

ESPN ANCHOR SUSPENDED; APOLOGY ACCEPTED

On January 22, the Catholic League launched a protest of ESPN anchorwoman Dana Jacobson's foul and bigoted comments that were made at a January 11 "roast" in Atlantic City. The next day we issued another news release, putting pressure on ESPN to respond. It took one more day before we were satisfied with the outcome.

We learned from news and sports websites that Jacobson graphically attacked Jesus Christ at the event; she was totally intoxicated. She roared from the podium, "F*** Notre Dame," "F*** Touchdown Jesus," and "F*** Jesus." Initially, there were conflicting reports regarding her last remark (it turned out that all three invectives were voiced).

ESPN's response was to issue a rather lame statement of apology by Jacobson. We wanted more. Indeed, we said, "This response fails on several counts." We emphasized that "there is no evidence that ESPN is taking this matter seriously." This forced us to ask, "Are we to believe that her hate speech is of no consequence? Her comments were not made at a private function, rather they were made at a public event where she represented ESPN."

What bothered us most was the fact that the most offensive thing she said, "F*** Jesus," wasn't even addressed. Our conclusion: "It is obvious, then, that neither Jacobson nor ESPN is dealing with this matter in a professional way. To put this issue behind them, ESPN must deal with this issue quickly, publicly and fairly, something it has yet to do."

After several news stories, and TV appearances by Bill Donohue, two ESPN officials called Donohue on January 24. They maintained that in the 6-7 years that they had worked with

Jacobson, they had never heard her say anything bad about any religion. It was her, they stressed, that “fell on the sword” and called them the next day after her drunken rant.

ESPN suspended Jacobson and, at Donohue’s request, issued another apology. Donohue then said, “I am happy to say that after speaking to two ESPN officials today, and having learned more about exactly what happened, that they are in fact taking this matter seriously. Indeed, I am convinced that what occurred at the roast will not happen again.”

After weighing the context of Jacobson’s remarks, and considering the change in ESPN’s approach to this problem, we decided to drop the issue. On Jacobson’s first day back, she started by issuing another apology: “I want to say how truly sorry I am for my poor choices and bad judgment.”