

FINANCIAL LESSONS FROM ATHLETES WHO EARNED AND LOST MILLIONS

By Claire Loup

ASK YOUR STUDENTS TO RAISE THEIR HAND IF THEY LIKE MONEY,

and you're likely to see every hand in the room go up. Now ask them if they want to learn about how to budget and save and plan for their future, and you're apt to see a lot of disappointed faces and a lot fewer hands. Sure, we like to spend it, we may like to dream about all the things we would do if we had lots more of it, but for the most part, we don't particularly care to talk about the more serious side of managing money.

It's a tough topic for adults, so getting students excited to learn (and hopefully apply) sound personal financial behaviors can be extra challenging. After all, the concepts of working full time, setting financial goals, creating a budget, managing debt and planning for retirement seem all-too-distant concerns—and frankly can be kind of boring. But start talking about the megasalaries and lavish spending of celebrities and professional athletes, and you'll get their attention.

Students know that getting to the pros can make instant millionaires of many athletes. But what they probably don't know is that a significant percentage of professional athletes find themselves broke, bankrupt or under severe financial stress soon after leaving the sport and sometimes while still playing. Poor decision-making and a lack of financial literacy are key factors contributing to this

situation. Once the conversation is started, keep it going with the help of the ESPN 30 for 30 documentary, *Broke*.

Watch It

Broke presents stories from prominent athletes that clearly illustrate that money is surprisingly easy to lose, no matter how much you have. Tales of outrageous spending, bad investments, bankruptcy and financial catastrophes brought on by uninformed or irresponsible behavior provide numerous opportunities to discuss the consequences of bad decisions and lack of planning for the unexpected. The documentary is available on [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Plan It

The candid nature of the athletes' stories may not be appropriate for all ages or school cultures, so you may find it necessary to skip a few parts here and there. The film is divided into 12 short sections, making it easy to pick and choose the sections and topics that complement your specific learning objectives and time constraints. It takes a little time and effort to watch the film a few times to identify what you want to use, but it is time well spent.

Prepare a viewing guide for your students to complete while watching the film so that they are on the lookout for the important points that relate to your lesson. The guide can be as simple as a series of questions about the content of each section. Plan to debrief each section to recap,

clarify or expand upon the key messages before viewing the next section.

Make It Real

The majority of the population will never attain the level of earnings that is possible in professional sports, so the lofty salaries and extravagant spending may be too outrageous to truly hit home with your students. With a little imagination you can tailor activities that directly incorporate the athletes' stories and make it relevant to your students. Here are some suggestions for "making it real."

- Make a list of the financial mistakes or financial disasters in the film, then restate the experience into something realistic for everyone. For example, an athlete with uncontrolled spending and no plan for saving gets cut from the team and no longer has income. Loss of income can happen to anyone from job loss, injury, illness, natural disaster, etc.
- Make a list of the large-dollar purchases, and then have the students work in groups to identify and calculate better uses for the money that was spent. For example, an athlete spends \$50,000 on a dinner with his friends. With \$50,000 you could invest for your future, or buy two mid-priced cars, or pay for a college education at a public university, or buy 17,000

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gallons of gas, or pay a year's worth of rent for several families, etc.

- Use the film section titles as discussion starters to introduce each section. For example: Explain what is meant by "Keeping up with the Joneses."

Expand It

The sports theme, teams and featured players provide an opportunity to reinforce the behavioral messages by using the film in courses like career exploration, math, family and consumer sciences, economics, geography and other subjects.

Here are a few suggestions for using the film beyond personal finance:

- Use the featured athletes to help your students learn about a school or region beyond their home. Select an athlete and identify the college the athlete attended. Then explore degree programs offered at the university, find out about the city and/or state where the university is located. Research the economy of the region, job opportunities, population, natural

resources, economic impact of the sports programs of the university on the city, etc.

- Use any professional sports team to analyze different pay levels and sources of income (endorsements, bonuses, etc.) of the players or staff. Discuss or write about why there is such a difference. What makes one player more valuable than another? Compare this to the variety of job titles that exists in other companies or industries. What makes one employee more valuable or more highly paid than another? Discuss how training, education, experience, work ethic, opportunity, ambition, responsibility, etc. contribute to "moving up" in the workplace.
- Discuss some of the failed business ventures to identify factors that might have contributed to the financial failure and to frame discussions of the role of the entrepreneur, the risk-return relationship, the concept of "buyer beware," scams, etc.

- Use the introduction section to frame a discussion about the effects of economic booms and downturns on personal wealth and to illustrate the effects of marketing and demand on price (team values and player salaries).

Refine It

Each time I watch the film or use it in a lesson, new activity ideas come from the discussions that emerge. Listen to what resonates with your students and capitalize on those segments for the next time around. *Broke* is one of several films that I use to complement personal finance and economics lessons. Using films as part of a lesson plan allows students to see a situation through another's eyes. In the case of *Broke*, they see that learning how to manage their money and plan for their future is important, even for megamillionaires.

Tech

Claire Loup, a former Business Education teacher, is the senior economic and financial education specialist at the New Orleans branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. E-mail her at claire.loup@atl.frb.org.

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