

Addictions & Answers: Why do millionaire baseball players have so much trouble with addiction?

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BILL: Doc, you read where [Detroit Tigers](#) star [Miguel Cabrera was recently arrested again](#) on suspicion of drunk driving? Most people think you drink to forget your troubles. But the 27-year-old first baseman just finished a terrific season, hitting .328 with 38 home runs in 2010 and finished second in the American League MVP vote. He has a multi-million dollar contract--

DR. DAVE: --but bragging about how important he was, according to the [St. Lucie County \(Fla.\)](#) Sheriff's office, he took [a swig from a bottle of scotch](#) right in front of the cops.

BILL: There, that's the heart of what I think of as addiction. Cabrera found the moment so unbearable that he tried to drink his way through it right now no matter what price later.

DR. DAVE: Cabrera's romance with alcohol has a roll call of symptoms that would stagger any run-of-the-mill boozehound.....

BILL: ...including that classic [drunken brawl with his wife](#). That fracas caused the Tigers to get knocked out of the American League Playoffs two years ago.

DR. DAVE: Booked into jail with a blood alcohol level 3 times the drunk driving limit, Cabrera was back in the lineup 12 hours later. Withdrawal and all, he went 0 for 4 at bat and stranded six runners on base in the 5-1 loss to the [White Sox](#).

BILL: Even a medical layman like me knows Cabrera was looking at five red flags that day. 1. High tolerance to booze, 2. Serious impact on his job, 3. Disruption of his marriage, 4.&5., Legal problems and loss of control.

DR. DAVE: [Major League Baseball](#) treats its drug-abusing superstars like a parent who is willing to call their kid's ongoing arrests for alcohol ANYTHING but a serious alcohol problem. Bill, you wouldn't believe the hundreds of times I've heard parents say that little Jim or Janie has a self-esteem problem that needs therapy—

BILL:-- or they are merely depressed, and need to be medicated due to the trials and tribulations of being a teen—

DR.DAVE: Anything—just don't imply their wunderkind is struggling with alcohol or drug addiction.

BILL: That hits home Doc—[CBS news asked Cabrera](#) about his off-season "counseling" around this time last year. "You guys write in the paper 'alcoholic,' that's not right," Cabrera said last March after he spent much of the off-season in counseling. "I don't know how to explain, but it's not an alcohol problem."

DR. DAVE: I wish some professionals with his team had "explained it to him" by getting him into a chemical dependency treatment program.

BILL: Which brings us back to Point One. Athletes like Cabrera have all the success and happiness that money can buy. What don't they have that makes them so high risk for sliding into addiction?

DR. DAVE: The biggest sacrifice a pro athlete often makes is trading all those hours of social development for T-ball, [Little League](#), and college 2-a-day practices. When they're later handed huge pro contracts, many are caught between their own internal feelings of social awkwardness and the high expectations they see in the eyes of their fans.

BILL: Behind their successful front, they feel a fraud?

DR. DAVE: Until Major League Baseball understands they have a group of social [Peter Pans](#), who have never grown up, they are unlikely to stem the crisis of drug abuse and addiction we find in stars like [Miguel Cabrera](#).

BILL: You're not advising parents of athletically talented kids to forbid them to play Little League ball, are you?

DR. DAVE: Of course not. Sports offer insurance against drug abuse in terms of teaming, delayed gratification and a sense of self-accomplishment. It's a matter of the parents and coaches understanding they need to infuse social skills-building into the training diet of their athletes.

BILL: How do you do that?

DR. DAVE: Actually Bill, the oldest and strongest substance abuse prevention programs are found in what is called Life Skills—a group of activities that have prevented substance abuse in elementary, middle and high schoolers for over two decades. Developed by [Gil Botvin](#) and his colleagues, any parent or coach can go to [their website](#).

BILL: Maybe a place a few of our "middle school" athletes like Cabrera would be wise to have a look at as well?

DR. DAVE: Amen, Bill. Amen.

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