

The Weight of Legacy: Myth-Making, Media, and the Modern Athlete

A roaring stadium, a school's legacy, and a city pulsing with regional rivalries: all of this (and more) awaited Arch Manning before he could form words, let alone throw a game-winning spiral. How do narratives woven by media, family legacies, and regional fervor shape—or sometimes shatter—young athletes' careers?

Arch Manning's emergence as the heir to a storied football dynasty, alongside the cautionary tale of former Texas A&M QB Johnny Manziel's rise and fall, illustrates the Epic burdens of myth-making on the modern athlete. Today, tech-enhanced broadcasts, social media, and the multi-billion-dollar world of betting and fantasy sports amplify expectations—for fans and the athletes themselves. These technologies create a “more than a game” mentality, entwining athletes' lives with collective fantasies and personal projections—often with serious consequences.

More than just reporting the facts, contemporary sports culture heightens the stakes of personal ambition, public mythology, and the do-or-die nature of athletic performance. How do young athletes withstand these mythic expectations, and at what personal cost—whether physical or mental (—for example, CTE)? Even before high school, exceptional athletes like Manning contend with intergenerational expectations, media spectacle, and regional pride. Driven by the question of how these athletes rise to the occasion or collapse under the weight of legend, this paper explores the myth- and money-making machine that defines modern sports like American football.

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