



FINANCIAL PREPAREDNESS

"One of life's most painful moments comes when we must admit that we didn't do our homework, that we are not prepared." ~ Merlin Olsen

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Don't Watch Sports, Play Them

Some of you may not like what I'm about to say, but hear me out and then spend some time thinking about it.

As a boy, I enjoyed playing sports even though I wasn't a good athlete. In my early days I played four seasons of baseball and one of soccer, and ran in a number of 10K road races. In my neighborhood, we played Nerf football and pickup basketball. In high school, I played soccer for two years, JV football for one and track for one.

I also enjoyed watching and following sports, especially college football. I lived in an area that was dominated by Florida Gator fans, but my family rooted for the Florida State Seminoles (and to a lesser extent, Auburn, where my father went). Two of my relatives had attended FSU when it was still a women's college, and invariably, the Gator fans we knew were banal jerks.

I also had an affinity for the Seminole mascot since I had found a lot of Indian pottery in our garden and along the lake we lived near. I also did a report on the [Dade Massacre](#), when a band of Seminole warriors who refused to relocate to a reservation in Oklahoma ambushed a column of 107 federal soldiers in 1835, virtually wiping them out. I read the book [Massacre!](#) and even interviewed the author. Every year they have a reenactment

near the site of the battle, which is now a quiet state park.

I've always thought that FSU's [Seminole mascot](#) was relatively cool. Before a recent game, a commentator called Chief Osceola and his Appaloosa horse "one of the most iconic traditions of college football." The Seminoles were known to harbor fugitive slaves (some of whom apparently helped finish off the survivors of the Dade Massacre). Those who refused to "get on the bus" (the Trail of Tears) were heroes and early dissidents of the federal government.



I've never understood mascots that had nothing to do with the local area, such as the Georgia bulldogs. Interestingly, while researching this, I read that after 1894, Georgia did not acknowledge an official mascot for 50 years, resulting in mascot chaos: "Many games had several, depending on which alumnus got his dog to the game first."

When I was in high school, I'd get the morning paper and devour the sports section. I was a numbers guy even back then, tracking standings and statistics in sports that I seldom ever actually watched, such as basketball, baseball and hockey.

Then one day I started noticing stories on the front page, and reading them. I soon realized that there were a lot of events happening in the world that were far more important than spectator sports, and I soon stopped watching and following sports altogether. For decades, I had no idea what was happening in the sports world, including who was playing in the Super Bowl. Generally speaking, as a contrarian, the more people are interested in something, the less interested I am.

Sure, every now and then, I'd hear about an important game that involved a tangentially-related team and would check it out. I followed the Atlanta Falcons in 1998 as they made their way to the Super Bowl. And I watched the 2014 National Championship game between Auburn and FSU.

I have a couple of relatives who are very much into college football, and in years past would watch about one game a year with them, usually around Thanksgiving. In 2013, I saw the famous [Kick Six](#) play in the 78th Iron Bowl, when Auburn ran back a short field goal attempt for a touchdown as time expired, beating the #1-ranked and two-time defending national champions Alabama. [The end of this year's Iron Bowl](#) was equally amazing.

But generally during my adult life, I've avoided spectator sports. During the past decade, I've told people, "I don't watch sports, I *play* them." Playing sports provides a number of important benefits, including (fun) exercise, sunshine, fresh air, socialization and laughter.

Contrast that to watching sports. Generally, you sit there for long hours at a time without moving much (which is bad for your health), passively watching ads for junk food and Big Pharma products. Not only is everything outside of your control, *the result has no effect on your life*.

It's easy to get sucked in, though: the bright, high definition screen, the rivalries, the strong and fast athletes, the physical struggle, the close plays and games, the play-by-play commentary and instant replays, the penalties, the celebrations after good plays, the fight songs, mascots and cheerleaders, the records, statistics and physical attributes of the players, the race for ranking in the polls, the national championship, the Heisman Trophy and the NFL draft.

And then there's coaching drama: which coaches are being wooed or fired (and [paid obscene amounts of money to go away](#)), which ones are getting in trouble for stealing play signs, phone sex or yelling at players. Taken together, all of this can make for some very compelling stories.

The advent of the transfer portal and Name, Image and Likeness compensation has dramatically changed college football and created a plethora of new stories and bits of data to track and analyze: who went into the portal and why, which teams are interested, how much NIL money they could earn, etc. I think becoming *de facto* perpetual free agents has been a boon to players and has brought into the open what would have been recruiting violations in the past. But it has also destroyed the old tradition of student athletes playing for only one alma mater. Now colleges have to admit that they're just running a semi-pro sports league on the side that has almost nothing to do with their school, which makes college football less meaningful for students and alumni.

Another problem with college football is the practice of competitive teams paying hapless teams to play them, just so the former can get an easy win (such as Georgia vs. Ball State). It seems like these pushover games comprise about a third of the schedule of competitive teams these days. What's the point? What does a win prove? What is there to cheer about?

As this season progressed, I started following FSU as they fought their way to a 13-0 season and an ACC championship. It still wasn't enough to receive an invitation to the

playoffs from the Selection Committee, which is something else that's very wrong with college football. The championship should be decided by play on the field, not by a committee. I've heard that starting next year, the top 12 teams will make the playoffs.

FSU did get invited to play in the Orange Bowl against Georgia—the two-time defending national champions and another team that got snubbed by the committee for their one close loss to Alabama. But since the outcome of the Orange Bowl didn't matter and FSU's star quarterback was injured, 23 of FSU's players bowed out—nine who declared for the NFL draft and 14 who entered the transfer portal. Surprisingly, 24 of Georgia's players also opted out of the bowl game, but only two of which declared for the draft.

Georgia was a 21-point favorite, but I watched the game anyway. The result was a 63-3 blowout, the worst FSU loss *ever* and the worst loss in *any* bowl game, *ever* (Georgia beat its own record set just last year, when it beat TCU 65-7 in the national championship game). What a strange ending to a 13-0 season.

I stopped watching midway through the third quarter—not because FSU was losing, but because it wasn't enjoyable, it wasn't sportsmanlike, it felt wrong. There was no mercy, no realization that the outcome of the game had already been decided and 50 points was enough. (To be fair, FSU did the same thing when they beat Southern Miss 66-13 and North Alabama 58-13 earlier this year, teams it really had no business playing. In 1982, I saw them beat Southern Illinois 59-8, and remember wondering why they played them.)

It reminded me of a youth soccer game I coached where my outmatched team lost 15-0 (which was also the score of my first high school soccer game, against the defending state champions). I couldn't believe the other coach could be so clueless to allow his team to run up the score like that. Yes, I understand that Georgia had a chip on its shoulder after being denied a chance to compete for a third national championship in a row. And after FSU was snubbed from the playoffs, there was some speculation that it might join the SEC, so this may have been Georgia's way of saying “You're not welcome.”

One of the commentators, who played at Florida, mentioned that when Steve Spurrier coached the team, he would be up by 80 points (on Central Michigan, a game they won 82-6) and would still be passing the ball. Yeah, and that's why “Shiny Pants” Spurrier is an asshole.

Sports are a crucible in which character is revealed and important life lessons can be learned. The motto of the youth soccer league I coached in for seven seasons was “Skills for Life,” and they didn't mean soccer skills. I taught my kids teamwork, sportsmanship, empathy, bravery (which is doing something even though you're scared), how to shake someone's hand, how to lose with dignity and win with grace. We started every game with the chant “Let's have fun!” and ended every game and practice with “We had fun!”

For years I've admired FSU coach Mike Norvell, who seems like a great guy. I was VERY impressed by [the speech he gave to his team after their Orange Bowl loss](#) (it's definitely worth two minutes of your time). That's what leadership looks like. Life is full of tough, hard lessons, and playing sports helps you learn how to deal with them.

After that game, I pulled back and reassessed my relationship with spectator sports, and concluded that I'm probably done with them. They're a massive time suck and don't affect my life, other than leaving me with less time to pursue the things in life that really matter.

Spectator sports are also the modern bread and circuses that distract the populace from those who are trying to take away their liberties. I'm sure that controligarchs such as Bill Gates, George Soros and Klaus Schwab are delighted that so many people around the world spend so much time watching and talking about spectator sports, which makes it much easier for them to achieve their goals.

There's something primal about competition, physical struggle and violence; it's what humans expect and long for. The teams, rivalries, colors and traditions appeal to our tribal nature. Cheering for a team makes you feel like you're part of something larger than yourself, a common human need. In a world where we never see our own neighbors and anomie permeates society, being a fan makes you feel like you're part of a tribe. Spectator sports provide a simulacrum of meaning to people whose lives are generally devoid of it.

If you want to change the world, forget about politics and voting. Instead, coach a youth sports team and leave your mark on the next generation. Be a role model and teach them skills for life. And forget about watching sports; instead, *play* them. You'll be happier, healthier and more productive. When you play sports, you become “the man in the arena” that Teddy Roosevelt talked about in his famous speech “Citizenship in a Republic”:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

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