

Hook, Line and Sinker

With Tony Hooker

What if they threw a social spectacle and a football game that was just "ok" broke out?

As a first ballot hall of fame lover of the game of football, I was really surprised at how disinterested I was in the game itself.

Dorito's commercial with Chance the Rapper? Cool. Another three and out by the Rams? Not so much.

To be honest, I think my lack of interest had more to do with the cast of characters than the lack of offense.

The perception was that the Rams were only there because of a blown pass interference call that cost the Saints the NFC championship game. As for their opponents, the general feeling around most of the US is that the Patriots feature Voldemort at quarterback, being coached by Sauron.

It's funny how so many of us fall into the same trap. Why do we hate New England? As a society who supposedly venerates excellence, we sure seem to despise most of the sustained examples of it that sport provides.

Dynastic Yankees teams of the 90's? Hated them. Celtics with Bird and McHale? Ditto. Michigan & THE Ohio State University? Same.

And it's not just me. This year's college football championship game between Clemson and Alabama didn't even sell out. Of course, part of that was due to the fact that it was played on the west coast, when everyone knew the combatants were most

likely going to be coming out of the southeastern part of the country.

Speaking of despicable excellence, how many of us hate Crimson Tide football? Even with monstrous turnover in their players and coaching staff, they continue to be the team to beat, and most of America outside a few transplants and wagon jumpers can't stand them. From Saban's smug autocracy to the gazillion dollar football only facility, they make us grind our teeth.

Strangely, outside of a few hundred thousand Gamecocks fans, Clemson doesn't seem to be met with the same disdain, even though they've split the last four national titles with the Crimson Tide. You can bet that if they win another title or two, people will begin to hate them like they hate the Andy Warhol Burger King commercial.

Call it the green monster of envy. Call it jealousy. You can call it whatever you want, but it's a part of our national fabric to hate on those who are most successful. Duke basketball and LeBron James earn our ire, along with the Patriots. Locally, many of us dislike a certain black and yellow clad high school football team that we share a county with. Many otherwise rational buddies of mine wear their hatred for the team with the birds on the bats like a scarlet letter. It must reach to the big league level, right? Why else, other than a pang of jealousy, or perhaps

worry that the team along the Mississippi got better during the off-season, would a handsome, talented millionaire player to go out of his way to throw shade, not just at the team, but at the whole city and region. It makes about as much sense as Harrison Ford giving his dog an Alexa.

Maybe that's the key. All this irrational hatred can foment interest when it begins to wane. How many times do we watch those we hate with a great desire to see them fail? When they succeed, it's because they cheated, obviously. When they fail, it's because they finally got their richly deserved comeuppance. With all this being said, I'm going to try to appreciate excellence in everything else around me. Even Adam Levine's ripped physique. So, just for a moment, I'm going to see the New England and Alabamas of the sporting world for what they are, tributes to the hard work and dedication it takes get to the top and stay there. But not local high school football. No matter how good they've been or for how long, it's genetically imprinted in me to not like the team to the west. If that's a character flaw, it's one that I'm willing to live with.



South County Sports Report



Unity Boys' Basketball De-fang Sabers

Brady Porter nailed 8 three-pointers on his way to a 31 point night as the Rockets defeated St. Thomas More 73-60 on January 29. Evan Miebach helped out with 24 for UHS.

Clawed by Hawks
Porter netted 18 points and Miebach added 14, but it wasn't enough as Unity dropped a 63-53 decision to Prairie Central on February 1.

Girls' basketball Taught by Sages
Elyce Knudsen continued to make a push toward post-season accolades with 13 points, but it wasn't enough as the Rockets dropped a 43-27 decision to Monticello on January 28.

Bust Ghosts
Knudsen poured in 29 points as UHS defeated IVC 57-29 on February 2.

Wrestling
Tavius Hosley (106), Pate Eastin (145) and Cade Scott (182) earned first place finishes to lead their team to a second place finish at the IHSA 1A regional wrestling tournament that was hosted by Unity on February 2. Second place finishers for the Rockets included Quinn Shan-

non (170), Connor Eastin (195) Oran Varela (220) and Austin McDaniel (285). Ben Gavel (126) earned 3rd place and Matt Decker finished 4th at 138.

Dance
Rockette Destini Newberry qualified her solo routine for the IDTA state finals in Springfield on February 8.

VGH Girls' basketball Fall to Titans
Kyleigh Block's nine points led VGH, but the Blue Devils fell to Tri-County 55-25 on January 28.

Clean Streaks
Kyleigh Block tallied 23 points and reigning News-Gazette player of the week Aliyah Holloman added 21 as the Blue Devils defeated Martinsville 58-25 on January 31.

Boys' basketball

Crowded by Tribe
Jared Stevens hit three 3-pointers on his way to a 19 point night and dished out 8 assists, but VGH dropped a 71-59 decision to Judah Christian on January 31. Will Wilson had 15 points and 12 rebounds for the Hawks.

Cage Panthers
Stevens was the only double digit scorer as the Hawks won a 63-51 road contest over Ob-long on February 1. Jake Ever sole and Will Wilson added 9 points, and Logan Nohren pitched in with 8. Nohren ran down 10 rebounds to lead the Hawks on the glass, and Eversole pilfered 5 steals and Stevens swiped 4 to lead the team defensively.

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