

FOOTBALL WUSSES

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In his 1997 bestselling book, “Brain Droppings,” the late George Carlin wrote his famous stage monologue on the violence of football vs. the tameness of baseball. Among other things, he compared football helmets to baseball caps; contrasted football blitzes and bombs to baseball bunts and bloopers; and noted that football has blocking, clipping, spearing, piling on, unnecessary roughness while baseball has the squeeze play, the sacrifice fly, the walk, the fielder’s choice.

In a Washington Post article, sports writer Tom Boswell wrote a similar piece pointing out that in football you march down the field and score; while in baseball, you wait for a walk, take your stretch, toe the rubber, tap your spikes, play ball and run home. Even political columnist George Will noted that football combines two of the worst elements of American life: violence and committee meetings.

But this Words installment goes against the flow, presenting the docile side of football and exposing the rough edges of baseball. Don’t football players usually huddle (and some even hold hands) to discuss protecting the passer who might be launching a Hail Mary pass? If it’s an immaculate reception, there certainly will be some joyful dancing and merriment in the end zone. Aren’t there many other timid plays and situations in the course of a football game, like free kicks, safeties, neutral zones, flea flickers, dead balls, weak sides, kneeling, and fair catches? Also, aren’t many football games played in such benevolent venues as the Humanitarian Bowl, Liberty Bowl, Rose Bowl, Sugar Bowl, and Fiesta Bowl?

By contrast, baseball is a sport where each team has at least eight hitters with baseball bats – three foot pieces of lumber – that are sometimes used to hit screwballs and an occasional bleeder. If at least three of these heavy hitters follow one another in the lineup, it’s called murderers’ row. In a baseball game, there might be bean balls, suicides, steals, twin killings, and hit and runs. In addition, you can get shut out, knocked out of the box, put out, picked off, thrown out, and run down. Besides being tough, baseball players need to be smart - you won’t see them get penalized for having too many players on the field.

On the gridiron sidelines, trainers are standing by to squirt Gatorade into the players’ open mouths - like a mother bird feeding the gaping beaks of her nestlings. No one near the baseball diamond waits on the players - they drink water and Gatorade all by themselves. Some players are even isolated in a bullpen and kept ready to come out to kill an opponent's rally; others pace in their dugout chewing tobacco and spitting a lot. So, as for football players’ toughness rating, they need to expectorate if they expect to rate.

Finally, with all the talk about football players kneeling during the national anthem, it should be noted that baseball is not only our national pastime but also our most patriotic sport. The next time you attend a baseball game, listen for the last six words of our national anthem: ‘... home of the brave, play ball.’