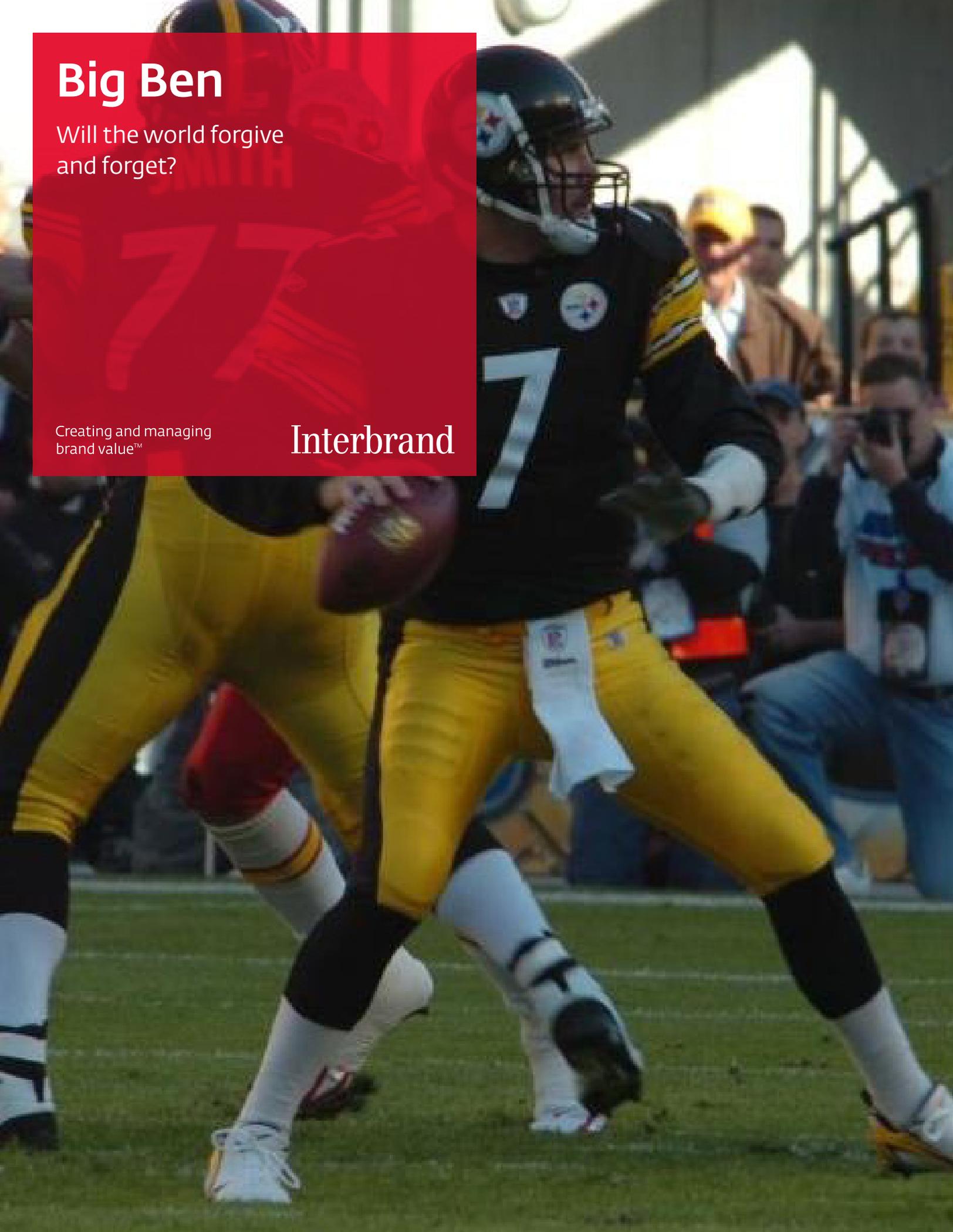


Big Ben

Will the world forgive
and forget?

Creating and managing
brand value™

Interbrand



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Will the world forgive and forget?

by Patrick Kerns

This weekend's Super Bowl pits the Green Bay Packers against the Pittsburgh Steelers—two proud franchises with plenty of championship mettle—and many commentators predict the game will hinge on QB play. The winning quarterback can expect to see some positive movement in that most crucial stat for our purposes: personal brand valuation (which Interbrand developed as a way of measuring LeBron James's best move during last summer's NBA free agency wooing season). Before this latest playoff run, the Steelers' Ben Roethlisberger was a man with a brand in need, to put it mildly, of just such help.

Indeed, back in 2010, things didn't look so great for Roethlisberger and the Steelers after sexual assault allegations were made against Roethlisberger for the second time in his short career. The fans were relentless, and it seemed to be a sign of difficult times ahead. Despite the great "Big Ben's" stellar field performance, his poor decision-making off the field was doing his personal brand no favors.

Fast forward nine months, and we've seen the Steelers march through the playoffs, on the way to their third Super Bowl in six years—with Roethlisberger once again leading the charge. Suddenly, hardly anyone is talking about Ben's off-field problems. Instead, they are focused on the plays he's making on the field to will his team to victory.

But will a potential February 6th Super Bowl win be enough to drastically alter the public's perceptions of Roethlisberger and improve his personal brand for the long-term?

Image + performance = a win win

If you take a look at Roethlisberger's rocky career, a pattern begins to emerge. As a rookie quarterback for one of the NFL's most popular teams, Roethlisberger was met with immediate success, going 13-0 his first season and winning a Super Bowl title in year two. But, a major motorcycle accident in June of 2006 put a damper on his brand image, and it was only after a second Super Bowl win in 2009, that he saw his star rise again. Then came the sexual assault allegations in 2009 and 2010, which appear to now be taking a backseat to another potential Super Bowl success.

Over the years, Roethlisberger's image has consistently taken a hit, but his strong on-field performance has always resulted in a personal brand bounce back. Why? Because unlike many others before him, (ahem, Tiger Woods), Roethlisberger has always made an effort to be transparent and apologetic about his mistakes. For example, in the case of the recent scandal, while he's denied the sexual assault allegations, he's also admitted that he has a problem, and vowed to focus on being the same caliber person off the field as he is player on it. Coming forward has allowed Roethlisberger to let his performance speak for itself. His transparency got his suspension reduced, and his alignment with the storied Pittsburgh Steelers brand only helped his cause.

Sports stars ranging from Tiger Woods to John McEnroe have been plagued by image problems due to personal scandals. But in the end, history has shown that if the athlete performs well enough and makes an effort to address a scandal in an authentic and apologetic way, the world will be forgiving—especially if this effort is accompanied by success.

So, while nothing comes close to the impact of performance, image is still absolutely important and a solid team brand certainly helps. Luckily for Roethlisberger, playing well—and winning—seems to come pretty naturally. The final verdict? As long as he can maintain his composure off the field, it appears there are clear skies ahead for Roethlisberger and his brand. ■



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Patrick Kerns is a member of the Associate program at Interbrand New York. In it, he works in a variety of roles within strategy, program management, and client services to help companies create powerful and distinctive brands. Patrick's avid interest in sports helps him understand what drives value for sports brands. He has been instrumental in developing Interbrand's personal valuation methodology.