

Why Should a Woman Have a Head for Football?

Football is an obsession of American men. For years I couldn't understand why. I enjoyed occasional key games during playoff time but I still felt like an ignorant outsider. Football seemed an overrated, high profile event that transfixed husbands at their wives' expense. I heard about those "sports widows" abandoned by their husbands glued to a game on TV for hours on end. I was more inclined not to love the game.

But then I married "Mr. Sports Encyclopedia" who followed football avidly. An apparent inconsistency emerged—my husband isn't some mindless grunt, but an intelligent, sensitive person. Could there be more to this game? So I resolved to learn about football. Years later I realized what a wise decision it was.

My husband was glad to explain the game to me. This was a pleasant surprise, for he didn't make me feel stupid, but welcomed my questions. I learned about blitzes, bombs, hail Marys, passing plays, running plays, zone defense, and the West Coast offense.

As I learned technical details about football, some deeper insights into the human spirit emerged. Each player must function in concert with the rest of the team according to a master plan. A "lone ranger" who strays from the plan will alienate the other players and hinder the goal to win. Even a star quarterback needs help from his teammates to do his job. He needs protection from the massive wall of opponents rushing at him. If he passes the ball to a receiver, the pass is useless if dropped. Furthermore, the receiver must reach the end zone to score a touchdown. If the play succeeds, the quarterback gets much credit, but he knows that success depends upon the efforts of many unsung heroes.

The strategy of football also deserves appreciation. What looks like a chaotic scramble is really a complex series of interactions. While the offense plots to advance the ball, the opposing defense anticipates their movements in order to thwart the play. Those big lugs actually have highly developed instincts and split-second reflexes. It all happens so quickly, each play takes just a few seconds. Each team fakes movements in order to deceive the opposition, but amidst such deception, dirty play is taboo and incurs stiff penalties.

Football requires the intestinal fortitude to face certain pain and possible injury game after brutal game. The natural instinct is to run from pain, but football players run into pain. (It has been estimated that each defensive lineman is hit approximately 1120 times each season.) The strength of will required to subject his body to relentless blows is undoubtedly character-building for a man.

But does the game offer anything to women? We're wise to understand the football mentality because it is often applied to situations off the playing field. In business, sports metaphors fit perfectly. I know that I'd have been lost in certain business conversations without knowledge of football lingo. Once my company's president used football talk to motivate us and described the situation as "fourth and one." In a few words, he communicated an entire concept—the goal is near, the risks are great, and the stakes are high.

More importantly, similar concepts exist between this physical game and the spiritual world. Paul wrote about the self-discipline required to win the spiritual race, likening the contest to a foot race. Football wasn't around in Biblical times, but the training and preparation required to win the Superbowl can also illustrate the right kind of self discipline and training necessary to finish well spiritually. Also, football underscores the value of teamwork; much like the parts of a body must work in concert for the whole to function properly, likewise the many parts of a church body, each uniquely gifted spiritually, harmonize together in a healthy church. All parts are vital in the body; if all were an eye, where would the hearing be? (1 Cor 12:17). So it is in football; if all were a quarterback, where would the protection be?

Football stems from a man's hard world, and most women won't experience a linebacker's hit or the thrill of a touchdown. But we're created differently; our strength shines forth when we nurture loving relationships through kindness and understanding. Nonetheless, if we learn about football because we care about a football-lover, we've honored him. For me, it has been a winning effort because I understand my husband better and have scored my own points with him—points that last a lifetime.

By Mary Nixon