



THE PUSSAFYING OF PRO FOOTBALL

By Kerry Schmidt

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First off, hey, December 7. Happy Pearl Harbor Day to all my friends from another country.

Also, a reader emailed me last week saying I did not close my column with my signature “single malt” remark. I checked, and I did make a little mention of it.

But to make sure, I will tell you I am starting this column having already indulged myself three fingers of my finest. I do better work that way.

Just ask my idol – you can’t, he’s dead, Hunter S. Thompson, whose trademark was “lots of drugs, alcohol and violence.”

Earned him a Pulitzer Prize. Gonzo journalism!

NFL: Nice Fluffy League.

Back in my days, the good ole 60’s into the late 80’s, and even way back into the 50’s. NFL football was a very rough sport. Every game was a WAR!

Violent sport, to be more succinct.

Like the saying goes, NBA is a contact sport, NFL is a collision sport.

Back then, a CB could knock the crap out of a wide receiver from snap to play’s end. None of this five yards only crap, then hands off.

And when a WR “came into the middle,” well, he was taking his life in his hands. You got a WR racing in one direction, reaching out to catch the ball and at the same time, you have an angry CB or safety racing in the opposite direction, and he will hit the WR with enough force to, as the great Ronnie Lott of the 49’ers said, “to break the guy in half.”

Dick Butkis, generally regarded as the hardest hitting player of all time at middle linebacker, would say, “God, I love hitting those guys so damn hard that slobber and snot comes flying out of them.”

As Steelers hard hitting CB Troy Palamalu said, “Those great players would not be able to play today. They would be fined or suspended on nearly every play. The NFL is a violent, contact sport. That is part of what makes it so popular.”

When asked to give details, he declined to comment further, but he criticized the league in October for diluting the essence of football. He likened NFL football to “a pansy game.”

He also complained about expectations the league has for him to alter his techniques to comply with the rules. You could imagine the steam coming out of his ears.

The NFL started the pussafying of football several years ago, when they made special rules about hitting the QB’S. At first, the simple rule was that you could not hit the QB after he had released the ball.

OK, fine.

But then all this began to spread, like a giant blob of bacteria.

No helmet to helmet contact, no hitting below the knees from behind, and then, the many strict rules on when and how you could blast a WR.

I agree with the QB part, and the below the knee stuff, but all the rest? Gimme a break. This ain’t flag football.

Numerous fines, and even some suspensions have been levied.

Listen to some of the players: Steelers’ safety Ryan Clark was flagged for making a “defenseless” hit on Patriots WR Wes Welker.



Welker had come across the middle, and as he reached for the ball, Clark, not seeing that the ball had been deflected, launched himself and laid Clark out. He was down for a few minutes and did not play the remainder of the game.

The refs told Clark that it was because he had “left his feet (launched) to get the guy. Clark was later cleared for any wrong doing.

With all LB’s and CB’s, they say it is almost always a split second decision. “If you hesitate, he may be gone.”

Clark said, It’s a case of whether I pay an NFL fine, or do I try to support my family with some other job because I can’t tackle?

“I did nothing dirty. 10 times out of 10 I think he’s going to catch the ball, so I’m going to hit him.”

The NFL calls a flag for “point of emphasis,” whatever the hell that means.

Point of collision, I guess.

Here is an example of an illegal hit. Jets’ safety Eric Smith for an illegal face to face (helmet to helmet) hit on Arizona’s WR Anquan Boldin. He incurred three facial fractures and lost several teeth.

Smith was fined \$50,000 and suspended for one game, without pay.

Having seen the play several times, yes, it was a flagrant, illegal hit, but in Smith’s behalf, he had that “split second” decision to hit him or not.

Protecting the head is paramount. But much of the other stuff is crap.

And get this. Patriots nose tackle Vince Williams is \$35,000 lighter for what the league termed PATTERN OF AGGRESSION! God almighty, aggression is what football is all about!

Vikings defensive end Jared Allen has been fined a total of \$80,000 this year.

He said, “I will play football the way I play football. I’m not a dirty player. I never have been. This ain’t ping pong.”

The NFL will not give any specifics, but more than 300 fines have been levied through the first 12 weeks.

NFL executive VP Ray Anderson says unnecessary roughness penalties have increased more than 33% over last year.

“If there’s one clear message, it’s that we will not relent in protecting player safety.”

BS!

The NFL Players Union says they will push next year for independent arbitrators next season.

Currently, the league office makes the calls.

Anderson says that every play (about 2300) is reviewed each week and that about 30 (1.3%) result in fines, but they are not announced nor is the amount.

When you talk with defensive players, there is a “significant” amount of defiance and confusion when considering how the league’s crackdown applies.

Baltimore’s All-Pro LB, Ray Lewis – one of the hardest hitting and most feared players in the game today, says, “I don’t care what the NFL thinks. If you do, it takes away from who you are.

You can’t go out and worry about the NFL fining you because you run and tackle someone at full speed!”

Lewis then said of a \$7,500 fine levied on Giants defensive end Justin Tuck for a hit on Dallas QB Brooks Bollinger as “The worst bleeping call I’ve ever seen in football.”

Then with sarcasm dripping all over his statement, “But hey, it’s their game, their prima donna position, QB. Don’t let those poor babies get hurt!”

The fine on Tuck was later rescinded, but Tuck said, “their ever-so-protective scrutiny might have toned down football’s aggression.”



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

He adds, "Some of the plays that they call us on, it puts us in a predicament. What else can we do? Hell, this is the way we have been taught to play football since we were about 6-years old. The league needs to understand the speed of the game. The plays happen in split seconds." Even some offensive players are questioning the rulings. Boldin said he did not think Smith's hit on him (resulting in the facial fractures) should have drawn a fine. "It wasn't fair because it wasn't his intent to hurt me. The way guys are getting fined these days, it's crazy. It's hurting the game. The fact that this sport is so violent is part of its attraction."

Many of the fines are levied during the week after games. The referees did not throw flags.

"When people are going back and getting fined days after the game, it makes it real hard to know exactly what they want," says Steelers' WR Hines Ward, who was fined \$15,000 for successive weeks in October that drew no flags.

"Players are preparing for next week's game and boom, they find out they were fined for something last week. It sucks."

Lott says of today's game, I can see both sides. But how many games today can you get through where there is no injury. It's a fine line. The violence has been there forever, but the strike zone has changed."

I've spoken with a number of NFL players on this. They say they get excited when they score, but when one guy makes a "great, bon-rattling tackle," they say they really go nuts. They love it. And why not. This is how they've been taught to play from the beginning.

Anyone who has ever played the game has heard their coaches say, "you've got to be tougher than the next guy. Tough it out, etc."

As one player said, "you lay some guy out, and he stays down for a few seconds, you get goose bumps. Likewise, many a fan gets more excited on a huge hit than on a good offensive play. The football field is a war zone. And fans love it that way.

Violence

Of a far different type.

Will someone please tell me why in the hell a big hot shot pro football player (or other pro athlete) feels that they must walk around with a gun?!

Yea, it's true that many of them are not exactly Einstein, but...?

Giants WR Plaxico Burress is the latest show case of stupidity.

Not only did he illegally carry a gun, the idiot shot himself!

He has been charged with two felonies: Illegal possession of a gun and illegal discharge of same.. The Giants quickly suspended him, without pay, for the remainder of the season. It is quite likely he will never put on a Giants uniform again. And, depending on the outcome of his legal problems, he may join doggy boy Vick in the state slammer.

A number of athletes have done similar dumb things, but when New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg immediately went public, condemning Burress in a very strong and brutal commentary, you can be sure that his prosecution will be major.

Bloomberg seems he has made it his personal vendetta to make sure Burress does time. He even mentioned "3 1/2 years."

I think society today is pretty fed up with hot shot pro athletes doing stuff like this.

Karl Malone, who had a Hall-of-Fame career in the NBA with Utah, said,

With fame, comes responsibility. And common sense. When you are a huge celebrity, you will likely be a target of some jerk trying to make himself look big."

Being a star athlete does open many doors for them. But these athletes do not need to go to late-night clubs, into their VIP rooms and flaunt their status.

Trouble will quickly find them. Pacman Jones is the poster boy for this problem.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

As Malone said, “they do not need, and should not be out partying in public into the early morning. They are just asking for trouble.”

Some athletes who do go out at least have enough sense to hire a licensed, professional body guard, to keep them out of this type of trouble.

This thing will play itself out over time. And, others will likely join the stupidity club along the way.

The BCS (BS MESS) will start boiling over after yesterdays games. Favored Florida, if they beat No. 1 Alabama, will likely vault into the No. 2 spot (Oklahoma will be No. 1), and you will hear a lot from Texas, among other stuff. It is possible that one of the polls could leave Alabama at No. 2. No matter, it’s another mess, so stay tuned.

Southern Cal should easily defeat UCLA, thus sending them to the Rose Bowl against.....Joe Paterno (Ja-Pa as he is known to his many fans) and Penn State.

Win or lose, it would be a great final chapter for Jo Pa. At 81 years of age, and with 45 years as head of the Penn State football program, this would be a grand exit.

Yes, Henry, I will now imbibe myself with another 2-3 fingers of single malt.