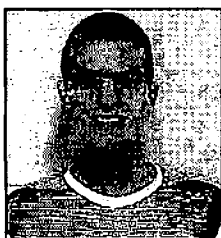


As lifelong 'Boys fan, I can finally rest easy



TRENTON DAESCHNER
SPORTS EDITOR

Six months ago, the Dallas Cowboys had just wrapped up their four-game preseason schedule. No wins, four losses and a bevy of cynical expectations. Quarterback Tony Romo was recovering from back surgery, the defense was being written off as one of the worst in NFL history, and the Cowboys looked as though they would be lucky to even finish 8-8 as they had done the previous three seasons. All hope was lost.

You see, every year around this time I have written on the Cowboys and all their woes. But this year, thankfully, I don't have to. In fact, I would like to thank a few important people for putting me out of my misery (at least for one season).

First, thank you, Jerry Jones. Six months ago, I figured I'd be bashing you again around this time. You wisely chose not to draft the playmaking, thrilling, now-rehabilitating Johnny Manziel. Instead, you drafted an offensive lineman in the first round for the third consecutive year—and it paid off. Zack Martin, along with Travis Frederick and Tyron Smith, were Pro Bowlers and the engine of Dallas' resurrected running game. So thanks, Jerry, for finally swallowing your pride and putting football before show biz for a change.

Thank you, Jason Garrett, for finally stepping into the shadows and letting your coordinators, Scott Linehan and Rod Marinelli, do all the coaching. Marinelli was able to turn one of the worst defenses in NFL history into, well, the 19th best defense in the league. Hey, it could've been worse.

Thank you, DeMarco Murray, for leading the NFL in rushing and finally, finally lifting some weight off Romo's shoulders. Without Murray and the offensive line, this Cowboys team is everything that every critic said they were before the season.

Thank you, Dez Bryant, for finally growing up and turning in a season that places you among the best wide receivers in the NFL. And yes, Dez, you caught that football late in the fourth quarter of that fateful Green Bay playoff game. It was a catch.

Finally, thank you, Tony Romo, for also growing up at a mere 34 years old. For years you've been unfairly criticized and laughed at as the ultimate "accident waiting to happen." You led the NFL in QBR, and you silenced even your toughest critics.

Fast-forward to now. The Cowboys won the NFC East, made the playoffs and won a playoff game against literally every odd possible. But it's the offseason, and it's looking more and more likely that either Dez or DeMarco will bolt in pursuit of a lucrative contract. Yes, there is uncertainty in Dallas. But when has there ever not been? One thing is for certain: the Cowboys will have plenty of expectations for next season. Bring on the cynics.