

The Current Status of the National Football League Today

by Phillip W. Weiss

Today's NFL games are overhyped, overpriced and over-politicized. The players are reasonably good athletes but are more interested in showboating than in winning. They also lack discipline. Play calling is unimaginative and predictable. The games are riddled by penalties. If the referees called the games strictly by the book, there would be penalties called on every play.

There is no game in the world in which the referees are more deeply embedded into the on-field action than NFL football. Entire games are ruined by incessant penalties. They disrupt the continuity of the games and divert attention away from the players to the referees. But don't blame the referees. They are doing their jobs. If the players played by the rules, or at least made a good-faith effort to try comply, then the referees would call fewer penalties. Many penalties are for avoidable infractions: grabbing face masks, holdings, false starts, personal fouls, unsportsmanlike conduct, head-butting, and unnecessary roughness (with emphasis on "unnecessary"). Such penalties are attributable to lack of discipline, inadequate training, poor coaching, an oblivious front office, and low morale.

The rules are manipulated to give unfair advantage to the offense. This hikes up the scores while at the same time erodes the quality of play. However, that is a far less serious problem than the fact that, the rule changes notwithstanding, the fans are asked to pay top-dollar (with emphasis on the word "top") to watch a game played by performers who have chips on their shoulders,

have contempt for the fans, despise their country, seem self-righteous, and seem totally unappreciative and oblivious of their responsibilities as role models to children. The NFL is constantly mired in scandals of its own making. Players are associated with drug use, violent crimes and domestic discord. This raises questions as to the integrity of play on the field.

Football is a difficult game to play. It requires athletes who are in top physical shape and possess the mental discipline to avoid making mistakes. The players today just don't seem motivated to do their best. They sulk, argue, pout, and brawl. They set a terrible example for children and for the country in general. In the past, NFL football players had pride in their country. That pride is gone. The players are disengaged and detached from the fans. They thumb their noses at everything. Yet they still expect and demand to be paid top dollar. When they do decide to put aside their personal issues and concentrate on just playing the game, the players can produce impressive performances, but that is the exception and not the rule. That lack of consistency stems from a poor attitude and dooms the NFL to mediocrity.

As for the owners, they are more interested in collecting money than producing winning teams. They have no incentive to invest resources to produce winners or to make their product more attractive or improve its quality. For the owners winning takes a back seat to making money. They don't care about the fans. For them, fan loyalty means nothing. If the price is right, they will move their franchises and abandon their fans.

While the NFL is losing fans, soccer is attracting new fans. NFL football's fan base is limited almost exclusively to the United States, while interest in soccer is international. Unlike soccer, at the international level there is little interest in NFL football. The NFL's attempts to attract a wider international audience have failed. The NFL's image is tarnished, its reputation sullied; its product stale. Compared to soccer, NFL football games are static, predictable and boring.

None of this would matter if it wasn't for the NFL's bizarre, baffling and reckless decision to allow their players to engage in political demonstrations during the playing of the United States National Anthem. The effect of these demonstrations is toxic. They sow disharmony, discord and disunity and impugn the integrity of the NFL. Where exactly the NFL is planning to go with this is anyone's guess. Whatever it is, it has done nothing to improve the NFL's image, the quality of its product or help make the United States a happier place. That the NFL engages in gaudy displays of patriotism, such as unfurling American flags the size of a football field, for a price, is further of evidence of an organization that has lost its way.

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