

Tim Tebow, Hated for Doing Good?

Before I go too deep into this blog, I should probably go ahead and confess that I'm a stereotypical sports junkie. So it shouldn't be too difficult to figure out what I was doing Thursday night (along with a few million other sports fans).

Being from Oklahoma, you would assume that I was cheering for the Sooners to defeat the Florida Gators in the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) National Championship Game in Miami, Fla. The truth is, however, that I'm a graduate of The University of Tulsa and had no personal stake in the outcome.

To be honest (and at the risk of alienating some of my fellow Oklahomans), I found myself pulling for the Gators who ultimately pulled off the 24-14 victory. Why, you ask? My response is simply two words: Tim Tebow.

Before anyone worries that this next part of the blog is about to dive headlong into flat-out idol worship, be assured that I fully understand the fallible nature of man and putting people on a pedestal is a bad habit that sets both us and the object of our admiration up for disappointment and failure. So obviously there's a fine line that needs to be walked here.

With that said, let me give a quick history lesson for any non-sports junkies. Tebow, a junior from Jacksonville, is Florida's starting quarterback. He was a key part of Florida's National Championship team two years ago and last year won the coveted Heisman Trophy, an award given annually to college football's premier player.

In fact, Tebow has amassed so many awards, championships and individual records in three seasons that many experts and fans alike are already citing the Gator play-caller as one of the greatest college football players of all time.

But his football accomplishments are hardly what define this 21-year-old. Instead, it's Tebow's unwavering belief in Jesus Christ and service to others that has impressed so many onlookers. Born in the Philippines to missionary parents, Tebow has lived an exemplary life of biblical morality and personal integrity. He has ministered overseas to orphans in developing countries and has personally touched the lives of countless inmates at prisons throughout Central Florida.

These are just some of the biographical tidbits that the FOX broadcast team touted during the fourth quarter as Tebow led his team on a championship-clinching drive. As a Christian, I was both inspired and challenged. I assumed others would feel the same.

Strangely, that wasn't necessarily the case. I later found through various message boards that a disturbing number of sports fans were put off by the extended praise that Tebow was receiving. "Talk about football already," some cried. "Who cares what that Jesus freak does off the field?" others ranted. "I hope he gets caught boozing it up with a bunch of women in a club after the game," one poster nefariously wished.

A similar phenomenon took place with Orlando Magic All-Star center Dwight Howard who as a prep star took the NBA by storm and brought with him an uncharacteristic devotion to Christ. However, late 2007, it was revealed that Howard had fathered a child out of wedlock and the naysayers piled on with relentless fervor and borderline glee.

And after the BCS title game, it hit me: Our nation has a bad case of condemnation. As a whole, we can't stand to see people actually living like Christians have been called to live. It drives many of us crazy when people in the public eye display the kind of faith that has often been deemed impossible to live out—the kind of faith described in Romans 12.

So instead of being inspired and challenged, we look for fault or chinks in the armor. Sometimes we even secretly root for falls from grace so that we can justify our own imperfections, our own struggles with the sinful nature. Jesus confirms that this is a sign of His impending returning in Matt. 24:11: "And you will be hated by all nations because of me" (NIV).

If you're a believer reading and you're feeling a prick to the heart, don't be so shocked. That's because we as Christians are often caught displaying the same behavior. If there is a minister we disagree with, we can easily fall prey to this demonic spirit. I wonder how many within the body of Christ privately (or perhaps even publicly) uttered, "I told you so" when Ted Haggard's secret sin was revealed? How many of us within the church community felt no sorrow for Richard and Lindsey Roberts after their departure from Oral Roberts University? Going further back, I can only imagine how many of us were pleased with the moral failures of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker.

Can I just go ahead and plead "guilty" to having those very ungodly thoughts? I know I have done this very thing at different stages in my life, and after watching the game and reading the commentary that ensued, I can admit to feeling extremely convicted for letting silly things like fan support or even deeper issues such as theological belief systems dictate the way I viewed others' public mistakes.

Jesus tells us in Matt. 7:1 how we are to respond to the failures of fellow Christians: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (NIV).

James continues this thought by writing, "Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your

neighbor?" (James 4:11-12, NIV)

In other words, we cannot afford to treat our fellow Christian brothers and sisters the same way the world treats Christians.

So while this blog might have started out about sports and a football player named Tim Tebow, it's really about the heart condition of mankind and how our nature—left unsanctified by a Holy God—can become our own worst enemy. Whether you're a sports fan or just an average believer trying to do your best to live like Christ, let us all remember that when God is for us, no one can be against us. And trust me, there is a world full of people out there rooting for our demise.

How much stronger would we be if we could stand unified as one body with one goal in mind?

Chad Bonham is a freelance author, journalist and television, and documentary producer from Broken Arrow, Okla.