

# Ravens' Ray Lewis left out of post-Super Bowl endorsements

BY STEPHEN MANNING  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**BALTIMORE** - Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis won't be going to Disney World and you won't see the Super Bowl MVP's face on the cover of the next Wheaties box.

Lewis, the NFL's Defensive Player of the Year and anchor of arguably the best defense in NFL history, was shut out of the traditional post-Super Bowl endorsements this year, even though his team beat the New York Giants 34-7 on Sunday.

Instead, it was Ravens quarterback Trent Dilfer who shouted, "I'm going to Disney World!" in the traditional post-game endorsement. General Mills chose tight end Shannon Sharpe and four other Ravens to appear on a commemorative Wheaties box.

"We look for a great story, and Trent Dilfer offered us that story," Disney spokesman Craig Dezern said Monday. "Taking this team to the Super Bowl is a Cinderella story."

General Mills Inc., which manufactures Wheaties, said in a statement, "The five players who appear on the Ravens Wheaties box represent the entire team and reflect its historic accomplishments this season."

Lewis' marketability has been tarnished by his connection to a fatal double-stabbing last year after the 2000 Super Bowl in Atlanta, according to industry analysts.

Lewis pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of obstruction of justice last summer and was fined \$250,000 by the NFL. No one

has been convicted for the stabbings.

"Whatever the result of the trial, to have someone who is close enough to a double murder as recently as last year is not the kind of spokesman that corporate America wants to have represent them right now," said Sean Brenner, managing editor of the Chicago-based IEG Sponsorship sports marketing newsletter.

Lewis' image problems were the brunt of Jay Leno's monologue Monday night on NBC's "The Tonight Show."

"Oh, yeah, I'm real unfair," Leno said. "Hey, he got MVP — what, most valuable parolee? What'd he get? Didn't he get a car? Or he calls it, the getaway vehicle."

Disney traditionally has asked the Super Bowl MVP the "What's next?" question and featured that player in a parade the next day. This was the fourth time in the ad's 15-year run that the MVP did not ride in the parade.

Neither company would comment on their selection process and Disney declined to discuss whether the company had considered Lewis, but a spokesman said Dilfer was picked because the game played in Tampa, Fla., capped a comeback from his release by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers last year.

Lewis shrugged off the apparent Disney snub after the game.

"I wasn't going there anyway. I have kids who were not going to let me go to Disney World. They wanted to see me," he said.

The Super Bowl capped a season in which Ray Lewis joined the league's top echelon of players with his bone-

crunching hits and emotional leadership of a defense that allowed the fewest points since the NFL expanded to a 16-game season.

But he will likely be dogged for a long time by his murder trial last summer, said Bob Williams, president of Burns Sports, a company that matches athletes and companies.

Lewis' name recognition is now on par with NFL stars like the Denver Broncos' Terrell Davis and Kurt Warner of the St. Louis Rams, said Williams.

While Warner, the MVP of Super Bowl XXXIV, signed several endorsements after the game, Williams said marketers are not likely to flock to Lewis.

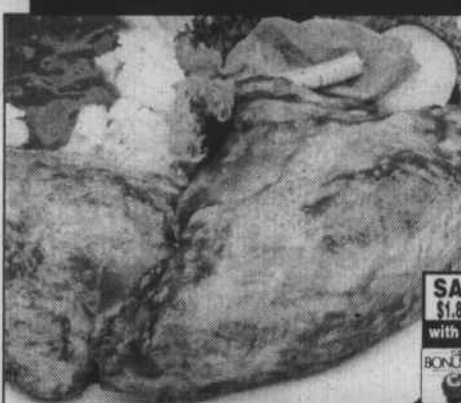
"I think marketers saw an athlete who could fit into the upper echelon of endorsers but who is not going to because of the baggage he will carry for a long time from the trial."

Williams said Lewis could miss out on a potential \$1 million in endorsements.

Lewis could be signed by a company seeking to increase its name recognition, said Brenner, noting the signing of then-Golden State Warrior Latrell Sprewell by the fledgling shoe company And 1 after he was suspended for choking his coach in 1997.

But most companies try to avoid controversial figures and will likely not take a risk on Lewis, Brenner said.

"While most of Middle America would do well to admire his play on the field, he's not the kind of guy you want to see on your breakfast cereal each morning," Brenner said.



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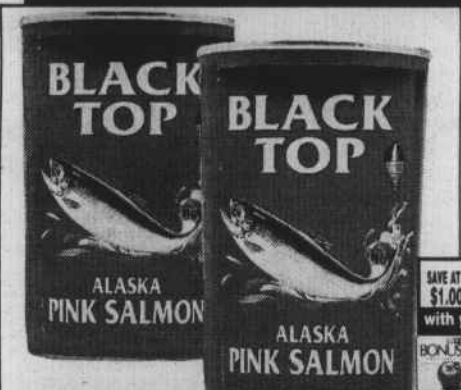
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