

Joel Stein

The Awesome Column

A League of Their Own

Adventures with women who love football and the women who love to hate them

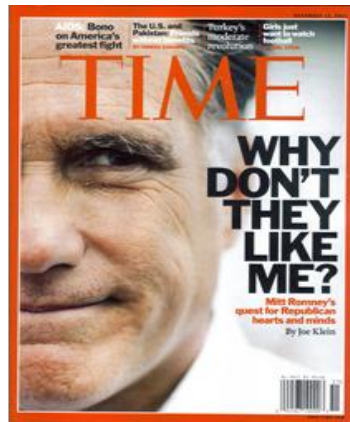
I DON'T LOVE SPORTS, BUT I DO LOVE women who love sports. They're passionate and competitive and don't mind when things get a little rough. My lovely wife Cassandra, however, hates sports. "You're rooting for this guy?" she says whenever I try to watch a game. "Do you know this guy? Is he your best friend? Are you related to him? You're about to punch your friend who's rooting for the opposing team because some millionaire from your state happened to buy the New Jersey Whatever?" It is hard to argue with a woman who came up with the most perfect team name in history.

The only thing that makes Cassandra more angry than me watching sports is women watching sports—especially football. She believes that all women hate football and that particularly guileful ones pretend to enjoy it to trick men into liking them. The few women who actually believe they enjoy watching football are subconsciously doing it to attract men. This is ridiculous, because anything any man does at any time is subconsciously to attract women too. That's why we have football, skyscrapers, wars and this column.

It was the most elitist, urban, sheltered thing I'd ever heard anyone say who wasn't me. That is, until I told her theory to my editor, who went to Harvard, worked at the *Pan's Review* and—from what I gather from her final edit of this column—thinks

it's undignified to have her name in print. She totally agreed with Cassandra. "They're like, 'Oh, you know me, I really like gu-u-u-y stuff,'" she said of female football lovers, in the least attractive way I can imagine. I'm sure she has a much stronger impression of Bernard-Henri Levy that killed at the *Paris Review*.

I explained that *Sunday Night Football* is the fourth most watched program among



women 18 to 49. That 44% of people who identify themselves as NFL fans are women. That Victoria's Secret sells New England Patriots underwear that says TOUCHDOWN on it. That last fact may have proved their point more than mine.

Questioning the sexual intentions of females who enjoy historically male behavior has a long sad history, stretching back to women who acted, drank, smoked and dated Mick Jagger. As a feminist—particularly a feminist interested in spending a Sunday with a group of fun women—I decided to prove them wrong.



I arrived at a bar called **Barney's Beanery in L.A.**

early Sunday morning to meet a group of mostly 30-year-old women who compete in a fantasy league called the OMG Girls. They were sitting in front of a wall of floating flat screens, punching away on six iPads and a couple of laptops to keep track of stats. I realized I could already disprove Cassandra's theory, since there are much easier ways to attract men than multitasking between multiple games and player records. Like going to a bar that doesn't show football. I sat down next to Alyssa Roenigk and told her about the theory that she was just there to meet a guy, which she said was insane. "Men don't like women who like sports. They like women who tolerate their sports watching and make them sandwiches," says Roenigk, a former University of Florida cheerleader who writes for *ESPN: the Magazine*. "If I wanted to meet guys, I'd be in my yoga class doing my standing splits." This did not help my cause, since I'm pretty sure it counts as hitting on me.

The OMG Girls were smart and fun—taunting each other over games by sending each other beers with cruel notes attached to straws and then taunting back by drinking the beers *through the straws*. When the first batch of games ended, "Big" Bev Sloane sadly took off for home, as she does every week. "Otherwise," she says, "I'd be divorced." If Cassandra and my editor are right, Big Bev is using football to meet new men with a very long-term strategy.

Mike Girma, who comes to the bar every week, has never even noticed the OMG Girls there, despite the fact that he knows some of them from college. "I think it's because I'm so focused," he says. Now that he has found them, he's not going to ask any of them out, despite the fact that they are pretty much his ideal girlfriends. Because if they broke up, he'd have to stop watching football at this bar.

I left the bar before the last game ended, since I already had ironclad proof that the women weren't there to attract men. Not only had several of them not washed their hair, not only were they not wearing

heels, but two of them started talking to me about Oprah. That's right: despite my inarguable sexual attractiveness, these women were not flirting with me. I even think that standing-split comment was meant in a gal-pal kind of way. Cassandra

and my editor had gotten it backward: Women don't watch football to meet guys. Now sports-agnostic guys like me can watch football to meet women. •