole.



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Table 1 Strategies in Bill Belichick’s Statement from Jan. 22, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Evading Responsibility	<p>“I had no knowledge of the various steps involved in the game balls and the process that happened between when they were prepared and went to the officials and went to the game.”</p>
Reducing Offensiveness	<p>“[M]y mentality has always been to make things as difficult as possible for players in practice. So with regard to footballs, . . . the balls we practice with are as bad as they can be: wet, sticky, cold, slippery.”</p> <p>“We never use the condition of the footballs as an excuse. We play with whatever or kick with whatever we have to use and that's the way it is . . . Maybe that's part of our ball security philosophy.”</p> <p>“Knowing that now, in the future we will certainly inflate the footballs above that low level to account for any possible change during the game.”</p> <p>“We will take steps in the future to make sure that we don't put ourselves in that type of potential situation again.”</p>



	<p>“We have cooperated fully, quickly and completely with every request that they have made; (we) continue to be cooperative in any way that we can.”</p> <p>“It's unfortunate that this is a story coming off of two great playoff victories by our football team and our players.”</p> <p>“[W]e will turn all our attention and focus on to the Seattle Seahawks, a very well coached, talented, tough, competitive football team.”</p>
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Note. This information was retrieved from nfl.com

Table 2 Strategies in Tom Brady’s Press Conference Interview from Jan. 22, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Denial	<p data-bbox="570 333 1016 369">“I didn't alter the ball in any way.”</p> <p data-bbox="570 478 1417 806">“Our equipment guys do a great job with breaking the balls in. They have a process that they go through. When I pick those balls out, at that point to me they are perfect. I don't want anyone touching the balls after that, I don't want anyone rubbing them, putting any air in them, taking any air out.”</p> <p data-bbox="570 915 794 951">“I believe them.”</p> <p data-bbox="570 1060 1321 1171">“I'm very comfortable saying that nobody did it, as far as I know.”</p>
Evading Responsibility	<p data-bbox="570 1211 1382 1320">“I have no knowledge of anything. I have no knowledge of any wrongdoing.”</p> <p data-bbox="570 1430 1403 1686">“I don't know everything. I also understand that I was in the locker room preparing for a game. I don't know what happened over the course of the process with the footballs. I was preparing for my own job, doing what I needed to do.”</p>
Reducing Offensiveness	<p data-bbox="570 1726 1395 1835">“I feel like I've always played within the rules. I would never do anything to break the rules.”</p>

	<p>“I believe in fair play and I'll always believe in that for as long as I'm playing.”</p>
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Note. This information was retrieved from New York Daily News; [nydailynews.com](http://nydailynews.com)

Table 3 Strategies in Robert Kraft's Statement from Jan. 24, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Reducing Offensiveness	<p data-bbox="574 331 1289 441">“I instructed our staff to be completely cooperative and transparent with the league’s investigators.”</p> <p data-bbox="574 550 1399 735">“[W]e provided access to every full- and part-time employee the league’s representatives requested to speak with and produced every communication device that they requested to search.”</p> <p data-bbox="574 844 1341 953">“Our organization will continue to cooperate throughout the league’s investigation.”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from patriots.com

Table 4 Strategies in Robert Kraft’s Media Session from Jan. 26, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Reducing Offensiveness	<p>“Tom, Bill, and I have been together for 15 years. They are my guys, they are a part of my family. And Bill, Tom, and I have had many difficult discussions over the years, and I have never known them to lie to me.”</p> <p>“It bothers me greatly that their reputations and integrity, and by association that of our team, has been called into question.”</p> <p>“If the Wells investigation is not able to definitely determine that our organization tampered with the air pressure in the footballs, I would expect and hope the league would apologize to our entire team and in particular coach Belichick and Tom Brady for what they have had to endure the last week.”</p> <p>“I am disappointed in the way the entire matter has been handled and reported upon.”</p>
Denial	<p>“I want to make it clear that I believe, unconditionally, that the New England Patriots have done nothing wrong.”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from patriots.com

Table 5 Strategies in Robert Kraft’s Statement on the Ted Well Report from May 6, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Denial	“That sentiment has not changed.”
Reducing Offensiveness	<p>“As compelling a case as the Wells Report may try to make, I am going to rely on the factual evidence of numerous scientists and engineers rather than inferences from circumstantial evidence.”</p> <p>“[G]iven our level of cooperation throughout the process, I was offended by the comments made in the Wells Report.”</p> <p>“[W]e will accept the findings of the report and take the appropriate actions based on those findings as well as any discipline levied by the league.”</p>

Note. This information is was retrieved from patriots.com

Table 6 Strategies in Tom Brady’s Interview from May 7, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Reducing Offensiveness	<p>“I’ve dealt with a lot of things in the past. I dealt with this three months ago before the Super bowl. I dealt with a lot of adversity over the course of my career and the course of my life, and I’m very fortunate to have so many people that love me and support me. Life is certainly about ups and downs and I certainly accept my responsibility as a public figure. I think a lot of it you take the good with the bad. Dealing with different diversities in life you try to deal with it the best you can, and I was raised by a great mom and dad that support me and I have a great team that supports me, so we’ll get through it.”</p> <p>“You know my nature and character. You know as a human I think we care what people think. I certainly care what the people close to me care and think. As a public figure you learn that not everyone is going to like you either. So, Good bad and different there’s a lot of people that don’t like Tom Brady and I’m ok with that. I have teammates that I love and support and love and support me. I have fans, I family. I am very blessed.”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from complex.com

Table 7 Strategies in Robert Kraft's Statement from May 11, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Reducing Offensiveness	<p data-bbox="570 333 1357 512">“Today's punishment, however, far exceeded any reasonable expectation. It was based completely on circumstantial rather than hard or conclusive evidence.”</p> <p data-bbox="570 625 1398 953">“We are humbled by the support the New England Patriots have received from our fans throughout the world. We recognize our fans' concerns regarding the NFL's penalties and share in their disappointment in how this one-sided investigation was handled, as well as the dismissal of the scientific evidence.”</p>
Denial	<p data-bbox="570 995 1409 1100">“Tom Brady has our unconditional support. Our belief in him has not wavered.”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from nfl.com



Table 8 Strategies in Robert Kraft’s Press Conference Statement from May 19, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Denial	<p>“There was no hard evidence and everything was circumstantial.”</p> <p>“[I]t was unreasonable and unprecedented in my opinion.”</p>
Reducing offensiveness	<p>“I have a way of looking at problems that are very strong in my mind.”</p> <p>“Although I might disagree with what is decided, I do have respect for the Commissioner and believe that he’s doing what he perceives to be in the best interest of the full 32.”</p> <p>“I really feel at this point in time that taking this off the agenda, this is the best thing for the New England Patriots, our fans and the NFL.”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from patriots.com

Table 9 Strategies in Tom Brady’s Facebook post from July 29, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Denial	<p>“I did nothing wrong, and no one in the Patriots organization did either.”</p> <p>“The fact is that neither I, nor any equipment person, did anything of which we have been accused.”</p> <p>“I have never written, texted, emailed to anybody at any time, anything related to football air pressure before this issue was raised . . . [t]o suggest that I destroyed a phone to avoid giving the NFL information it requested is completely wrong.”</p> <p>“I will not allow my unfair discipline to become a precedent for other NFL players without a fight.”</p>
Evading Responsibility	<p>“As a member of a union, I was under no obligation to set a new precedent going forward, nor was I made aware at any time during Mr. Wells investigation, that failing to subject my cell phone to investigation would result in ANY discipline.”</p>
Reducing Offensiveness	<p>“There is no ‘smoking gun’ and this controversy is manufactured to distract from the fact they have zero evidence of wrongdoing.”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from Facebook.com/TomBrady

Table 10 Strategies in Robert Kraft’s Press Conference Statement from July 29, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Reducing Offensiveness	<p data-bbox="571 331 1412 512">“I truly believe what I did in May, given the actual evidence of this situation and the league's history on discipline matters, would make it much easier for the league to exonerate Tom Brady.”</p> <p data-bbox="571 625 1133 659">“I was wrong to put my faith in the league.”</p> <p data-bbox="571 772 1412 877">“I’ve come to the conclusion this was never about doing what was fair and just.”</p> <p data-bbox="571 991 1344 1171">“This headline was designed to capture headlines across the country and obscure evidence regarding the tampering of air pressure in footballs.”</p> <p data-bbox="571 1285 1409 1390">“Tom Brady is a person of great integrity and a great ambassador of the game, both on and off the field.”</p> <p data-bbox="571 1503 1390 1608">“...those in the league office who are more determined to prove that they were right rather than admit any culpability...”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from nfl.com

Table 11 Strategies in Tom Brady's Facebook Post from Sept. 4, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Reducing Offensiveness	“It is a privilege to be a member of the NFL community and I will always try to do my best in representing my team and the league in a way that would make all members of this community proud.”

Note. This information was retrieved from Facebook.com/TomBrady

Table 12 Strategies in Robert Kraft statement on Judge Berman decision from Sept. 4, 2015

Strategies	Quotes
Reducing Offensiveness	“Tom Brady is a classy person of the highest integrity.”  “He represents everything that is great about this game and this league.”

Note. This information was retrieved from patriots.com

Table 13 Strategies in Robert Kraft’s Statement from July 15, 2016

Strategies	Quotes
Denial	<p>“The penalty imposed by the NFL was unprecedented, unjust and unreasonable, especially given that no empirical or direct evidence of any kind showed Tom did anything to violate League rules prior to, during or after the 2015 AFC Championship Game.”</p> <p>“From day one, I have believed in Tom and given him my unwavering support in his pursuit to rightfully clear his name of any wrongdoing. That support extends throughout our organization and has only grown more steadfast as the preponderance of scientific evidence has exonerated Tom.”</p>
Reducing Offensiveness	<p>“The League's investigation into a football pressure matter was flawed and biased from the start, and has been discredited nearly unanimously by accredited academics and scientists.”</p> <p>“Unfortunately, this stopped being about air pressure a long time ago.”</p>

Note. This information was retrieved from patriots.com

<b>Event/Development</b>			<b>Response</b>
	<b>2015</b>		
The NFL finds that footballs used by the Patriots were underinflated.	<b>Jan. 20</b>		
		<b>Jan. 22</b>	- Belichick press conference - Brady press conference
Ted Wells investigation is announced.	<b>Jan. 23</b>		
		<b>Jan. 24</b>	Kraft statement
		<b>Jan. 26</b>	Kraft media session
The Ted Wells report is released.	<b>May 6</b>	<b>May 6</b>	Kraft statement
		<b>May 7</b>	Brady interview
NFL hands down punishments to the Patriots and Brady.	<b>May 11</b>	<b>May 11</b>	Kraft statement
		<b>May 19</b>	Kraft press conference
NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell upholds Brady's suspension.	<b>July 28</b>		
		<b>July 29</b>	- Brady Facebook post - Kraft press conference
Judge Richard Berman overturns Brady's suspension.	<b>Sep. 3</b>		
		<b>Sep. 4</b>	- Brady Facebook post - Kraft statement
<b>2016</b>			
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals reinstates Brady's suspension.	<b>April 25</b>		
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals denies Brady petition.	<b>July 13</b>		
		<b>July 15</b>	- Brady Facebook post - Kraft statement

Figure 1. Timeline of dates detailing when the New England Patriots or Tom Brady issued a statement in response to a development during Deflategate

2015	
The NFL finds that footballs used by the Patriots were underinflated.	<p><b>Jan. 20</b></p> <p><b>Jan. 22</b> - <b>Belichick press conference</b> Evading Responsibility Reducing Offensiveness</p> <p>- <b>Brady press conference</b> Evading Responsibility Reducing Offensiveness Denial</p>
Ted Wells investigation is announced.	<p><b>Jan. 23</b></p> <p><b>Jan. 24</b> <b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness</p> <p><b>Jan. 26</b> <b>Kraft media session</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial</p>
The Ted Wells report is released.	<p><b>May 6</b> <b>May 6</b> <b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial</p> <p><b>May 7</b> <b>Brady interview</b> Reducing Offensiveness</p>
NFL hands down punishments to the Patriots and Brady.	<p><b>May 11</b> <b>May 11</b> <b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial</p> <p><b>May 19</b> <b>Kraft press conference</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial</p>
NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell upholds Brady's suspension.	<p><b>July 28</b></p> <p><b>July 29</b> - <b>Brady Facebook post</b> Evading Responsibility Reducing Offensiveness Denial</p> <p>- <b>Kraft press conference</b> Reducing Offensiveness</p>
Judge Richard Berman overturns Brady's suspension.	<p><b>Sep. 3</b></p> <p><b>Sep. 4</b> - <b>Brady Facebook post</b> Reducing Offensiveness</p> <p>- <b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness</p>
2016	
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals reinstates Brady's suspension.	<b>April 25</b>
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals denies Brady petition.	<p><b>July 13</b></p> <p><b>July 15</b> - <b>Brady Facebook post</b> No strategy utilized</p> <p>- <b>Kraft statement</b> Reducing Offensiveness Denial</p>

Figure 1. 1. Timeline of dates detailing when the New England Patriots or Tom Brady issued a statement in response to a development during Deflategate with image repair strategies used



Strategy	Criteria
Denial	The offensive act is denied by the accused or the blame is shifted to another party.
Evading Responsibility	<p>Provocation: the accused claims the act was done in response to another offensive act.</p> <p>Defeasibility: the accused claims to have no knowledge or control over factors dealing with the offensive act.</p> <p>Accident: the accused provides excuses for factors out of their control.</p> <p>Good Intentions: the accused attempts to justify the offensive act based on the good nature of their motives in committing the act.</p>
Reducing Offensiveness	<p>Bolstering: the accused attempts to reduce negative sentiments by reminding the audience of past good acts.</p> <p>Minimization: the accused attempts to convince their audience that the act wasn't as serious as it appears to be.</p> <p>Differentiation: the accused compares the offensive act to other more offensive acts.</p> <p>Transcendence: the accused attempts to reduce offensiveness by putting the act into a different context and shifting the perception of the audience.</p> <p>Attacking the accuser: the accused individual attempts to allege that the accuser was responsible in some way or that they deserved what happened.</p> <p>Compensation: the accused offers some type of reimbursement to reduce negative sentiments.</p>
Corrective Action	The accused promises to fix the problem by working to return things as they were before the offensive act was committed, or by assuring that adjustments will be made to prevent similar acts of happening again in the future.
Mortification	The accused accepts responsibility and asks to be forgiven.

Figure 2. List of image repair theory strategies and criteria

## Bill Belichick's statement on deflated football controversy

NFL.com

Published: Jan. 22, 2015 at 04:23 p.m. Updated: Jan. 22, 2015 at 04:41 p.m.

*Editor's note: The following is Bill Belichick's complete opening statement from Thursday's news conference, addressing the deflated football controversy surrounding the New England Patriots.*

"I'll start out by addressing the football issue here. When I came in Monday morning, I was shocked to learn of the news reports about the footballs. I had no knowledge whatsoever of this situation until Monday morning. I would say I've learned a lot more about this process in the last three days than I knew or have talked about it in the last 40 years that I have coached in this league. I had no knowledge of the various steps involved in the game balls and the process that happened between when they were prepared and went to the officials and went to the game. So, I've learned a lot about that. I obviously understand that each team has the opportunity to prepare the balls the way they want, give them to the officials and the game officials either approve or disapprove the balls. That really was the end of it for me until I learned a little bit more about this the last couple days.

Let me just say that my personal coaching philosophy, my mentality has always been to make things as difficult as possible for players in practice. So with regard to footballs, I'm sure that any current or past player of mine would tell you that the balls we practice with are as bad as they can be: wet, sticky, cold, slippery. However bad we can make them, I make them. Any time that players complain about the quality of the footballs, I make them worse and that stops the complaining. We never use the condition of the footballs as an excuse. We play with whatever or kick with whatever we have to use and that's the way it is. That has never been a priority for me and I want the players to deal with a harder situation in practice than they'll ever have to deal with in the game. Maybe that's part of our ball security philosophy.

I'm trying to coach the team and that's what I want to do. I think we all know that quarterbacks, kickers, specialists have certain preferences on footballs. They know a lot more about it than I do. They're a lot more sensitive to it than I am. I hear them comment on it from time to time, but I can tell you and they will tell you that there is never any sympathy whatsoever from me on that subject. Zero. Tom's (Brady) personal preferences on his footballs are something he can take about in much better detail and information than I could possibly provide. I could tell you that in my entire coaching career I have never talked to any player, staff member about football air pressure. That is not a subject that I have ever brought up. To me the footballs are approved by the league and game officials pregame and we play with what's out there. That's the only way that I have ever thought about that.

I've learned about the inflation range situation. Obviously with our footballs being inflated to the 12.5-pound range, any deflation would then take us under that specification limit. Knowing that now, in the future we will certainly inflate the footballs above that low level to account for any possible change during the game. As an example, if a ball deflated from 13.2 to 12.9 it wouldn't matter. But if it deflated from 12.5 to 12.3 it would -- as an example. We will take steps in the future to make sure that we don't put ourselves in that type of potential situation again.

The National Football League is investigating this situation. We have cooperated fully, quickly and completely with every request that they have made; (we) continue to be cooperative in any way that we can. I have no explanation for what happened. That's what they're looking into. So I can't comment on what they're doing. That's something that you should talk to them about.

Again, my overall knowledge of football specifications, the overall process that happens on game day with the footballs is very limited. I would say that during the course of the game, I honestly never -- it probably has happened on an incomplete pass or something - but I've never touched a game ball. It's not something I have any familiarity with on that.

Again, I was completely and totally unaware of any of this that we're talking about in the last couple days until Monday morning. Based on what I knew Sunday, Sunday night, thinking back on this, which I've done several times, (I) really can't think of anything that I would have done differently, based on what I knew then, based on what I know now. I told you the one change we would make in the initial start level of the football pressure, but that's really about it.

It's unfortunate that this is a story coming off of two great playoff victories by our football team and our players. But again, we've been cooperative with the NFL investigation. We'll continue to do so and we will turn all our attention and focus on to the Seattle Seahawks, a very well coached, talented, tough, competitive football team.

We've spent the last four days, three days, with our preparations and so forth for the trip. I think those are coming to a conclusion. We're wrapping that up and we're starting our preparations today with the Seahawks and practicing through the weekend. We'll have a good, solid opportunity to get ourselves ready to go before we head down there.

Again, I have no further comment on the NFL investigation and I've told you all I know about the subject from my perspective. That's where we are."

Figure 3. Bill Belichick's statement on the deflated football controversy from Jan. 22, 2015

**Tom Brady:** Obviously I'd much rather be up here talking about the Seahawks and preparing for the Super Bowl, which we've been trying to do for the last few days. I know Coach [Bill] Belichick addressed it with you guys this morning and I wanted to give you guys the opportunity to ask [The] questions that you want. I'll do my best to provide the answers that I have, if any, and we'll go from there.

**Q:** When and how did you supposedly alter the balls?

**TB:** I didn't have any – I didn't alter the ball in any way. I have a process that I go through before every game where I go in and I pick the footballs that I want to use for the game. Our equipment guys do a great job of breaking the balls in, they have a process that they go through. When I pick those balls out, at that point to me they're perfect. I don't want anyone touching the balls after that. I don't want anyone rubbing them, putting any air in them, taking any air out. To me those balls are perfect and that's what I expect when I show up on the field. That happened obviously on Sunday night, it was the same process that I always go through. I didn't think anything of it. Obviously I woke up Monday morning and answered a question on the radio about it and that was the first I really heard about it.

**Q:** This has raised a lot of uncomfortable conversations for people around this country who view you as their idol. The question they're asking themselves is, 'What's up with our hero?' Can you answer right now, is Tom Brady a cheater?

**TB:** I don't believe so. I feel like I've always played within the rules. I would never do anything to break the rules. I believe in fair play and I respect the league and everything they're doing to try to create a very competitive playing field for all the NFL teams. It's a very competitive league. Every team is trying to do the best they can to win every week. I believe in fair play and I'll always believe in that for as long as I'm playing.

**Q:** Some people think Coach Belichick threw you under the bus this morning, do you feel that way?

**TB:** No, I think everyone is obviously trying to figure out what happened. I think that's the main thing over the last couple days: it's trying to figure out what happened. Like I said, I was as surprised as anybody when I heard Monday morning what was happening. I think over the last few days people have been trying to figure out – as the NFL is trying to figure out – what part of the process and from when I saw the ball which was five hours before halftime, what exactly happened.

**Q:** Do all quarterbacks doctor the balls and have you done anything differently from anyone else in the league?

**TB:** I'm not sure. I can only speak for myself. I think that there's a process that everybody goes through breaking in footballs. It's probably a lot like a baseball mitt when you're a kid. I try to explain that to my friends a lot. When you use it and that's your equipment, the football is something that I handle on every play. I want to be very familiar with the equipment that I'm using, just like my cleats, just like my

helmet, just like my pads. You go through that process of breaking the balls in and getting comfortable with them. Of course I choose the balls that I want to use for the game and that's what I expect to go out on the playing field with.

**Q:** How important is it for you to get this out of the way and take this head-on so you can get focused on the Super Bowl?

**TB:** That's where the importance is, as far as I'm concerned. I know this is a very important thing and that's why I'm here addressing it. I know my teammates, we accomplished something really special getting to this point. I don't like the fact that this is taking away from some of the accomplishment of what we've achieved as a team. I think hopefully our best is still to come. We're going to work as hard as we can over the next 10 days to put ourselves in a great position to be prepared for the game.

**Q:** Do you know the difference between an under-inflated ball and an over-inflated ball? Did you notice a difference in the balls used in the first half and second half?

**TB:** From the first half to the second half, I didn't think twice about it. I didn't put one thought into the football at that point. Once I approve the ball, like I said, that's the ball that I expect out there on the field. It wasn't even a thought, inking of a concern of mine that they were any different. I just assumed that they were exactly the same: first half, second half.

**Q:** What do you say to the skeptics that say, 'The Patriots have had violations before. How can we possibly believe what Brady and the coach are saying now?'

**TB:** Everybody has an opinion. I think everybody has the right to believe whatever they want. I don't ever cast judgment on someone's belief system. If that's what they feel like they want to do, then I don't have a problem with that. I think part of being in this position and putting yourself under a spotlight like this and being open for criticism, I think that's very much a part of being a professional athlete. We can only express to you what our side is and how we approach it. Then everyone is going to make their own [conclusion].

**Q:** Are you comfortable that nobody on the Patriots side did anything wrong?

**TB:** I have no knowledge of anything. I have no knowledge of any wrongdoing –

**Q:** Are you comfortable that nobody did anything?

**TB:** Yeah, I'm very comfortable saying that. I'm very comfortable saying that nobody did it, as far as I know. I don't know everything. I also understand that I was in the locker room preparing for a game. I don't know what happened over the course of the process with the footballs. I was preparing for my own job, doing what I needed to do.

Figure 4. Tom Brady's press conference transcript from Jan. 22, 2015 (New York Daily News, 2015)

<p><b>Q:</b> A few years ago you said you liked the ball deflated. You were quoted saying you like throwing a deflated ball. Explain that comment in the context of what you're dealing with this week.</p>	<p><b>Q:</b> How does it make you feel that they're calling your team cheaters?</p>
<p><b>TB:</b> I obviously read that I said that. I like them at the way that I like them, which is at 12.5. To me, that's a perfect grip for the football. I think that particular term [deflated or inflated, whatever norm you're using, you could probably use. I would never do anything outside of the rules of play, I would never have someone do something that I thought was outside the rules.</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> You know, I think a big part of playing here is trying to ignore the outside forces and influences and people that are maybe fans of our team or not fans of your team or fans of yourself or not fans of yourself. Like I said, everybody is entitled to an opinion. Those opinions rest with those people. I think you can just go out and try to be the best you can be, deal with people with respect, with honesty, with integrity, have a high moral standard. I've always really tried to exemplify that as an athlete. I'll continue to try to do that.</p>
<p><b>Q:</b> So you never knowingly played with a football that was under 12.5-pounds?</p>	<p><b>Q:</b> Does this motivate you guys?</p>
<p><b>TB:</b> No.</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> We've had a lot of motivation. I would say we've got a lot of motivation as a team. I think our team has overcome a lot of adversity this year. I think sometimes in life the biggest challenges end up being the best things that happen in your life. We've overcome a lot of those this year as a team. So, we can rally around one another and support one another. You can be the best teammate you can possibly be and you can go out and support each other and try to go win a very important game.</p>
<p><b>Q:</b> Have you tried to find out why the balls were under-inflated?</p>	<p><b>Q:</b> Did you address your teammates today and if so, what did you say to them?</p>
<p><b>TB:</b> That's a great question. I think there are a lot of people that have more information than me. I only know what I've kind of gone through and the process I've taken as part of the game and the postgame, as well as trying to prepare for the Super Bowl. Yeah, I have questions, too. But there's nobody that I know that can answer the questions that I have. I just have tried my best to focus on what I need to do, to be prepared for Seattle.</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> Those are very personal things with my teammates. That was very personal comments.</p>
<p><b>Q:</b> If you know the look and feel of the football that you like, do you think there could have been other games where you played with an under-inflated football?</p>	<p><b>Q:</b> Did you see the footballs before they went to the referees?</p>
<p><b>TB:</b> I don't know. Like I said, once I'm out on the field, I'm playing. I have no thought of the football at that point. I'm thinking about the defense, I'm thinking about the execution of the play and what I need to do. I'm not thinking about how the football feels. I grip the football –</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> Yeah. It's always the same process. I get here – the playoffs I got here pretty early before the games. Then I go in there and I choose however many balls are necessary for the games. Sometimes it's 12, 16, 18, 24. This last particular game was 24. I felt them. They were perfect. I wouldn't want anyone touching those. I would zip those things up and lock them away until I got out on the field and an opportunity to play with them. That's what I thought I was doing.</p>
<p><b>Q:</b> Are you wondering if you've played with an under-inflated ball before?</p>	<p><b>Q:</b> We're you surprised when you heard those footballs had been deflated by two pounds?</p>
<p><b>TB:</b> I have no idea. I have no idea. This was the first that I've heard of it. Obviously on Monday morning, was the first that I heard of it.</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> Absolutely. That was very surprising to me.</p>
<p><b>Q:</b> If it's found that someone improperly tampered with the balls, is it important to you that someone is held accountable?</p>	<p><b>Q:</b> One of your teammates said this was a media thing. Is that your feeling? Is there a feeling behind closed doors that this is being blown out of proportion?</p>
<p><b>TB:</b> I'm not the one that imposes [that] type of accountability. It's discipline and all that, that's not really my job. Obviously I'd like to know what happened, as you all would, too. In the meantime, I'm going to try to do the best I can to play against the Seahawks. Because I can't do anything with what's happened in the past. I have to just go forward with the most awareness I can going forward and trying to be the best I can be for our team.</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> No, it's very serious. This is a very serious topic. Obviously the integrity of the sport is very important. I think there's another focus that we have also as a team that guys are very focused on our opponent and the things that we need to do to try to be successful. Everyone is trying to figure out what happened. But at the same time, you have to prepare for the Seahawks also.</p>

Figure 4. 1. Tom Brady's press conference transcript from Jan. 22, 2015 (New York Daily News, 2015)

<p><b>Q: You laughed this off on Monday on the radio. Now you're more somber about it. What happened between Monday and today?</b></p>	<p>TB: I'm not sure. What would you like me to say? I'm not quite sure.</p>
<p>TB: Look, that was real early in the morning. I got home at 12, one o'clock and woke up to do the radio interview and I was very shocked to hear it. I almost laughed it off thinking it was more sour grapes than anything. Then it ends up being a very serious thing when you start learning the things that –</p>	<p><b>Q: Does the league have a responsibility to button this up so everybody can move on?</b></p>
<p><b>Q: When the start of the second half was delayed and the balls were swapped out, how did you guys on the sideline not know what was going on on the field with respect to the footballs?</b></p>	<p>TB: I think they'll do however they see fit. You know, I think that's up to their responsibility to do whatever they want to do. That's kind of usually what happens anyway. Like I said, I know they're doing their investigation. I don't know what will happen after that.</p>
<p>TB: I don't think anybody knew there was an issue with the balls. I think they said, 'The balls are not ready for play.' And then I turn around in the huddle and the ball was ready for play. So, I didn't think anything of it.</p>	<p><b>Q: Do you feel like you're hanging in the wind?</b></p>
<p><b>Q: Nobody said anything to you on the sideline? It was a good minute delay.</b></p>	<p>TB: No, I think we're preparing for the Super Bowl. I think this is obviously something we're having to address, but at the same time, I think we're focused on trying to go out and beat the Seahawks.</p>
<p>TB: I wasn't paying attention to what was happening at that time. I don't remember. Everything was happening obviously so fast in the middle of the game. I was thinking about the series, to go out there and the execution of the game.</p>	<p><b>Q: Did the league investigators talk to you?</b></p>
<p><b>Q: The officials didn't say a word to you?</b></p>	<p>TB: Not yet.</p>
<p>TB: No.</p>	<p><b>Q: You said earlier that first the issue seemed minor and then you became it was more serious. What was it that convinced you of the seriousness?</b></p>
<p><b>Q: Do you feel like you had an unfair advantage over the Colts?</b></p>	<p>TB: I just wasn't, obviously, aware Monday morning of everything that had happened. So just as I learned more, you understand that there's more than what I initially –</p>
<p>TB: I feel like we won the game fair and square. We ended up playing a great opponent and I thought our team went out and played a great game offensively, defensively [AND] special teams. It was a great accomplishment to reach the AFC Championship, to win the AFC Championship and then to have the opportunity to play in the Super Bowl. That was a great feeling after the game. Obviously the next few days and hearing the football issue has taken away from a little bit of that, but hopefully we'll rally around one another to bring it back to the task at hand which is to try to go out and be the best we can be.</p>	<p><b>Q: What's so serious about it to you?</b></p>
<p><b>Q: Is this a moment to just say 'I'm sorry,' to the fans?</b></p>	<p>TB: Just the integrity of the game. I think that's a very important issue to always be mindful of as an athlete, and fair play. I think we set a great example for the younger athletes, the younger kids, the college kids, the high school kids. We want to be the ones to set the great example.</p>
<p>TB: I think it's disappointing that a situation like this happens. Obviously I'd love to be up here talking about [the game], in a very joyful mood. These are the two best weeks of the year if you happen to be one of the two teams still playing. It should be a great two weeks. I'm obviously very disappointed that we have to be having a press conference like this. I wish I could give you more answers or the answers that you guys were looking for. But I don't have some of those answers.</p>	<p><b>Q: Are you frustrated by this process? Are you surprised by the process of what the story has become? What do you hope the end result is going forward?</b></p>
<p><b>Q: For the fans that are watching and looking into that camera, what do you say?</b></p>	<p>TB: I'm not sure if I have a hope. I haven't put much thought into that. It's been just a short period of time. I'd really love to go out there and play a great game. Obviously the NFL would love to figure out what happened in this situation. I try to keep everything in perspective. I'm happy we have an opportunity to play in the next game. Obviously I'm disappointed by the footballs of last game, but I can't do anything about what happened. I can only try to – I can only do something going forward.</p>
	<p><b>Q: The league has not spoken to or contacted you yet?</b></p>
	<p>TB: No, but they may. They may. I think that's obviously their choice.</p>
	<p><b>Q: Do you find that odd though?</b></p>
	<p>TB: Sure, yeah, they might. They might.</p>

Figure 4. 2. Tom Brady's press conference transcript from Jan. 22, 2015 (New York Daily News, 2015)

Q: It's odd that they haven't at this point. You're the quarterback and you're the center of this story right now and the league's officials haven't talked to you indicates to a lot of people they're letting this drag on.

TB: I'm not sure.

Q: Have you been told they will talk to you?

TB: I'm not sure.

Q: There are people who are going to say, 'You're so familiar with the equipment, how could you not know?' What would you say to them?

TB: I addressed that a little bit earlier. Like I said, I don't put any thought into the footballs after I choose them. When you're out there playing in front of 70,000 people, like a home crowd, you don't think about [IT]. You're just reacting to the game. I don't certainly think about the football. I just assume it's the same one I approved in the pregame.

Q: Do you break the balls in during practice?

TB: We break them in in practice, certainly sometimes. Yeah, we definitely do that. It's different from game to game. Some days one ball may feel good; the next day it may not. It depends on maybe how, I don't know, the humidity in the air or how old the ball was. There are a lot of variables with obviously Mother Nature and the balls. Whatever feels good that day, those are the ones I would typically choose.

Q: Those are the same ones that Bill Belichick squirts water on in practice?

TB: Yeah, he does that a lot. It could be, yeah. It definitely could be.

Q: You said you didn't want the balls to be touched after you approved them. You didn't notice that 15 percent of the air was out of the ball when you started using it? It didn't strike you during the first half?

TB: I didn't feel any different. I would just assume that it was the same thing. Like I said, once I get the ball, I'm dropping back and reading the coverage and throwing the ball. I'm not —

Q: Basketball players would know if the ball was off after taking two shots. Baseball players could pick up a bat and know if it was less than ounce different. You're asking us to believe that you couldn't tell 15 percent of the football was deflated and you didn't notice?

TB: I wouldn't know on a particular play. It was a very wet, cold, windy night. Like I said —

Q: But [Colts linebacker] D'Qwell Jackson noticed.

TB: I don't know. I don't do that. I get the snap, I drop back, I throw the ball. I grip it and I try to throw the ball. That the extent of me touching the football. I don't sit there and try to

squeeze it and determine that. If that's what the Colts wanted to do, then that's what they wanted to do. That's what their decision was. But I certainly didn't. No, I did not recognize that. I did not feel a difference between the first half and the second half when supposedly they were inflated to the original or even more inflated. I didn't notice any difference. I didn't obviously think there was anything different between halves.

Q: When you initially tested the balls, did you think you would have noticed if the balls were under-inflated at that time?

TB: I don't know. I guess it's a challenging thing. I'm not squeezing the balls. That's not part of my process. I grab it, I feel the lace, I feel the leather, I feel the tack on the ball. That's really what you go for. It's not like I ever squeeze the football. I just grip the football. I think there's maybe a little bit of a difference of how I do that.

Q: What about the fact that you had better numbers after they exchanged the balls?

TB: Yeah. Like I said, I didn't think any differently in the second half as I did in the first half. I know we had a great second half. It was due to great execution by a lot of great football player. Like I said, I know that's obviously what they said. They inflated them. I didn't notice a difference. I wish I could tell you something different. I just didn't notice a difference.

Q: Bill Belichick said the team will inflate the balls over the minimum requirement from now on. Is that going to be an adjustment if 12.5 pounds is what you like?

TB: I don't think that would make much of a difference. Like I said, I didn't feel any difference between what was a 13-pound football or an 11-pound football the other night. That is pretty irrelevant to me.

Q: Will you lobby the league to change the rules surrounding this situation?

TB: What situation, what process would that be — about us breaking in our own balls?

Q: Making sure the balls are the proper weight throughout the game.


TB: Yeah, if they want to do that I have no problem with that. I certainly.

Figure 4. 3. Tom Brady's press conference transcript from Jan. 22, 2015 (New York Daily News, 2015)

# Statement from Patriots Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft

Saturday, January 24, 2015 9:00 AM EST

By New England Patriots

 [@patriots](#)

"On Monday, I received a letter from the league office informing me that they would be conducting an investigation into the air pressure of the game balls. Immediately after receiving the letter, I instructed our staff to be completely cooperative and transparent with the league's investigators. During the three days they were here, we provided access to every full- and part-time employee the league's representatives requested to speak with and produced every communication device that they requested to search. It is an ongoing process that the league and our team are taking very seriously. I very much support the league's desire to conduct a complete investigation and welcome the appointment of Ted Wells to lead the process. Competitive balance and the integrity of the game are the foundation of what makes our league so special and I have the utmost respect for those principles. Our organization will continue to cooperate throughout the league's investigation. Meanwhile, our players, coaches and staff will continue to focus on our preparations for Super Bowl XLIX and the many challenges we face as we prepare for the Seattle Seahawks."

Figure 5. Statement from Patriots Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft on Jan. 24, 2015

CHAIRMAN & CEO ROBERT KRAFT

"On the plane ride out to here, I prepared a few remarks which I would like to read to you.

On behalf of the entire organization, I want to express what an honor it is to be here and represent the AFC in the Super Bowl. I know how difficult it is to get to this game and I appreciate the work of everyone who helps host the event. We are anticipating a great game against the defending Super Bowl champs, Seattle Seahawks.

Given the events of the last week, I want to take a minute to address the air pressure matter before we kickoff this week's media availabilities. I have spoken with Coach (Bill) Belichick. I have spoken with Tom Brady. I have taken the time to understand to the best of my abilities what goes on in the preparation of gameday footballs. And I want to make it clear that I believe, unconditionally, that the New England Patriots have done nothing inappropriate in this process or in violation of NFL rules.

Tom, Bill, and I have been together for 15 years. They are my guys, they are part of my family. And Bill, Tom, and I have had many difficult discussions over the years, and I have never known them to lie to me. That is why I am confident in saying what I just said. And it bothers me greatly that their reputations and integrity, and by association that of our team, has been called into question this past week.

As I said on Friday in my prepared statement, we welcome the League's investigation and the involvement of Attorney (Ted) Wells. I am confident that this investigation will uncover whatever the facts were that took place last Sunday and the science of how game balls react to changes in the environment. This would be in direct contrast to the public discourse, which has been driven by media leaks as opposed to actual data and facts. Because of this, many jumped to conclusions and made scarring accusations against our coach, quarterback and staff questioning the integrity of all involved.

If the Wells' investigation is not able to definitively determine that our organization tampered with the air pressure in the footballs, I would expect and hope that the League would apologize to our entire team and in particular, Coach Belichick and Tom Brady for what they have had to endure this past week. I am disappointed in the way this entire matter has been handled and reported upon. We expect hard facts as opposed to circumstantial leaked evidence to drive the conclusion of this investigation.

In closing, I would like to say to all the fans of the National Football League, and especially the amazing fans of the New England Patriots, that I and our entire organization believe strongly in the integrity of the game and the rules of fair play properly, equitably and fairly enforced. Thank you."

Figure 6. Full transcript from Patriots owner Robert Kraft's media session on Jan. 26, 2015



## Patriots owner Robert Kraft's statement on Ted Wells report

NFL.com

Published: May 6, 2015 at 02:04 p.m. Updated: May 6, 2015 at 08:04 p.m.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is a statement from New England Patriots Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft regarding the Wells report which was released Wednesday.*

"When I addressed the media at the Super Bowl on January 26 – over 14 weeks ago – I stated that I unconditionally believed that the New England Patriots had done nothing inappropriate in this process or in violation of the NFL rules and that I was disappointed in the way the league handled the initial investigation. That sentiment has not changed.

"I was convinced that Ted Wells' investigation would find the same factual evidence supported by both scientific formula and independent research as we did and would ultimately exonerate the Patriots. Based on the explanations I have heard and the studies that have been done, I don't know how the science of atmospheric conditions can be refuted or how conclusions to the contrary can be drawn without some definitive evidence.

"What is not highlighted in the text of the report is that three of the Colts' four footballs measured by at least one official were under the required psi level. As far as we are aware, there is no comparable data available from any other game because, in the history of the NFL, psi levels of footballs have never been measured at halftime, in any climate. If they had been, based on what we now know, it is safe to assume that every cold-weather game was played with under inflated footballs. As compelling a case as the Wells Report may try to make, I am going to rely on the factual evidence of numerous scientists and engineers rather than inferences from circumstantial evidence.

"Throughout the process of this nearly four-month investigation, we have cooperated and patiently awaited its outcome. To say we are disappointed in its findings, which do not include any incontrovertible or hard evidence of deliberate deflation of footballs at the AFC Championship Game, would be a gross understatement. In addition, given our level of cooperation throughout the process, I was offended by the comments made in the Wells Report in reference to not making an individual available for a follow-up interview. What the report fails to mention is that he had already been interviewed four times and we felt the fifth request for access was excessive for a part-time game day employee who has a full-time job with another employer.

"While I respect the independent process of the investigation, the time, effort and resources expended to reach this conclusion are incomprehensible to me. Knowing that there is no real recourse available, fighting the league and extending this debate would prove to be futile. We understand and greatly respect the responsibility of being one of 32 in this league and, on that basis, we will accept the findings of the report and take the appropriate actions based on those findings as well as any discipline levied by the league."

Figure 7. Patriots owner Robert Kraft's statement on the Ted Wells Report from May 6, 2015

## Kraft: Punishment 'far exceeded any reasonable expectation'

NFL.com

Published: [May 11, 2015 at 08:57 p.m.](#) Updated: [May 11, 2015 at 09:18 p.m.](#)

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is a statement from New England Patriots Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft regarding the news that Tom Brady was suspended four games on Monday. The team will also be fined \$1 million and will forfeit a 2016 first-rounder and 2017 fourth-round selection in the NFL Draft.*

"Despite our conviction that there was no tampering with footballs, it was our intention to accept any discipline levied by the league. Today's punishment, however, far exceeded any reasonable expectation, it was based completely on circumstantial rather than hard or conclusive evidence.

"We are humbled by the support the New England Patriots have received from our fans throughout the world. We recognize our fans' concerns regarding the NFL's penalties and share in their disappointment in how this one-sided investigation was handled; as well as the dismissal of the scientific evidence supported by the Ideal Gas Law in the final report.

"Tom Brady has our unconditional support. Our belief in him has not wavered."

Figure 8. Kraft's statement from May 11, 2015

**RKK:** It's been an emotionally charged couple of weeks, as all of you know. I've been considering what my options are. Throughout this whole process, there have been two polarizing audiences. At one end of the spectrum, we've had Patriots fans throughout the country who have been so supportive and really inspirational to us and believing in us. I'm also mindful at the other end of the spectrum there are fans that feel just the opposite. What I've learned is the ongoing rhetoric continues to galvanize both camps and I don't see that changing, and they will never agree. The one thing that we all can agree upon is the entire process has taken way too long. I don't think anyone can believe that after four months [since] the AFC Championship Game we are still talking about air pressure and the psi in footballs.

So, I think I made it clear when the report came out that I didn't think it was fair. There was no hard evidence and everything was circumstantial. At the same time, when the discipline came out, I felt it was way over the top, as it was unreasonable and unprecedented in my opinion.


So, I have two options: I can try to end it or extend it. I have given a lot of thought to both options. The first thing that came to mind is 21 years ago, I had the privilege of going to a meeting similar to what we're at here, in Orlando, and being welcomed in an NFL owners' meeting. Here's a fan and a former season ticket holder living a dream and being welcomed in that room. I got goosebumps that day. I vowed at that time that I would do everything that I could do to make the New England Patriots an elite team and hopefully respected throughout the country and at the same time, do whatever I could do to try to help the NFL become the most popular sport in America.

You know what I've learned over the last two decades is that the heart and soul of the strength of the NFL is a partnership of 32 teams. What's become very clear over those two decades [is] that at no time should the agenda of one team outweigh the collective good of the full 32. So, I have a way of looking at problems that are very strong in my mind. Before I make a final decision, I measure nine times and I cut once. I think maybe if I had made the decision last week it would be different than it is today. But believing in the strength of the partnership and the 32 teams, we have concentrated the power of adjudication of problems in the office of the commissioner. Although I might disagree with what is decided, I do have respect for the Commissioner and believe that he's doing what he perceives to be in the best interest of the full 32.

So, in that spirit, I don't want to continue the rhetoric that's gone on for the last four months. I'm going to accept, reluctantly, what he has given to us and not continue this dialogue and rhetoric. We won't appeal.

Now, I know that a lot of Patriots fans are going to be disappointed in that decision. But I hope they trust my judgment and know that I really feel at this point in time that taking this off the agenda, this is the best thing for the New England Patriots, our fans and the NFL. I hope you all can respect that. You know, I would normally take questions, but my desire is truly not to continue the rhetoric, so I'm going to leave this discussion exactly here. Thank you very much.

Figure 9. Patriots Chairman & CEO Robert Kraft's Press Conference Transcript from May 19, 2015



**Tom Brady**  
July 29, 2015 · 🌐

I am very disappointed by the NFL's decision to uphold the 4 game suspension against me. I did nothing wrong, and no one in the Patriots organization did either.

Despite submitting to hours of testimony over the past 6 months, it is disappointing that the Commissioner upheld my suspension based upon a standard that it was "probable" that I was "generally aware" of misconduct. The fact is that neither I, nor any equipment person, did anything of which we have been accused. He dismissed my hours of testimony and it is disappointing that he found it unreliable.

I also disagree with yesterday's narrative surrounding my cellphone. I replaced my broken Samsung phone with a new iPhone 6 AFTER my attorneys made it clear to the NFL that my actual phone device would not be subjected to investigation under ANY circumstances. As a member of a union, I was under no obligation to set a new precedent going forward, nor was I made aware at any time during Mr. Wells investigation, that failing to subject my cell phone to investigation would result in ANY discipline.

Most importantly, I have never written, texted, emailed to anybody at anytime, anything related to football air pressure before this issue was raised at the AFC Championship game in January. To suggest that I destroyed a phone to avoid giving the NFL information it requested is completely wrong.

To try and reconcile the record and fully cooperate with the investigation after I was disciplined in May, we turned over detailed pages of cell phone records and all of the emails that Mr. Wells requested. We even contacted the phone company to see if there was any possible way we could retrieve any/all of the actual text messages from my old phone. In short, we exhausted every possibility to give the NFL everything we could and offered to go thru the identity for every text and phone call during the relevant time. Regardless, the NFL knows that Mr. Wells already had ALL relevant communications with Patriots personnel that either Mr. Wells saw or that I was questioned about in my appeal hearing. There is no "smoking gun" and this controversy is manufactured to distract from the fact they have zero evidence of wrongdoing.

I authorized the NFLPA to make a settlement offer to the NFL so that we could avoid going to court and put this inconsequential issue behind us as we move forward into this season. The discipline was upheld without any counter offer. I respect the Commissioner's authority, but he also has to respect the CBA and my rights as a private citizen. I will not allow my unfair discipline to become a precedent for other NFL players without a fight.

Lastly, I am overwhelmed and humbled by the support of family, friends and our fans who have supported me since the false accusations were made after the AFC Championship game. I look forward to the opportunity to resume playing with my teammates and winning more games for the New England Patriots.

Figure 10. Tom Brady's Facebook post from July 29, 2015

RKK: In light of yesterday's league ruling, I felt it was important to make a statement today, prior to the start of training camp. After this, I will not be talking about this matter until after the legal process plays itself out and I would advise everyone in the organization to do the same and just concentrate on preparation for the 2015 season.

The decision handed down by the league yesterday is unfathomable to me. It is routine for discipline in the NFL to be reduced upon appeal. In the vast majority of these cases there is tangible and hard evidence of the infraction for which the discipline is being imposed and still the initial penalty gets reduced. Six months removed from the AFC Championship game, the league still has no hard evidence of anybody doing anything to tamper with the psi level of footballs.

I continue to believe and unequivocally support Tom Brady. I first and foremost need to apologize to our fans because I truly believe that what I did in May, given the actual evidence of this situation and the league's history on discipline matters, would make it much easier for the league to exonerate Tom Brady. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

The league's handling of this entire process has been extremely frustrating and disconcerting. I will never understand why an initial erroneous report regarding the psi level of footballs was leaked by a source from the NFL a few days after the AFC Championship game was never corrected by those who had the correct information. For four months, that report cast aspersions and shaped public opinion.

Yesterday's decision by Commissioner [Roger] Goodell was released in a similar manner under an erroneous headline that read "Tom Brady Destroyed His Cell Phone." This headline was designed to capture headlines across the country and obscure [the fact the NFL still has no hard] evidence regarding the tampering of air pressure in footballs. It intentionally implied nefarious behavior and minimized the acknowledgement that Tom provided the history of every number he texted during the relevant time frame. And we had already provided the league with every cellphone of every non-NFLPA employee that they requested, including head coach Bill Belichick.

Tom Brady is a person of great integrity and is a great ambassador of the game, both on and off the field.

Yet, for reasons that I cannot comprehend, there are those in the league office who are more determined to prove that they were right rather than admit any culpability of their own or take any responsibility for the initiation of a process and ensuing investigation that was flawed.

I have come to the conclusion that this was never about doing what was fair and just. Back in May, I had to make a difficult decision that I now regret. I tried to do what I thought was right. I chose not to take legal action. I wanted to return the focus to football. I have been negotiating agreements on a global basis my entire life. I know that there are times when you have to give up important points of principle to achieve a greater good.

I acted in good faith and was optimistic that by taking the actions I took, the league would have what they wanted. I was willing to accept the harshest penalty in the history of the NFL for an alleged ball violation because I believed it would help exonerate Tom.

I have often said, "if you want to get a deal done, sometimes you have to get the lawyers out of the room." I had hopes that Tom Brady's appeal to the league would provide Roger Goodell the necessary explanation to overturn his suspension. Now, the league has taken the matter to court, which is a tactic that only a lawyer would recommend.

Once again, I want to apologize to the fans of the New England Patriots and [to] Tom Brady. I was wrong to put my faith in the league.

Given the facts, evidence and laws of science that underscore this entire situation, it is completely incomprehensible to me that the league continues to take steps to disparage one of its all-time great players and a man for whom I have the utmost respect.

Personally, this is very sad and disappointing to me.

Figure 11. Robert Kraft's Press Conference Transcript from July 29, 2015

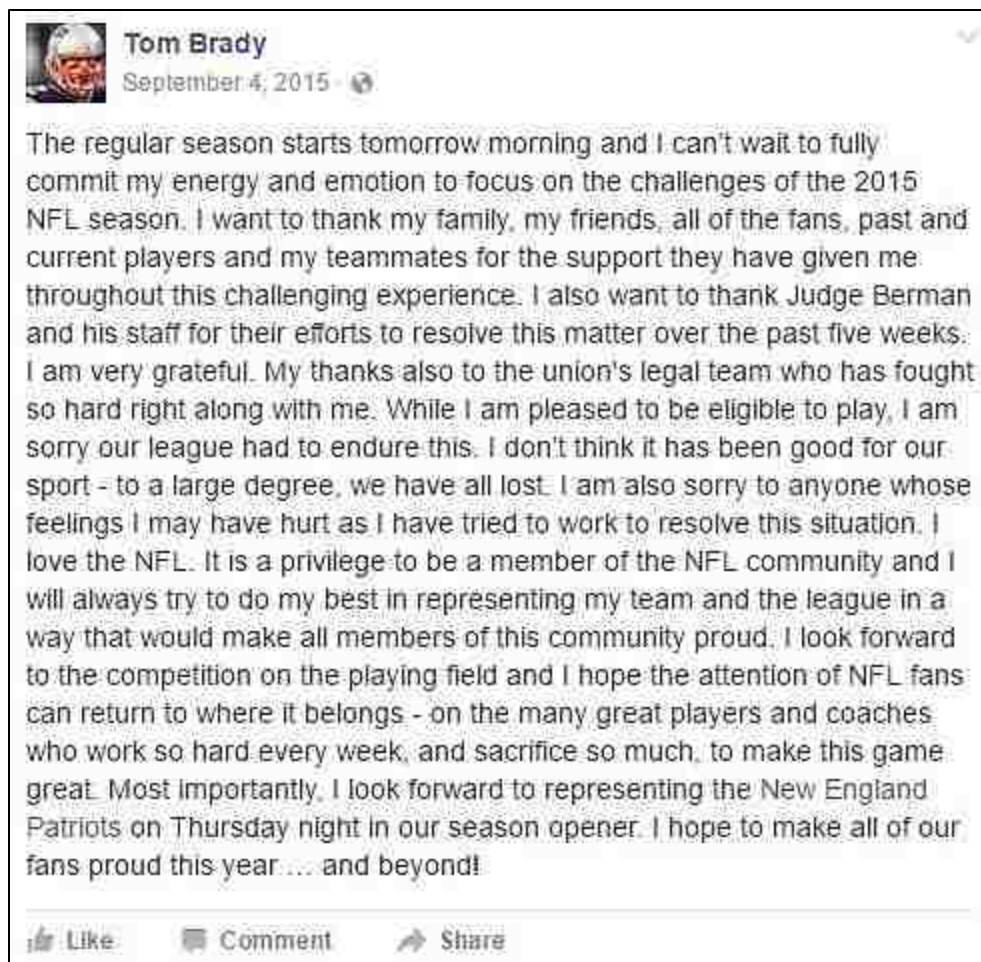


Figure 12. Tom Brady's Facebook Post from September 4, 2015

# Statement from Robert Kraft on Judge Berman decision

Friday, September 04, 2015 9:17 AM EDT

## **Statement from Patriots Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft on today's decision by Judge Richard Berman:**

"As I have said during this process and throughout his Patriots career, **Tom Brady** is a classy person of the highest integrity. He represents everything that is great about this game and this league. Yet, with absolutely no evidence of any actions of wrongdoing by Tom in the Wells report, the lawyers at the league still insisted on imposing and defending unwarranted and unprecedented discipline. Judge Richard Berman understood this and we are greatly appreciative of his thoughtful decision that was delivered today. Now, we can return our focus to the game on the field."

Figure 13. Statement from Robert Kraft on Judge Berman decision from Sept. 4, 2015



Figure 14. Tom Brady's Facebook post from July 15, 2016



# Statement from New England Patriots Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft

Friday, July 15, 2016 2:48 PM EDT

By New England Patriots

 @patriots

"While I was disappointed with the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' decision not to rehear **Tom Brady's** case, I am most frustrated that Tom was denied his right to a fair and impartial process. The League's investigation into a football pressure matter was flawed and biased from the start, and has been discredited nearly unanimously by accredited academics and scientists.

"The penalty imposed by the NFL was unprecedented, unjust and unreasonable, especially given that no empirical or direct evidence of any kind showed Tom did anything to violate League rules prior to, during or after the 2015 AFC Championship Game. What Tom has had to endure throughout this 18-month ordeal has been, in my opinion, as far removed from due process as you could ever expect in this country.

"From day one, I have believed in Tom and given him my unwavering support in his pursuit to rightfully clear his name of any wrongdoing. That support extends throughout our organization and has only grown more steadfast as the preponderance of scientific evidence has exonerated Tom. Unfortunately, this stopped being about air pressure a long time ago.

"This entire process has indelibly taken a toll on our organization, our fans and most importantly, **Tom Brady**. His reluctant decision to stop pursuing further action and to put this situation behind him is what he feels is best for the team in preparation for this season and is fully supported by me and our entire organization.

"To our devoted fans, your unwavering support for Tom and our organization have only reinforced our longstanding belief that we have the greatest fans in all of sports. We will continue to unequivocally support Tom and know our fans will rally around him and the rest of the team like never before. Our full focus now is on making the upcoming season a memorable one for all of our fans."

Figure 15. Statement from New England Patriots Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft on July 15, 2016