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“Are You Ready For Some Football”

by
Tom Holbrook

Well the cool fall air nipping at our nose means that winter is not far behind... but to millions of others in these great United States the coming of fall means only one thing.... football season is finally here. It also means this country's most watched sport is beginning its captivity of our Thursday nights, all day Saturdays and for you NFL fans your Sundays and Mondays as well. Of course I'm talking American football here and since 1972 it has been the nation's number one watched sport in America every year. Baseball may be, or was, America's National pastime but football is the one we watch the most, and Mr. Gallup who does the poll every year says the numbers are increasing every year.

In any given week over 70 Million fans watch college football alone, especially now with ESPN and other TV Networks providing regional broadcasts of just about every college football game being played. If you add to that number those who listen to the games on the radio, especially with XM and Sirius Satellite Radio now broadcasting many of the games, the number of fans involved with college football weekly could be over 100 million. The NFL's Super Bowl draws so many fans every year it has become an unofficial National Holiday and the catalyst for more social gatherings around the nation than any other event. This last year's Super Bowl had a national audience of over 91 Million fans.

But college football games are the really exciting games to watch or attend. What drama, what rivalries, what great bands, what great looking cheerleaders and delicious hot dogs. Driving around Greenbrier County neighborhoods you see college banners predominantly displayed in the front yards and hanging from the trees of rabid football fans proclaiming “Hokie Country” or “Go Ears!” In Florida, a kind of melting pot of retirees from all over the nation, you'll see a lot of banners of WV Mountaineers, Tennessee, Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio State, and of course the Florida Gators. Last Saturday I thought I saw a Notre Dame banner waving bravely somewhere in the neighborhood but when I drove by the house on Sunday it wasn't there... guess I was mistaken.

Everyone knows College football is big business. We had the opportunity this past couple of weeks to watch games taking place in some of the largest college stadiums in the country. Ohio State, Michigan, Penn State and the University of Tennessee all perennially sell out stadiums with over 100,000 fan-filled seats. That's one reason college football coaches make salaries equal to CEOs of major corporations. Florida's own 2006 National Champions, the Florida Gators from Gainesville, filled their stadium, “The Swamp,” a couple of weeks ago with over 94,000 people as they crushed Tennessee 59 – 20. Our nationally ranked Mountaineers from WVU have to get by with only 63,500 seats accommodate their fans

but if they keep to their winning ways the powers that be might just be adding another 25 – 30,000 seats.

In addition to the attributes listed above, college football is popular because of its players and coaches. Over the years college football has produced many great teams and even more great coaches... some who are still being quoted.

Bear Bryant, the legendary coach at the University of Alabama is known as one of the greatest coaches of the game and one of the toughest on his players. When asked about his strict discipline Bryant answered... *“I make my practices real hard because if a player is a quitter, I want him to quit in practice, not in a game.”* In trying to explain the difference in salaries between football coaches and math teachers Bryant replied, *“It’s kind of hard to rally around a math class.”* Coach Bryant evidenced his opinion that there was a direct connection between school spirit and the heavenly spirits when he commented, *“If you want to walk the heavenly streets of gold, you gotta know the password... “Roll Tide Roll!!!”*

There are many critics of football who say it is too violent a sport. Various coaches have expressed their thoughts on that opinion:

Bowden Wyatt (former Tennessee coach) – *“My advice to defensive players: Take the shortest route to the ball and arrive in a bad humor.”*

Woody Hayes (Ohio State legend) - *“There’s nothing that cleanses your soul like getting the hell kicked out of you.”*

Duffy Daugherty (former Michigan State coach) – *“Football is not a contact sport... it is a collision sport. Dancing is a contact sport.”*

John Heisman (Heisman trophy named after him) – *“Gentlemen, it is better to have died a small boy than to fumble this football.”*

Knut Rockne (legendary Notre Dame coach) – *“I’ve found that prayers work best when you have big players.”*

With most of these coaches loyalty and endurance were priority qualities in their players and comedy was a mainstay with a lot of the coaches as seen in these quotes:

Frank Leahy (former Notre Dame coach) – *“Lads, you’re not to miss practice unless your parents died or you died.”*

Knut Rockne (Notre Dame) – *“The only qualifications for a lineman are to be big and dumb. To be a back, you only have to be dumb.”*

John McKay (USC) – *“We didn’t tackle well today but we made up for it by not blocking.”*

Bobby Bowden (Florida State, formerly West Virginia) – *“Son, you’ve got a good engine, but your hands aren’t on the steering wheel.”*

Lou Holtz (formerly Arkansas & Notre Dame) – *“The man who complains about the way the ball bounces is likely to be the one who dropped it.”*

Let’s close with a good quote taken from a church message board somewhere in Arkansas....
*“Football is only a game and only temporary. Spiritual things are eternal... Nevertheless, BEAT
TEXAS!!!”*

“Go Mountaineers!!!”

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