

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

2 January 2017

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Victories and Defeats

Looking back on the year 2016, several events jump out at me in the way of victories and defeats, or wins and losses, however you prefer to label these things. Like so many of you, I love to root for the underdog. We do that as Americans.

To begin with, a classic Super Bowl took place between the Carolina Panthers and the Denver Broncos last February. You have Cam Newton, the young potential superstar quarterback for the Panthers going up against the aging Peyton Manning, the quarterback for the Broncos who is retiring at age 39 whether they win or not. Clearly a Football Hall of Fame candidate, Peyton is considered to be one of the greatest quarterbacks of all time. His father, Archie Manning, was also a pro quarterback, but never won a Super Bowl. Peyton's younger brother, Eli Manning, is a two-time Super Bowl champion quarterback with the New York Giants. Until the 2016 Super Bowl, older brother Peyton had only one Super Bowl victory. No one really expected the Broncos to make it to Super Bowl L (50) with a somewhat battered quarterback who was finishing his 18-year pro career, hoping for one last victory. The oddsmakers all had the upstart Cam Newton and the Panthers rolling over the Broncos with what everyone believed would be the first of many Super Bowl victories for Cam. One problem in all of this: Someone forgot to tell the Broncos! Instead, the Broncos came out and outplayed the Panthers, sacking and chasing a hapless Cam Newton repeatedly, finishing with a score of 24-10. What a great way to end a career!

Second on my list, which is chronological, would be the Golden State Warriors of the NBA (National Basketball Association). As reigning champs from 2015, the Warriors went on a tear in 2016, setting a new record for the most wins in a regular season. They won 73 of their 82 games. On top of that, superstar and 2-time MVP Steph Curry, set a ridiculous record for the most 3-point shots made in the season, finishing with 402! In the finals, they were up against LeBron James and the Cavaliers for the national championship. The Warriors went up 3 games to 1 in the best of seven. But the Warriors simply ran out of gas, losing their final three games, which gave the Cavaliers the championship. But the Warriors are at it again. Their record of wins and losses is the same as it was this time last year. Can they win the championship this year? Many are doubting they can do it. Just don't tell the Warriors!

My third selection comes in the arena of Olympic swimming. This past summer we witnessed yet again, another awesome display of swimming prowess by none other than the force of nature known as Michael Phelps. After the Summer Games four years ago in London, Phelps declared he was done swimming in Olympic competition. But with the Rio Olympics in 2016, he just couldn't pass up the challenge. And at 31, with his fourth Olympics in his cross-hairs, he believed he still had more medals to win. Many had already written him off, saying his best

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days were behind him. After all, competitive swimming was for those in their teens and early 20s. Someone forgot to tell Michael. Six more medals, as it turns out, with five gold and one silver. He is the most decorated athlete in Olympic history with a total of 28. Of that number, 23 are gold. We were privileged to witness athletic greatness. You may never see the like again.

Then there are the perennial losers, baseball's Chicago Cubs. The Cubs last won the World Series in 1907, and again in 1908. The drought lasted 108 years. Baseball teams play 162 games in a season. To win anything close to 100 games is considered a phenomenal achievement. The Cubs racked up 103 wins in 2016. But could they win the World Series? Or would they choke, or have something weird happen so that they would lose again? The "Cub Faithful" held their collective breath. No one thought they would actually win. But no one told the Cubs. They then entered the playoffs, defeating all comers. All-around utility player, Ben Zobrist, was picked up by the Cubs at the end of the 2015 season. Zobrist had previously been with the Kansas City Royals when they won the World Series in 2015. He was also chosen as the World Series MVP that year. His contract was up, so the Cubs nabbed him. The 2016 World Series between the Chicago Cubs and the Cleveland Indians was a barn-burner, and the greatest World Series I've ever witnessed. It went all the way to the seventh game, but the kicker was the Cubs, down 3 games to 2, had to win the final two games in Cleveland to win the Series. Adding to the tension and the drama, the Cubs got a bunch of runs early, making it appear like a runaway win. The Indians weren't willing to go away quietly, tying the score in the ninth inning, sending the game into "extra innings". In the top of the 10th inning Zobrist drove in the go-ahead run. They added one more run for insurance, which was fortuitous since the Indians scored a run in the bottom of the 10th inning, falling one run short of tying the game again. The Cubs are World Series Champs after 108 years! And the MVP? Again, Ben Zobrist. Two years in a row, with two different teams. Incredible!

My final selection for victories and defeats goes to President-elect Donald Trump. This brash, arrogant, self-aggrandized billionaire had no chance of becoming the Republican nominee for President of the United States, let alone actually winning the race to the White House. Out of 17 Republicans vying for their party's endorsement, the most unlikely of the wannabes was Trump. Despite his ill-advised and rude remarks aimed at anyone who opposed him, he survived to become the nominee. Of course, he was never going to win the presidency, because Hillary already had that locked up, right? That's what everybody said! Somebody forgot to tell Trump. His victory over Hillary Clinton was stunning, to say the least. His final Electoral College vote count was 304, easily eclipsing the 270 needed to win. And he will be our 45th President in three weeks!

So, what are the impossible/improbable odds you're facing this year? Too hard, is it? No chance, they say? I'll bet someone forgot to tell you!