

How I Learned to Love Football

Ah, Football, the great American pastime! Wait that's baseball.

Ah Football, the Sport of Kings! No, that's horseracing.

Hoops? The Sweet Science (as of late see under "Hoops")?

Does this game not even have a nickname?

Ah football, throwing the old pigskin and falling down in clumps.

By the time we get out of school most Americans have played baseball and basketball, by the time we reach middle age, many of us have played at least a round or two of golf and a set or two of tennis.

But you know what – if you were a pre-Title IX girl, you've probably never played football. And if you're me, you have no interest in playing and precious little in watching.

And yet – you have to figure there must be something to it that lures so many away from the fishing channel.

Now this is what I know. Two teams, one ball, lining up, scrabbling around, sometimes throwing or kicking the ball to someone but mostly –

Falling down in clumps.

You have to move your clump ten yards in four tries or you lose the right of way.

If your clump or someone from your clump with the ball goes over the edge you get to dance a bit.

Then you kick or something else and then you line up and start over.

In the middle of the game they put on a show and at the end everyone talks about which was worse, the game or the show.

(I also know, having many relatives in Michigan, that the recent Gators' win over Ohio State was divinely ordained, at least, but let that pass.)

But all this was about to change. Every year Susan Siderman, a fellow runner and good friend, hosts a football clinic for the coalition of the clueless. It was time for me to get up to speed.

Now Susan is a teacher and knows how to break down even simple concepts into simpler ones, a good thing in my case. We first learned that as you approach and pass the fifty

yard line you come, not to the sixty yard line, but to the forty yard line. I'm a classicist; I know about BC, or "backward counting", so I'm fine with this. Clearly someone very important was once born on the fifty yard line and they honor the event to this day.

The next major concept was the "kicker boy" and his various roles, working both from a plastic stand and a Lucy-like holder to whom the ball has been "snapped" or "hiked" or, you heard it here first, "thrown in a very odd way". Punters also kick, but I think they are not official kicker boys, just someone handy who wants the ball to go the other way when the clump moving becomes a hopeless case.

This was followed by a discussion of touchdowns, field goals, extra points, all over glasses of wine, which might explain why my memory here is a bit hazy. We even had visual aids.

After the lecture we repaired to the den to watch an actual live game. It was easier to follow the diagrams. Susan stood by the TV doing a play by play and explaining what was making the little boxes at the top of the screen change. It actually makes sense, sort of, at least when she's there explaining it.

I'm not sure if I'm ready to fly solo, but it's time for the Superbowl (my spell checker wants to change this to "Superb Owl"). It's Colts and Bears. I'm routing for the Bears because everyone I know is mad at Peyton Manning's brother and that's good enough for me and anyway, Chicago has to deal with the cubs and that's enough for any one town.

And, thanks to Susan, I'll at least know when the game stops and the show starts. I'll probably even have an opinion about which was worse.

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