

Building a Better Football Fan

By Jeremy Greenberg



I love football. It brings men together to violate the NFL's substance abuse policy, spurred on by many enticing well-crafted beer commercials. Now that we're deep into the season, I offer these lessons to help you get in game shape by the Super Bowl.

Lesson No. 1: Chores Are for Chumps

An evil weed grows in our garden of gridiron. Household chores are the greatest obstacle to Sunday football bliss. They sprout up like dandelions, choking each bone-crushing hit, each high-flying catch with calls to "mow the lawn," "fix the garage door" and "take a shower."

Luckily, we have options:

The Chore-o-Matic 5000 (a.k.a. Kids): To best preserve your football-watching time, I recommend having kids. Not only will having kids give your wife something to do while you're out with friends, but by about age 2 they'll be able to start mowing the lawn. At age 3, you can trust them to fix anything from broken chainsaws to jammed shotguns. (Please note that I am being sarcastic, 3-year-olds should not be fixing shotguns unless accompanied by a U.S. vice president.)

The Sweet Sounds of the Game: If you cannot avoid pushing your chores off on people you claim as dependents, you may be forced to break away from the TV. Prepare for this as you would prepare for any other life-threatening emergency. Make sure you have canned goods and a radio with fresh batteries. If you must lose visual contact with football, the radio will allow you to listen to the game, and the canned goods will allow you to have something to eat if the game gets so good you can't move.

Time for the Prevent Defense: By timing your chores midway through the second quarter until the end of the third quarter, you prevent missing any game-winning drives or last-second field goals. It still will hurt to miss any part of the game. Some scars just don't heal. But if you time your chores carefully, you will survive.

Lesson No. 2: Determine if Wife Is Football Friend—or Foe

Next, the wife. Do we want her sitting with us this Sunday, wearing our old high school jersey, or should we encourage her to check out that new Julia Roberts chick flick with her friends?

A True Team Mate: Let's say you hear her belt out, "That call was crap!" during the game. We have a word for women like that: KEEPERS. She has crossed the valley of fire and come to live with you in man-land. Ask her to pull up a chair.

A Formidable Opponent: If she sees the game and asks "Is anything else on?" you may have to accept the fact that football and your wife have irreconcilable differences. Let her know that she retains custody, but football has weekend visitation rights (and Monday nights, and some Thursday nights). Be sure to respect her lack of interest. Think about how many of her interests (cooking, cleaning, parenting, talking, listening) you refuse to engage in. Just let your wife know that if she doesn't want to watch the game with you, she is free to ignore you all day. Let her know you'll return the favor by ignoring her right back tomorrow while she watches "The Bachelor."

Lesson No. 3: Menu Choices Make the Man

Good football watching requires making the right choices about what to eat and drink:

Game-Day Food: The only appropriate breakfast on football day is leftover pizza—make sure you have some. If other family members are cooking a breakfast, setting tables, etc., pay them no mind. Leftover pizza sends a message to your opponent—I'm not doing anything today I don't have to.

Snacks, the Reason We Have Hands: Question: What is a football made of? Answer: Pigskin. Question: What are pork rinds made of? Answer again: Pigskin.

Yes, the only snack for true football fans is pork rinds—the veritable communion wafer of the NFL. Each fried piece of pigskin makes you one with football. If you are kosher or a vegetarian, it is also acceptable to enjoy a salad of field greens in connection with the field. I recommend those trendy micro-greens the Food Network people are always going on about.

Drinks, the Reason We Have Throats: For beverages I recommend beer. It will dehydrate you and punish your body with the same ferocity as playing linebacker (without the hassle of actually moving). During the commercials switch to Gatorade, but spit most of it on the floor before the game returns. If you don't drink alcohol, a Red Bull or any other ridiculously caffeinated beverage will also work.

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Lesson No. 4: Remember Why We Love This Game

To really enjoy football at the highest level we must understand and appreciate what makes it special.

Inspiring NFL Story No. 4,873: On Oct. 22, 2006, Matt Bryant of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers kicked a 62-yard field goal. This was the second longest in NFL history. It was a game-winning kick; a storybook moment all kickers dream about when they realize they'll never play quarterback. Regardless of what Matt Bryant does with the rest of his life, he'll have that amazing kick. But what is truly amazing is his path to NFL glory. Matt Bryant spent four years working in a pawn shop, practicing his kicks during lunch. Pawn shop customers would chase down the balls and exchange them for their old electric guitars. Every night he'd go out to the local high school and kick by the headlights of his car (which I am sure was an orange Camaro blasting a song by Survivor or Journey). He overcame every obstacle and made it to the pros.

By comparison, on Oct. 17, 2006, I decided not to finish my tamale because I ran out of hot sauce. I quit. I gave up on my dream of eating that tamale because of a small condiment setback. Football gave me a great message of inspiration. If Matt Bryant can overcome the odds and fulfill his dream, I can finish my lunch.

That's the message I want to leave with you. Football is more than just a way to tune out, forget about problems, get drunk, overeat, and be lousy husbands. When applied correctly to life, football reminds us that we can survive, persevere and accomplish anything in this life—if we're just willing to work in a pawn shop. See you next Sunday!

Comedian and author Jeremy Greenberg has performed stand-up around the world, had jokes published in The Complete Idiots Guide to Jokes, and has been a contributing writer for Comics Unleashed. He lives in Kirkland, Wash., with his wife and cat.