

Matt Tiano
GE 111 I
2/20/2006

Fair-Weather Fans

Red Sox fans are like a woman who sticks by her man no matter how bad he treats her. He'll cheat on her, leave her and then she'll welcome him back with open arms. She can't explain why, but she just loves the man. Yankees fans are like a woman married to a bank account. You don't speak to your man, you don't pleasure your man, you don't even care about your man until payday and then suddenly he's your best friend.

-common lore

Yes, the New York Yankees have an all-star loaded roster. Yes, the Duke Blue Devils have dominated college basketball in recent years. And yet, these teams have the worst, least loyal fans, those that prefer eating wine and cheese than going to a baseball game in bitter cold and rainy weather. The truth is, you would be doing sports fans a huge favor for choosing the teams in which you root for, for the right reasons.

It is understood that an overwhelming majority of the American population are considered casual sports fans. In no way is this unacceptable. To try to convince an entire population that one must follow sports in the extreme manner that I do would be like trying to persuade all Jewish people to become Mormon converts. However, when those casual fans immediately become enthralled by a team's success, in turn traveling to the local sporting goods store to upgrade their wardrobe to team apparel, we shall draw the line. This valiant attempt to convince others that you had been there all along would be better off absent. We know where you've been, gnawing on wine and cheese only sixth months ago.

Part of the joy of watching sports is the thrill of winning. That is why Duke has some of the least loyal fans, those that have become addicted to winning 25 games year in and year out. Consider those fans, sticking by their team in the ugliest of times,

through winless seasons? Take into account those people that feel the pain of seeing the bandwagon folks jumping up and down like *they* themselves were responsible for making the last out or making the game winning shot. I will admit there may be a sense of bitterness surrounding this issue, most likely because those people that call themselves Yankee or Duke “fans” do a victory or even championship dance much more frequently than myself. It’s painful.

Association is crucial to defining your rooting interests. As for location, you grow up cheering for the teams in your region or you don’t at all. There is absolutely no middle ground. Above that, you remain loyal. Abandoning the team during a treacherous season is highly frowned upon. On the flipside, a sudden interest when a team has a remarkable season is even worse.

Take the NBA playoffs as an example. Has it occurred to anyone that, perhaps, a length of two months may be a little long? However, this situation exemplifies the case of fair-weathered fans to perfection. If I were in charge of television network scheduling, this would be the perfect opportunity to boost ratings. The television networks and the NBA know that “fans” are suddenly showing interest. They are aware that those “fans” that didn’t watch a game in the regular season will become interested at an incredible rate, and hang around for an eternal length of time, because they feel a sudden need to make up for lost time.

Another illustration of the phenomenon lies in possibly the greatest and most storied rivalry in all of sports, that of the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox. Two quotes exemplify the situation entirely. “Red Sox fans are like a woman who sticks by her man no matter how bad he treats her. He’ll cheat on her, leave her and then she’ll

welcome him back with open arms. She can't explain why, but she just loves the man." Conversely, fair-weathered Yankee fans are "like a woman married to a bank account. You don't speak to your man, you don't pleasure your man, you don't even care about your man until payday and then suddenly he's your best friend." The Red Sox fan has become known for their loyalty for seemingly no reason, while the Yankee fan takes two weeks out of the year just so they can feel good celebrating "their" championship.

It takes courage to stop yourself from hopping on the bandwagon. If nothing else, understand your roots in relation to your rooting interests. Every time you may find yourself denying the fact, catch yourself. Was I this interested last year when these guys were winless? Are there ties to location or origin? Perhaps familial ties? Have I *ever* seen a regular season game?

I was sitting in front of the television the other night, watching arguably the best college basketball rivalry in Duke and North Carolina. Sitting alongside me was a female student who called herself a Duke "fan." I immediately asked her if she was a Duke fan, and she replied affirmatively. I moved over, most likely as a way of preventing me from displaying my uneasiness and making a scene. After hearing her refer to Duke's star players on a first name basis, I figured there was some tradition so I proceeded to ask what it was. She gave me a not-so-pleasant look, like I was asking a remarkably ignorant question, and said "*It's Duke!* They have all the best players." Immediate red flag.

With the game seemingly out of reach for UNC, the Tar Heels made a miraculous run, and even took the lead for a brief second. During the time in which Duke was up by as much as 17, she proceeded to *leave*. When she returned with 4 minutes to play, I filled her in, using as sarcastic a tone as possible. "*Your* Blue Devils were up 17, got casual,

and are now *down* by 2. Should have hung around.” You would never guess her response; “They *can't* do this to me - I won't be able to *sleep* tonight.” Oh please.

By following a few simple guidelines, you too can avoid temptation of becoming a fair-weather, bandwagon oriented, fan. You will possess a feeling of self-satisfaction, notice the benefits of perseverance, and feel the joy of overcoming adversity. Like the above “fan”, loyalty is absent. Those loyal fans are fans of their teams for the right reasons, and they feel the pain of every championship celebration they are not a part of. Myself included, we are part of very few. When the day comes that you are able to jump up and down in celebration, followed by a victory dance, ask all those that had been there at least twenty times before for a lesson. That specific dance to their twenty will be much more special and profound.

As the axiom goes, it's the journey, not the destination that counts. The same applies to sports fans. Be sure you're there for the whole ride, through adversity, struggle, as well as the good times and the bad. When the day comes, you will experience the immediate satisfaction of the destination, but that destination would be impossible without the fulfillment of knowing you took the journey.