



DORDT COLLEGE

Digital Collections @ Dordt

Faculty Work: Comprehensive List

1-30-2015

Why We Should Watch Football

Greg Youngblood

Dordt College, greg.youngblood@dordt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Sports Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Youngblood, Greg, "Why We Should Watch Football" (2015). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. Paper 140.
http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/140

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Work: Comprehensive List by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

Why We Should Watch Football

Abstract

"Playing sports alone does not develop character, and sports in a corrupt context will develop bad character, but sports played according to God's plan develops character that honors and glorifies God and develops people who have a deeper understanding of how God works in their lives and how they can serve God even after their playing days are over."

Posting about the morality of supporting football as well as ethics in football from a Christian perspective from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/why-we-should-watch-football/>

Posting is part one of a response to Martin E. Marty's article of January 26, 2015, *Football and Ethics* which can be found at <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/football-and-ethics-martin-e-marty>. Part two can be found at http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/141/

Keywords

In All Things, football, NFL, deflategate, Reggie White, Tim Tebow, Tony Dungy

Disciplines

Christianity | Sports Sciences

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Why We Should Watch Football

 [all in allthings.org/why-we-should-watch-football/](http://allthings.org/why-we-should-watch-football/)

Greg Youngblood

In his article, *Football and Ethics*, Martin E. Marty addresses the issue of ethics in football and the morality of supporting football particularly in light of the recent “deflate-gate” controversy involving the New England Patriots and the scandal of allegedly taking air out of footballs for a competitive advantage. I would like to discuss the morality of supporting football as well as ethics in football from a Christian perspective.

First, if we are to discuss the issue of the morality of supporting football we have to include the morality of playing and coaching football. As a football coach of over twenty years and a participant for an additional twelve years, I am obviously biased toward the game of football. However, issues of morality in the football industry are not different from those faced in business, entertainment, or education. We live in a fallen world and anything created by and used by humankind is subject to corruption. This does not make the activity inherently bad but people who apply misguided values can reveal the dark side of any endeavor. Marty suggests the underlying reason for unethical behavior is money. While money can entice people to do unethical things within sport and this often happens, anyone who has ever witnessed obnoxious and sometimes violent behavior by parents or coaches at a little league game where kids are supposedly playing for the love of sport would agree that money can have very little to do with immoral behavior in and around sport.

As with anything humankind is passionate about, sports can become an idol. Whether a fan, player, or coach, when sports becomes an idol it causes us to act in ways that are in direct conflict with God’s desires. Just as the businessman may take advantage of a client to increase sales numbers and climb the company ladder, a coach or an athlete may look for an advantage that allows them to win. As Christians who live in this fallen world it can be a struggle to remain obedient to God when all around us we see our competition acting unethically to gain an advantage. The media will often show the worst side of human behavior which creates an even stronger belief that “everyone is doing it,” creating the perception that the entire sport is unethical. Sports also receive more visibility related to other fields and therefore sports are more scrutinized when unethical behavior does occur.

This visibility and increased scrutiny, however, is exactly what makes sports the perfect platform to reveal how God calls us to live within a fallen world. When the pressure is on and people make the game more important than it should be is exactly when God uses people to demonstrate His love and build His Kingdom here on earth. I know of two Christian high school football coaches who were very close friends but also happened to be cross-town rivals. One season when their teams played, one team held a slight advantage over the other at halftime. As the two coaches walked toward the locker room behind their respective teams, they joked with each other about a play that occurred during the first half and put their arms around each other as they walked. They passed one side of the stands where the fans from one side watched in shock. The fans began to boo and berate the coaches, not understanding how they could be so friendly with the “enemy.” Both coaches were very competitive and each had won state championships, but they did not let the game interfere with their friendship and the respect they had for each other. This was something the “fans” could not comprehend.

Another example is Tim Tebow, who became a lightning rod with the way he lived his faith outwardly. People either adored him because he was unashamed to show his faith in Christ or were turned off by him because they thought he was too demonstrative and fake. Whether one agrees or not with the way he

witnessed his faith, no one could argue that Tebow was an excellent role model for how a professional athlete should carry themselves and live an obedient Christian life both on and off the field. Ironically, he caught more criticism than many players with questionable personal lives.

I find both of the above examples intriguing because they created reactions very similar to the reactions Jesus received as he lived His ministry here on earth. Of the people who knew Jesus, very few were undecided about Christ. There were those who followed every footstep he took and absorbed every word he spoke, calling him Messiah, while others despised him and what he stood for and plotted to kill him. In sports, even when we see great examples of Christ and how he calls us to live and be obedient to his word, it is often overlooked or even looked down upon because being associated with a winner is often more important than other Christian values.

For example, Tony Dungy is well known for being a super bowl winning coach who authentically lives according to his Christian faith. He has written numerous books and is well respected. However, people forget that he was the same man when he was fired in Tampa Bay. There, he won games but was criticized for not being able to get his team to “the next level.” Many indicated that his soft spoken, gentle demeanor would never bring the intensity, toughness, and demonstrative personality needed for a team to win championships. No one was interested in reading his books until he finally won a Super Bowl with the Colts, even though one of his main messages was that significance (according to God’s standards) was more important than success.

Another example is all-pro defensive lineman Reggie White who was also an ordained pastor. Prior to his arrival in the league, many people labeled Christian football players as soft. It was rumored in the league that if one was a Christian that many teams would not want the player because they did not believe they had the ability to compete at the highest levels unless the player had a macho alpha-male personality. Reggie showed everyone that one can play the game tough and be physically dominant while being a humble servant in God’s kingdom. After Reggie dominated during his career and lived out his faith on and off the field people began to accept that playing tough, aggressive football could be done while also living out the gospel.

It’s easy for us when we look at “deflate-gate” or “spy-gate” or “bounty-gate” among others and come to the conclusion that those involved are heathens who have no moral code and are only about money, fame and wins. However, I have seen at all levels situations where coaches only enforce certain rules for star players, use questionable tactics to gain advantages, treat players disrespectfully and only use them for their worth on the field so they can climb the ladder of success. I have seen school administrations that claim the focus of sports is to develop character but find a reason to force a coach to resign because he does not win enough games even though he acts with and develops character in his players. Meanwhile, coaches with character issues get away with poor behavior because they win.

If we are to criticize a sport for being immoral then we have to look at our culture as a whole and recognize that we created this environment. We build up star athletes and give them special treatment, give them the status of a king and then act surprised and tear them down and disown them when they act selfish and immature. We watch games and spend money on tickets and merchandise of our favorite team even though they have players and coaches that continue to behave unethically on and off the field.

With all this negativity you would wonder why I am such a proponent of sports. It’s because when done the right way according to the true spirit of God, athletics demonstrates the glory, power, humility, grace and love of our Father in magnificent ways. There are many examples of athletes overcoming extreme adversity and accomplishing great things, demonstrating the strength and power of God working through the human spirit when it is focused and determined. We see selfless acts of an individual putting the team in front of him or herself so others can receive the credit. We see individuals accomplish great feats that seem impossible and sincerely thank God because they know that they were only able to accomplish this

by His strength. We see competitors battle each other fiercely but within the rules for the entire game but befriend each other afterwards because of the mutual respect they have for each other. We see athletes with limited ability win the admiration of their teammates because they serve in ways that make the group better even though no one outside their team will ever know. People can develop physical and mental toughness through their sport that prepares them to serve and honor God in amazing ways with their lives. Relationships are born and developed while pushing through the tough grind of work and adversity together, which can create lifelong friendships where people learn trust and know what it means to truly love and be loved. It is an old cliché that sports develop character. Playing sports alone does not develop character, and sports in a corrupt context will develop bad character, but sports played according to God's plan develops character that honors and glorifies God and develops people who have a deeper understanding of how God works in their lives and how they can serve God even after their playing days are over.

Dig Deeper

Check out iAt tomorrow for Greg Youngblood's second response to Marty E. Martin's article on [Football and Ethics](#) in *Supporting Football: The Physical Damage of the Game*.

Get new articles from us each morning after they're published

- [Facebook](#)
23
- [Twitter](#)
9
- [Google+](#)
0
- [LinkedIn](#)
0