

A football fan in despair

Football reminds us to get up and move forward when we fall. It reminds us that sometimes in life, you fumble. Don't dwell on it. Handle the situation better the next time. Sometimes life is painful. Learn to live with it and work through it.



HAMID TAVAKOLI

I CAN'T tell you how excited I was for football season to start this year. Being somewhat of an expert in mood disorders, I was inclined to write to the American Psychiatric Association about a new diagnosis I termed "football withdrawal affective disorder," similar to seasonal affective disorder and occurring between February and August.

Unfortunately, my jubilation for the start of this season has been met with nothing but disappointment. The current events in the NFL are tragic. Players such as Ray Rice, Greg Hardy, Ray McDonald, and now Adrian Peterson, are filling TV and computer screens over their poor decisions.

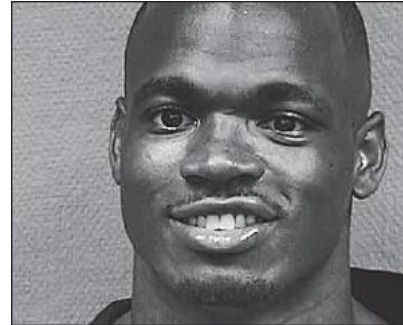
Football embodies American values and provides life lessons. It tells us to get up and

move forward when we fall. It reminds us that sometimes in life, you fumble. Don't dwell on it. Handle the situation better the next time. And sometimes life is painful. Learn to live with it and work through it.

The game means so much to me, and represents the peaks and valleys in life so well, that I often use it in clinical settings to help patients and to teach medical students and residents.

I have been in love with the game since I was 12, shortly after I came to this country in 1985. To watch men wearing what appeared to be body armor chase a ball — not round! — was utterly riveting.

But football also helped me assimilate here. As a fresh immigrant, I didn't quite know how to acclimate or adjust to



Adrian Peterson, the celebrated Minnesota Vikings running back, was arrested Sept. 13 after being charged with child abuse.

HOUSTON POLICE
AP

my new world: what to wear to school, how to act with peers. At first I was reserved and didn't make many friends. Of course, having no handle on the English language hampered communication, as gesturing can take you only so far.

That was the year this political refugee entered West Virginia and discovered many things he would like to forget. But it was also the year of Da Bears. The team was so talented and confident. The players made a rap song and music video before going to the Super Bowl, where they demolished the New England Patriots. Remember "The Super Bowl Shuffle"?

To all their fans, me included, they were so cool and amazing. It didn't occur to me at first that some would find them quite obnoxious. I grasped that revelation when I finally decided to break out of my shell, throw aside my V-neck sweater and don a bandana on my head that proclaimed "Pluto" in black marker. Just like Jim McMahon, the Bears quarterback.

That day, while riding home in the back of the bus, I was jumped by a bunch of guys. Another Bears fan came to fight alongside me, and a huge brawl ensued. Then the bus pulled over, the bus driver screamed and shouted, police

came, parents and guardians got involved and everyone went home two hours later.

I had a nice shiner on my eye the next day. But I made my first friend. Another Bears fan.

I have lost track of that friend, but I have remained a Bears fan. More importantly, I have become a big football fan. And I am not the only immigrant who has fallen in love with the sport.

It happens often, and the same cannot be said about baseball. There is something about football that makes it quintessentially American.

As Gerard Barker, an Englishman, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* a few years ago, football is "like a chess match with violence."

I am extremely sad that my favorite shows on ESPN and NFL Network have become like Jerry Springer. I am tired of hearing about players with domestic problems, bad conduct and poor choices. Serve them their legal papers, punish them, and then move on to the game.

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