Rhetorical Critique (Cont.)

An Analysis of Neil Paine's Use of Rhetorical Devices

by Lucas Tembras

Neil Paine, author of ["Why Michael Jordan Was The Best"](#) expresses his concerns for the debate on who the greatest basketball player of all time is. The piece itself was written on behalf of all sports fans, but is more clearly catered to those who are fans of basketball. Paine's purpose in writing the article is to persuade readers that Michael Jordan was and is the greatest basketball player of all time due to his endured statistical dominance and lasting impact on the sport. The article was published to the FiveThirtyEight website, [fivethirtyeight.com](#), which is owned by ABC News. As a direct result of this, it appears as though Paine deviates from what the genre of sports usually encourages, which often times is a less analytical approach than the one presented in the article. This orderly approach however, improves the quality of the text and allows for Paine to delve deeper into the subject, enriching the readers' experience and knowledge of the topic at hand. Paine's approach to answering the question of who the "G.O.A.T" is centers mainly around using data and statistical analysis to drive his points forward. Consequently, the text's logical development is extensive and consistent. Paine highlights far more than simple metrics such as points per game, field-goal percentage, and so on, which often fail to provide the context needed to properly reach a conclusion. Instead, he opts for metrics such Win Shares per 48 minutes, Player Efficiency Rating, Game Scores, but most surprisingly he includes the use of an original metric called [RAPTOR or Robust Algorithm using Player Tracking and On/Off Ratings](#). This falls perfectly in line with Paine's claim that "[Jordan] has the stats on his side[.]" Paine comes across as fair, reliable, and knowledgeable on the subject. It is apparent through his diction in the text that he understands the complexity of the issue -- "Was Jordan actually the greatest ever? It's something of a loaded question." Not to mention, he acknowledges that there are people that disagree with him, and he uses this to further push his argument by asking readers to consider Jordan's elaborate lore and the deep influence on those who came after him. Therefore, he makes a stronger argument by relating to those who oppose his views by getting them to rationalize with him. In relation to his ability to knowledgably articulate his points, his diction and ample use of facts lead me to believe that he is well-informed and can be trusted on the subject. As for his ability to relate the readers' emotions, he falls short by failing to include details regarding some of Jordan's triumphs and successes that could aid in swaying public opinion by failing to provide examples and by assuming that the reader has already seen the emotionally charged Netflix documentary on Michael Jordan himself "The Last Dance." Paine does attempt to make an appeal to values by reasoning with whoever may disagree with his stance in order to reach a broader audience: "So the arguments can go in both directions. But the numbers tell us that Jordan was uniquely great, both in terms of what he did and how he did it[]" is an example of this. Ultimately, Paine provides a thorough and well-supported argument for why he believes that Michael Jordan is the best of all time. However, in doing so, he fails to address some of the intangible components of a player which may give them a slight advantage. Furthermore, with Paine trying to make his case as to why Michael Jordan is the greatest of all time using statistics, the same argument could be made for a slew of other great players with the use of different metrics. Although statistics can be helpful in determining who the greatest of all time is, it can be a flawed means of gauging who the best truly is. There are a variety of other factors that contribute to a player's legacy and overall skill, so Paine's oversight of this simple fact hurts his argument.