

## **“What it was...was Football”**

A number of years ago Andy Griffith made a comedic record about a country bumpkin making his way into his first football game. He described it as a “whole bunch of folks a sittin’ on some boards and lookin’ at each other across a big cow pasture with funny lines across it and convicts runnin’ up and down the sides. He described two bunches of men a throwin’ and a kickin somethin’ that looked like a punkin and that it really must a been a strong punkin cause it never busted.”

Ah..Its almost here. As football season approaches, it is interesting to reflect on one of our national pastimes. Every year, thousands of both young and old people gather in huge crowds each weekend in the fall to watch an annual ritual called college football. They arrive on campus in all varieties of colorful garb measured to match particular old school colors, drive into parking lots with streamered or painted automobiles, have giant tailgate parties, and pack themselves into massive stadiums to whoop and holler for their favorite team. They often travel great distances, spend untold amounts of money on food, hotel rooms, alumni functions, and some even arrive on private jets to support their particular school on any given Saturday. What is it that creates this driving force that keeps so many returning year after year?

Perhaps it is simply a love of this game called football, but strangely, there has always been a mystery why so many of the old grads so fervently gravitate to these yearly gatherings with such unparalleled exuberance. Some will explain that the fans are merely trying to re- kindle their lost past, to recapture the youthful spirit that they once experienced while on the campus, or that perhaps that simply, some kind of lasting spirit of competition between rival institutions prevails over these contests. Once settled in the stands, the crowd often screams and shouts all types of encouragement, as if the team down on the field could actually hear what they are saying. Referees are personally chastised and cursed verbally from red-faced alums but the intended party almost never actually receives these comments. Fights often break out between complete strangers in the stands over a simple disagreement about a particular play on the field. If a certain team loses the game, the fans in the stands often grumble and stumble out of the stadium as if the world has suddenly ended and nothing else in life matters. Reading some of the internet message boards makes one wonder what in the world could make someone so angry about a simple game played by young men that are mostly in their teens. Watching some of the alumni gatherings is often comical and yet sometimes sad because many of these loyal backers actually revert to actions that resemble childlike tantrums. And what usually happens is that after the Monday morning quarterbacks have their say...much is all forgotten a few short days later.

There is no mistake that the draw to the stadiums is strong each year and college football has become a business. In between yells for “Yea Team” one will hear all kinds of advertisements blasting from bombastic obnoxious Jumbotron TV scoreboards. Football rules in the fall and money is the driving force for the school. But huge funds roll in from wealthy donors for luxurious boxes and preferred seating. Winning is everything, but for the losing fans, the time worn phrase “Wait until next year” will be shouted and heard for

countless years to come. The mystique of the draw for this fall ritual is so mystifying that it may never be understood. The lure is hard to explain and wiser men may be able to someday understand why this loyalty to the past is so strongly perpetuated year after year. Last years games are history. For most, the Saturday game at hand is the only important one. It will be discussed in newsprint and coffee groups in detail for a period of 6 days and on the seventh, it will start all over again.

And as an added postscript... I can hardly wait for when the Texas Longhorns begin the 2011 season. I just ordered my precious season tickets and again have succumbed to the lure of the fall madness myself.

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