

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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Don't Count the Score at Halftime

Well, after Sunday's Super Bowl game I just couldn't pass up the opportunity to put in my two cents worth. Wow! What a game!

In an attempt at full disclosure, I freely admit that I love sports. In particular, football sits at the top. My step father played football in the early 1930s at the University of Alabama. He actually played with Bear Bryant! That's during the era when the players wore leather helmets! Fortunately, I came along in the 50s and 60s when we had transitioned to hard-shell polycarbonate helmets which also sported a single crossbar as a facemask, but eventually expanded to provide more protection for the face along with a rubber mouthpiece.

I would have loved to have been a star football player. Alas! Twas not to be. I was a perennial benchwarmer. But it wasn't for lack of effort. I played in 9th grade at Highland Park Junior High in Dallas, Texas, a geographic region in the country where football is a religion! In 11th grade I played on the JV Team at Wellesley High School in Massachusetts. In one game I really got my bells rung! The good news is I laid a good lick on the quarterback, tackling him for a loss. After the pile of players moved off, I stood up, weaving from side to side. A couple of guys directed me toward the sidelines where I promptly walked into the head coach. He grabbed me and sat me down on the bench. I was still out of it even after the bus ride back to school. I played again in my sophomore year at Azusa Pacific College (now University). I also played for two of my four years in the Marine Corps. One year I played for the squadron team at VMFA 531 at MCAS El Toro, and the next year I played with a combined Navy/Marine team at Naval Station, Subic Bay in the Philippines. Later as a Navy chaplain I coached the MAG 39 Marine Team at Camp Pendleton, California for two years. All told, I had a blast in and around the game of football. I often thought the best job in the world would be as an NFL coach.

Since I was born and raised in New England, and my step father was from the Boston area, we rooted for all the professional sports teams from Boston. The Red Sox, the Celtics, and of course the Boston Patriots (later renamed the New England Patriots). California has pretty much been home for me since 1965, so I've always rooted for a local team. I have been a San Francisco 49ers fan for the last 30 years. However, with Colin Kaepernick's disrespectful behavior toward our flag this past season, I have taken a leave of absence from the Niners.

Ah, but I have always followed the Patriots! And ever since Coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady teamed up around the turn of the century, it has been an amazing run of victories culminating in what was their 5th Super Bowl victory on Sunday. The game was, dare I say, one for the ages! One of the

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monikers attributed to Tom Brady is "Tom Terrific". This has been well earned because of his ability to will his team to win when things were just not going their way. This last Sunday's Super Bowl was no exception.

The young, fresh, upstart Atlanta Falcons had arrived at the Super Bowl having easily vanquished opponents with a frightening ease, bearing a confidence that was palatable. But this bunch had never been in a Super Bowl game before. In fact, only four players on the Falcons had ever played in the Big Game. On the other hand, the Patriots had 22 players who had been to the "Big Dance". Two years ago they had won their fourth Super Bowl in a squeaker. Now they're back for another try.

The buildup to this clash between these two titans of the pigskin had the adversaries trading body blows, scoring somewhat at will, believing the team in possession of the ball in the final minutes of the game would win.

Well, some of that prediction was realized. But no one could have foreseen this Hollywood movie ending. Both teams remained scoreless at the end of the first quarter, all the while testing each other for weaknesses. The second quarter was a disaster for the Patriots, and a boon for the Falcons. In uncharacteristic fashion, the Patriots committed not one, but several egregious errors which the Falcons pounced on, gaining what appeared to be an insurmountable lead of 21-3 at the end of the first half. The three points the Patriots managed to get was at the very end of the half, appearing more cosmetic than surmounting any sort of scoring threat promised in the second half. The 21-3 halftime score was grim for New England. But this game was far from over!

The start of the second half didn't seem to go any better for the Patriots. Instead, the Falcons marched down the field, easily scoring a touchdown, boosting the score to 28-3. Any reasonable person would have said, "This game is over". But I've watched Tom Brady too many years to ever count him out. The Patriots finally scored their first touchdown at the end of the third quarter, but missed the extra point kick. Score: 28-9. The fourth quarter was another story altogether. The Patriots, under Brady's steady command, began a comeback that will be discussed, dissected and debated for years to come. The Falcons at this point still had an apparently insurmountable lead. But little mistakes crept into their nearly flawless game to that point. The Patriots made them pay with touchdowns, finally scoring the tying score with less than one minute left on the clock.

Regulation play ended in a tie at 28 apiece. This was now the first ever overtime period in the 51-year history of the Super Bowl. After the coin toss, the Patriots elected to receive the ball. You could sense this was it. Tom Brady led his team down the field with a touchdown to end the game and secure a fifth Super Bowl victory and set all kinds of records on a career that is nothing short of amazing. The Patriots overcame a 25-point deficit, the most in Super Bowl history.

Often during the years we were raising our daughters, when they seemed to drift from what we had taught them, I would say to my wife, "Don't count the score at halftime".

So, let me ask you, "What are you going through at this time?" Whatever it is, "Never give up!" Because it's never over until God says it's over.