

Sports Writing in Prisons

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I know it sounds like some kinda oxymoron, but try to follow me here. There is a lot to be said about writing in prison, and what can be accomplished by those who write.

If you are familiar with my writing, you know that I have done a lot of writing while in prison. Since I got here at USP Tucson on December of 2012, I have written over 1000 pages of essays, short stories and journals that I have sent to churches, ministries, colleges and universities, friends, family and blogs.

What I try to do is to open some doors of communication for others to see what inmates go through, to create some understanding and some attempt to "humanize" those who are doing time.

But to do that, I have to try to share a fair side of prison, giving you a contrast of what you may think you know, and what is actually going on. It takes a good writer to do that, one who can be successful in sharing contrasting sides of an issue. Now, this does not mean I am surrendering my beliefs, because there are a lot of prison issues that society has no clue about, that need to be addressed. But unless I can give you reason to care, most will be under the illusion that "all inmates are liars".

We REALLY need to dispel that myth...

So, one of the things I like doing is writing about sports. I used to work in radio and television, doing sports announcing, so this is kinda up my alley. Here in prison, during the 2017 college football season, I decided to use my skills to do some sports writing. I used what little info I had on last year's college teams, and wrote short predictions of what I thought each game would end up being, with a predicted score and spread.

What this helped me to do is to see both sides of a situation, something I learned while in college. When I was younger, I used to say to my professor, "this team is going to kill the other team because they score a lot of points", or some logic that, at the time, sounded right.

My professor would always say to me, "and what do you think the OTHER team is gonna do"? I laugh at it now, but what he was saying is that there are two sides to every story... well, at LEAST two sides. No argument is one-sided, and sports is a perfect example of that.

So, during the 2017 college football season, I decided to break down all the FBS games. All I had as my resources was the 2016 Phil Steel college football book (an essential to football fans), and my scores from the 2016 season. That's all I had, but it would have to do.

So, during the course of the season, I spent DAYS writing out my predictions. Doing all these games gave me time to practice the idea of seeing both sides of a situation, but still coming to a conclusion that I believed in. Let me give you an example:

The following is what I wrote on the week of November 25th, 2017, for the Utah State/Air Force game:

Air Force lost 44-19 to Boise State last week, and this is their last game. At 3-8, there is no bowl for them. They've scored 340-341, for a 30-31 losing margin. They did beat Colorado State this year, their best win. AF beat Utah State 27-20 last year, and 35-28 the year before. But losing 25 SRs crippled AF, easily shown from a 10-3 record to 3-8. Utah State also lost 25 SRs and was 3-9 last year. This year, after blanking Hawaii 38-0 last week, they are 6-5, and bowl eligible. They've scored 337-286, for a 30-27 margin. No quality wins, but played Wyoming close. The last 2 meetings have been within 7. I like Utah State, but AF lost to 3 good teams. I'm taking Air Force to win at home by 3. (34-31)

Just so you know... Air Force won 38-35...

I did every game that way, breaking it down based on what intel I had, and trying to see both sides of the situation. After using what I had, I then came to a conclusion based on what I believed.

Now, why is this important to a writer in prison? Because to make a point, I have to be able to share with the reader the facts, and the reason why I am making this point. One of the biggest problems in prisons, like here at USP Tucson, is transparency. They don't tell you about prison abuse, or how officers break the law and hide behind the "shield", as if they are allowed to break the law. They don't tell you how there are some good people here who made a mistake in life, and are trying to do something good. They don't tell you how the Federal Courts assign Public Defenders who no better than high school students in a debate class, who do the absolute least to defend an inmate, but get paid whether you win or lose.

So somebody has to share that intel, to give you another side that prisons neglect to tell you. Is it possible that the prison can be WRONG in some of the things they do? Absolutely. But because you don't know this, the assumption is that none of this actually exists.

So, I try to share what I can, while giving you both sides of the coin. Prison rape, retaliation, as well as friendships and faith are part of prison, the good and the bad. I spent 5 years (2012-2017) writing on this, sharing hundreds of letters to readers, trying to give them both sides of prison life. If I can do that, I can help the reader see what is really going on, and allow me to draw some conclusions as to what can be done to help solve some of the issues here.

Now, not every argument is clear cut, or even accurate. My example of the Utah State/Air Force game was pretty close, but some were way off. For example, here's one from the same week, the breakdown of the Appalachian State/Georgia State game:

Georgia State has scored a TOTAL of 6 pts in the 3 meetings against App State. Last year, App State won only 17-3, but avgs a 32-2 score. App State is 6-4, but struggles on the road. They've scored 287-239, for a 29-24 winning margin. Losing to ULM and UMASS on the road, and beating Idaho by 3 & Texas State by 7 raises concerns. Georgia State is 6-3, after starting off 0-2. GA State scores 205-216, for a 23-24 margin. The 56-0 loss to Penn State and 34-10 loss to Troy augments the score. Both are going to a bowl, but I have to take the home team this time, breaking the trend. I like Georgia State by 3 (30-27).

Appalachian State won easily, 31-10...

So I was wrong, but the facts were still there. Sometimes we have the answer, but refuse to acknowledge it. I made mention that the avg score between these two teams was 32-2. What was the final score? 31-10.

If you read my breakdown closer, you might see that most of the facts supported Appalachian State. So why did I go with the other team? Ignorance I guess; it just seemed that the home team SHOULD win. In prison writing, often times I present a lot of facts about how prisons treat inmates. Staff break the law by violating First Amendment rights, and the prison blatantly refuses to admit they were wrong. Officers beat inmates, or steal property, or ship inmates for no valid reason, but society thinks it is just a case of "sour grapes" for inmates...

Until it happens to one of THEIR loved ones.

The facts are there, it has been presented, but it is up to the reader...YOU to accept them, and draw a conclusion about what is really going on in prisons. I don't say I'm always right in what I share; hey, we all miss it sometimes. But if I can try to give you both sides of the situation, it might help you see that inmates do have a valid point on some issues.

Sometimes we can be right, like some of the games I predicted. Of course, I can be off some too, but if I do my best to present to you the facts, it can bring clarity to prison abuse and prison life, and possibly some sympathy.

If you get a chance, check out my other writings, or write to me for some of my essays or any questions you may have. I'd love to hear from you. Until next time...

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