

Team loyalty a tough sell

Several years ago two Kansas State marketing professors studied what drives people to identify with one sports team over another. They found four elements that consistently predict identification: mystique, significant others, proximity, and prestige. While proximity and prestige only lead to cognitive identification, mystique and significant others lead to affective commitment. These two factors are what sell sweatshirts, hats, and tickets.

Family and friends affect a fan's identification with and emotional attachment to a team. If you grow up and your parents love Kansas State football, for example, chances are you will also become emotionally vested in the team, the professors said.

That must explain why I, raised by parents who didn't know a linebacker from a comebacker, have at different times in my life rooted for the St. Louis Cardinals AND the Chicago Cubs, which is as absurd as cheering for both the Cleveland Browns AND the Pittsburgh Steelers, of which I'm also guilty.

This capricious loyalty has mutated in my offspring. The 8-year-old, a big sports fan, appears to be headed toward unforgivable territory however: cheering for whatever team is in first place. About 3 years ago when he was first old enough to follow anything he was a Philadelphia Eagles fan, which was fine since we live in Pennsylvania. The "Iggles" just happened to make the Super Bowl that year.

Then a year later he began backing the "Stillers" as they made an improbable run to the big game. How many kids have a McNabb AND a Roethlisberger jersey? And last season he was sporting blue and orange with "Urlacher" on the back when the Bears made it to February!

The young man was born in Chicagoland and responded thusly when I inquired about his changing loyalties, which was a good deflection. But last month when he declared he was now a Dallas Cowboys fan, well that was too much even for this veteran fence-sitter. He got an earful from both his mother and me on front-running, bandwagon-jumping fair weather fandom.

None of this is important of course, and perhaps the youngster has found a key to sports fan happiness. At the rate he's going, he'll never feel the despair and heartbreak of watching HIS team endure losing season after losing season.

Led by Chris Ralston, Lake Elsinore Storm Baseball, a team will build a full-size pitcher's mound inside during the STMA trade show on Thursday, January 17, from 4 to 8:30 p.m. Be sure to stop by and watch the development from a flat concrete surface to a pitcher-perfect mound. Stabilizer Solutions will be donating product to build the mound.



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