

Regretlessly Yours: The No-Fault Apology

RICK REILLY

Rick Reilly began his thirty-five-year career as a sportswriter and television personality in 1979, working for the *Boulder Daily Camera* while a sophomore at the University of Colorado. A Colorado native, Reilly stayed on at the *Camera* for two more years and then moved to the *Denver Post* before leaving to work at the *Los Angeles Times*, and, eventually, at *Sports Illustrated* in 1985. His twenty-two-year tenure at *Sports Illustrated*, from 1985 to 2007, defined his career. He wrote the popular feature “Life of Reilly,” which ran on the magazine’s last page and from which this essay is taken.

In 2007 Reilly was not only inducted into the National Sportswriters and Sportscasters Hall of Fame, but he moved to ESPN where he was a regular on *SportsCenter*, hosted the one-hour interview show *Homecoming with Rick Reilly*, and reprised his “Life of Reilly” column for *ESPN The Magazine* until 2010. He also won the 2009 Damon Runyon Award for Outstanding Contributions to Journalism. On March 12, 2014, he announced his retirement from sports writing but has continued working for ESPN, appearing on programs such as *SportsCenter* and *Sunday NFL Countdown*.

Reilly is also the author of eleven books on sports-related topics, including *Sports from Hell: My Search for the World’s Dumbest Competition* (2010), which was a finalist for the 2011 Thurber Prize, and he was voted National Sportswriter of the Year eleven times. In addition to novels and nonfiction, Reilly co-authored the screenplay for the film *Leatherheads* (2008), about the 1924 Duluth Eskimos and the nascent NFL, starring George Clooney. As his writing attests, Reilly has a remarkable ability to tell a good human interest story, but the popularity of his work is said to lie in his sharp wit, as shown in the essay included here on the formulaic sports “no-pology.”

WRITING TO DISCOVER: What kind of response or apology do you expect when a public figure, such as an athlete or a celebrity, has committed a crime or transgression? What factors shape that expectation? Do you think we hold some public figures to higher standards than others—or even ourselves?

Star athletes tend to get themselves in more hot water than Top Ramen. Last week alone Keith Hernandez, Kenyon Martin and Delmon Young all had to do major damage control for bad behavior. But now, thanks to the discount law firm of Wheezle, Wangle and Dodge, stars can save boatloads of p.r. and legal fees with the first-ever Do It Yourself Athletic Apology—the No-pology™. It’s the best way to say “I’m sorry” without really meaning it. Try it next time you’re busted! (Clear throat and read sincerely.)

THE NO-FAULT APOLOGY

Ladies and gentlemen, let me begin by saying I'm acutely aware of the accusations that I (pick from Menu A). Let me state categorically and on the record that (one from Menu B). What everybody involved needs to clearly understand is that (Menu C). And I refuse to let the (Menu D) win. Still, if (Menu E), then I would definitely like to take this opportunity to (Menu F). But I'll tell you one thing, I (Menu G). Peace. Out.

Menu A Offenses

- tested positive for every chemical on the element chart
- insulted an entire (race/gender/religion)
- beat the bejesus out of that meter maid
- groped most of the Rockettes
- threatened to kneecap my coach
- kneecapped my coach

Menu B Excuses

- I have no recollection of doing any of that
- it is what it is
- my meds were way off
- that's just (my name) being (my name)
- it was the arthritic rub
- I had to do something; they dissed my peeps

Menu C Rationalizations

- people just build you up to knock you down
- things got blown way out of proportion
- I didn't know that the damn thing was loaded
- people should be curing cancer, not hassling me

- nobody would've said a word if I were (name different race)
- nobody told me cops can dress like hookers

Menu D Scapegoats

- media
- haters
- liberals
- terrorists
- Girl Scouts
- voices in my head

Menu E Distancing Phrase

- my actions were somehow misinterpreted
- my T-shirt was taken out of context
- people are that PC
- one little flag-burning offended the mouth-breathers
- my Rosie O'Donnell impression bothered anybody
- the wildfires have become a distraction

Menu F No-Pology™

- turn the page and move forward
- in a way, apologize, up to a point-ish

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express regret that it even happened • feel bad for these morons • ask you what you want me to say • leave it in (Jesus/Allah/Vishnu)'s hands <p><i>Menu G The Last Word</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sure as hell ain't apologizing to that nun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will pick a batboy next time who can take a punch • didn't even know those people were considered a minority • won't ever ride my Harley in Nordstrom again • will not torpedo any more Smirnoff/Zoloft shooters ever again • had my fingers crossed
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THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THE READING

1. How does Reilly use humor to criticize star athletes and those involved in such "damage control"? What effect does Reilly's means of criticism have? Do you think the form letter scolds, in earnest, the actions of the athletes he names? Of those supporting or sponsoring the athlete?
2. What does Reilly's form letter suggest about athletes' feelings about their transgressions? What does he suggest about the nature of public apologies? About "damage control" as opposed to showing remorse or feeling regret?
3. What does Reilly mean by the neologism "No-pology"? What do the words "wheeze," "wangle," and "dodge" connote, and why might he choose that as the law firm's name? How do these words emphasize the performance involved in public apologies? How else does Reilly draw attention to public apology as a performance?
4. What are the titles of the menu categories? How do these single words characterize the "No-pology"? How do these words serve to criticize these athletes, their handlers, and the process of the No-Fault Apology?
5. Why do you think Reilly uses hyperbole to define the offenses in each of the menu categories? How might it emphasize the absurdity of the formulaic apology? What does Reilly's language say about the nature of the offenses that actual athletes have committed?
6. In order for satire to work, we need to be able to recognize ourselves and/or our society within the work. What menu items most accurately reflect the actual offenses of the athletes named? How does the inclusion of these items help Reilly to make a critical point rather than just an elaborate joke?

LANGUAGE IN ACTION

Examine this guide to effective apology by Aaron Lazare, professor of psychiatry and author of the book *On Apology* (2004). How does Reilly's humorous guide nod to Lazare's sincere list of requirements? What do

the two have in common, and where exactly do they part ways? Use the template of Reilly's apology but discard his "menus" and instead fill in the blanks using Lazare's recommendations, writing the sincerest apology you can write. Do you think Lazare is right about what's required? What, if anything, does he miss?

There are up to four parts to an effective apology, though not every apology requires all four parts. They are as follows.

1. A valid acknowledgment of the offense that makes clear who the offender is and who is the offended. The offender must clearly and completely acknowledge the offense.
2. An effective explanation, which shows an offense was neither intentional nor personal, and is unlikely to recur.
3. Expressions of remorse, shame, and humility, which show that the offender recognizes the suffering of the offended.
4. A reparation of some kind, in the form of a real or symbolic compensation for the offender's transgression.

WRITING SUGGESTIONS

1. Are athletes the only people in the public eye to use the No-Fault Apology? Think about other public apologies you've read about or witnessed offered by politicians, musicians, or celebrities. What phrases and moves do you associate with apologies from disgraced public figures? How do you think the words used by politicians, sports figures, and celebrities differ? Do they follow the same formula? What is each group trying to convey to its audience? Are there different patterns for each group? Write an essay that first identifies the pattern of apology for one of the groups listed above, compares it to Reilly's model, and then discusses whether or not these types of public "No-pologies" have any meaning.
2. Write your own "No-Pology" to a family member, significant other, friend, or teacher for a real offense, recent or past, using the narrative structure Reilly creates and menu items you've created for your offense. Read your "No-pology." Would you give it to the person for whom you wrote it? Why or why not? How does it differ from a genuine apology? From the apology you (presumably) offered for your own transgression? Does it reflect your offense accurately or make light of it? Write a reflection on how the "No-pology" differs from the apology you made or would make. Is an apology just about saying the right words? About the language we use? About delivery? What makes an apology genuine?