

Is Football Becoming Too Nice?

It's that time of year again. No, not the holiday season, but the football playoffs. The regular season for college football just ended, with conference playoffs next weekend. Then it is bowl season and the NCAA playoffs. The NFL still has several weeks left in its regular season, and then playoff games begin shortly after the start of the year.

Last weekend, they saw LSU defeated by Texas A&M at the end of the seventh overtime 74-72, the highest scoring FBS game in history—and the longest. Players were visibly exhausted. It seemed longer than a Florida election.

And the Monday before that, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Los Angeles Rams fought a high-scoring duel that resulted in a 54-51 win for the Rams, the third highest score in an NFL game.

But despite all this, there is growing concern about the eventual fate of the game, thanks to rule changes in NCAA and NFL.

The problem? There is rising anxiety about injuries due to the roughness of the sport. Some think the sport is too violent and that what it needs is a little more tenderness and sensitivity.

What we need is a kinder, gentler sport.

Rules on kickoff returns, targeting, and roughing the passer, many of which went into effect just this year, are threatening to change the nature of the sport. Some critics of the current game even want to prohibit linemen from lining up the three-

point stance to reduce the impact on the line.

Some of the changes are leaving fans wondering what is becoming of the sport John Madden used to extol, talking of mud, blood, and sweat.

But football was never meant to be nice, as the language we have always used to describe it suggests. There was the "Doomsday Defense," the "Orange Crush Defense." It was the "Killer Bees" and the "Monsters of the Midway," and the "Fearsome Foursome."

As rule changes take effect, NFL fans have got to be wondering, as they watch defensive rushers penalized for being mean, what exactly is wrong with tackling a quarterback? Will opposing defenses eventually have to fill out paperwork, greet the quarterback nicely, and issue a friendly request that he lay down on the ground?

Some of us are starting to think they will live to see the day when the center hikes the ball, followed by a cordial meet and greet out on the field with nicely dressed waiters serving drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

Won't that be fun to watch.

Yes, football is dangerous, as are many sports. But football's reputation is worse than the reality.

In fact, football is far from the most dangerous sport. I have a son who is an amateur mixed martial arts fighter. My friends ask, "Aren't you worried about injuries?" They never ask this about my daughter, who rides horses.

But, in fact, horseback riding is the most dangerous sport. Far more dangerous than football. But so far, no one has suggested that 3-day event riding eliminate the jumps.

Many people don't know this, but [cheerleading is more dangerous than football](#).

If we're not careful, we may one day be attending football games where no one is cheering and no one is doing anything worth cheering for.

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[Image Credit: Cpl Jody Lee Smith]