

End of football career brings new perspective on game



Alex Miller

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Football: a humble game that has become outrageously complex outside the white lines.

The modern era has taken the sport to an entirely new world. TV shows, magazines, reporters, analysts, commentators, video games, Fantasy Football and commercials.

Inside the Gridiron, however, the game is still as simple as its beginnings. *Kickoffs, routes, blocking schemes, fumbles, penalties, tackles, and touchdowns.* Despite the millions of dollars produced each year because of this sacred game, it's the mentality instilled in every sports-loving American that allows football to remain basic and pure. Because of a brown pigskin, football also creates a love that cannot be understood by some.

For me, football is not only a mentality but a lifestyle as well. For the past six years, my life has been consumed by the brutal sport. *Two-a-days, Skelly, plate circuits, sprints, 7on7 tournaments, speed ladders, film, and of course, **Friday Night Lights**.* However, this lifestyle ended on a rainy Black Friday in The Woodlands following our demoralizing loss to Angleton, and the definition of who I am ended with it.

No longer am I going to practice every day.

No longer am I going to put on a helmet, shoulder pads and cleats.

No longer am I going to run out of the giant helmet at 7:29 p.m. on Friday nights.

No longer am I going to pray with my teammates before we take the field.

No longer am I going to go to Whataburger after a game.

No longer am I going to play football.

The realization that I am no longer going to do things that I love dearly is tough to comprehend. There is not an amount of tears or regrets that can fix a hole that has been formed in my heart. I now have to accept the fact that my playing days are over and my cleats are hung up for good. But now I get to begin a new life with football, as a spectator.

Being a spectator is not as bad as people may think. Spectators can tailgate before games, get food at concession stands, and watch their favorite team in a chair back seat. It's not as exciting as being on the field, but nothing beats the atmosphere of a high school stadium in Texas on Friday nights, or colleges on Saturday afternoons.

Whether you are playing or watching, football is a

game that is loved. It's the moments of glorious triumph we dream of, like the 2013 Iron Bowl when Chris Davis returned Adam Griffith's missed 57-yard field goal 109 yards for a touchdown with 0:01 left, giving Auburn a miraculous victory over undefeated Alabama. The joy of the Auburn Family screaming "WAR EAGLE" as fans stormed the field was unimaginable, as their Tigers capped off what was a magical regular season. But when the times of sorrow happen, those are the moments we dread. It comes as personal as the Cougars' bi-district loss to Hutto last season. The first playoff game in school history, only to be stolen away with 0:12 remaining after the Cougars had a seemingly insurmountable 17-point lead in the second half. The silence on the bus on the way home from the Austin suburb on that frosty November night was painful, and was made worse in the weeks to come as the Hippos advanced all the way to the fourth round.

Times of triumph and sorrow occur in every walk of life, including football. It is the pageantry, traditions, and rivalries that cause people to love this game wholeheartedly despite what the scoreboard says when the clock strikes 0:00. The love of my life and many others will be one that cannot be replaced, all because of a brown pigskin. •