



When it comes to early '90s Saturday morning cartoons about pro athletes who fight crime, *Pro Stars* was easily among the best. Though the show only aired for a couple months in 1991, the adventures of the crudely animated Michael Jordan, Bo Jackson, and Wayne Gretzky probably represents the pinnacle moment for the classic, sports hero archetype of the 20th century. Sadly, it's a show we couldn't possibly recast in the post-BALCO, post-sexting world of today. ... Or could we?

Surprisingly, the original *ProStars* hasn't gotten its long overdue Criterion Collection blu-Ray box set release as of yet, so there's an outside chance that some of you might be a little hazy on the show's critical plot points. Some of the less fortunate or elderly readers among you might not even be familiar with this television classic at all (for shame!). It would be an insult to *ProStars*

' brilliant writing staff to summarize the 13 episode series in one fell swoop, but here goes...

Basketball star Michael Jordan, hockey star Wayne Gretzky, and baseball/football star Bo Jackson are friends and possibly siblings who-- despite being grown men with ridiculous bank accounts-- spend all their time together at a small gym run by an old woman named "Mom" who may or may not be their actual mother. From their headquarters at Mom's Gym, our ProStars receive video messages from kids in peril all over the world. Using their superhuman sports kills, they then seek and destroy the various cookie cutter cartoon villains who oppose them, all while imparting wisdom to the kiddos about self confidence, friendship, and recycling.

Like their real-life counterparts, cartoon MJ jumped super high, Bo was strong and talked about how much he "knows," and Gretzky obsessed over finding snack food (?). One thing the characters did not have in common with their human inspirations, however, was their voices. Sure, the real Bo, Michael, and Wayne occasionally showed up in live action bits before and after the show, but when it came to their actual animated adventures, three anonymous voice

actors spoke for them. Apologies if I just shattered your world.

Anyway, to the sadness of children the world over, *ProStars* was not picked up for a second season (though reruns could still be seen on random basic cable channels for years afterwards). In the two decades since the show's demise, the image of America's athletic heroes has rapidly lost that glossy perfect sheen of yesteryear-- to the point where the depiction of our finest "ProStars" as morality teachers and crimefighters could only have intentional comedic value today, rather than unintentional as with the original series.

As a case in point, let's imagine that ABC was looking to relaunch *ProStars* in, say, 2007. With the original series in mind, the goal would be to select the most popular and marketable athlete from each major sport and take their role model statuses to the next literally cartoonish level. So, who would they have picked just three years ago?

Unaired ProStars Reboot: Circa 2007



Brett Favre aka "The Big Guy"

Like Jordan in the original series, the Packers' franchise quarterback would be the experienced leader of the gang. His wisdom, grittiness, and unmatched likability make him the perfect ProStar—not to mention his unwavering determination, commitment, moral compass, and ample masculinity. He uses his cannon arm to blast bad guys and the confusing spelling of his last name is a recurring comedic bit.



Alex Rodriguez aka "Fair Play"

Fresh off an insane 2007 MVP season, the best player on the most popular team in American sports adds some flare and diversity to the new *ProStars*. While the show creators could have considered the more superhuman Barry Bonds for the part, they decided that the clean-cut, steroid-free A-Rod better represented what the ProStars were all about. Rodriguez fights criminals by punching them with his tree trunk arms and sometimes shooting lasers out of his frosted tips.



LeBron James aka "Humble Pie"

The obvious successor to Michael Jordan—without all of Kobe Bryant's Colorado hotel baggage— Cleveland's King James is the closest thing to a cartoon superhero in the real world. He's fast, powerful, smart, selfless, charming, and generally considered the perfect teammate. It's no wonder that LeBron decided to take his talents to Mom's Gym! Naturally, LeBron's powers include blinding villains with chalk dust and aimlessly dribbling around the top of the circle.



Tiger Woods aka "Squeaky Clean"

Since no one cares about hockey anymore, ABC decides that a fourth member of the new ProStars should be a guy who swings a different sort of crooked shaft (pun intended). He's the richest, most recognized athlete on the planet, Tiger Woods! Tiger brings the new ProStars their work ethic and drive to succeed. But more importantly, he's a family man who often concludes each show by telling the kids about the importance of loyalty, honesty, and respect for others. Tiger uses his "Putter of Truth" to get enemies to spill their beans—especially seductive female enemies. He and Commander Favre also are in charge of handling the ProStars high tech walkie-talkies to stay in touch with the various friends they make on their adventures.

In all seriousness, it's not an exaggeration to say that arguably the four most popular American athletes from just a few years ago have ALL fallen from grace—which is kind of a staggering thing to absorb. Sure, Babe Ruth was no saint. Neither was Jim Brown. And lest we forget that His Airness himself had some issues. Nonetheless, with the internet and ESPN taking great joy in both building and tearing down icons, it's hard to imagine the ProStars ever being a show worth taking a risk on again.

Then again, maybe Peyton Manning, Kevin Durant, and Albert Pujols could make it work? Their reputations are safe, right? Right?