

#31 Aaron Rodgers, Brett Favre, and the Unbearable Weight of Heroic Projections

by Nate A. Lindell, created 16 November 2011

Now I can be a Packers fan & not feel dirty. Such was not the case when Favre was slinging for the Pack, even before he was discovered to be addicted to pain pills & risqué extramarital antics. The reason for this sense of cleanliness is not the great success of the Packers under Rodgers (although that sure helps!); it is because Aaron Rodgers is a humble hero.

Hero?

Yes, in the classic sense.

Nowdays, in Western civilization, we don't have tribal wars where people can demonstrate their heroic qualities. Instead we have team sports: particularly football in America, rugby in other lands. And, in American football, the quarterback is the war chief, the tribal leader.

Being a hero isn't easy. It never has been. The great mythological hero-god of Ireland, Cuchulainn, suffered & eventually died for his people. The same is true for historical heroes such as William Wallace & Joan d'Arc. In several senses, Moses died to save the Israelites, & Jesus Christ is supposed to have died to save humanity. Even movie-star & musician heroes, in a way, died for their fans (e.g. James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, & Michael Jackson), before their fans could realize their true human ingloriousness.

We crave heroes, the majority of us, who live lives of "quiet desperation," feeling very unheroic. Having heroes allows us to dream of being heroes ourselves, at least for the duration of a football game, making the lives we unconsciously despise less despicable, more bearable. Even if we think of ourselves as... cowards, it encourages us to believe that being a hero is possible.

The truth is that it takes a lot of courage to be a common man or woman the kind of person whom communities rely on for their stability.

The heroic role is imaginary, just as is the cowardly role; although some people are more heroic or cowardly than others. But there are no perfect heroes, just as there is no Snow White or Prince Charming (i.e. perfect love). Something's gotta give when we project a heroic role onto some mere human: either our projection or the subject onto whom we are projecting.

In Brett Favre's case, it was he who broke. He, I believe, tried to be the hero many Wisconsinites wanted him to be, even though it wasn't in his nature. He cracked under the pressure of trying to be what he was not. The drug addiction, the illicit sex, the inexplicable fumbles, the senseless interceptions, just when the game was ending and the Packers were barely ahead, and his tearful "I just have nothing more to give" press conference (only to play for the freaking Vikings the next season!), these were the cracks, Favre's subconscious screaming, "Hey, f' you! I ain't your hero!"

Many Packers fans despised Favre for his... treason. But, to them and myself, I say that Favre deserves our pity more. We expected too much of a mere man, and he played along with our fantasy, at least for a while.

Hopefully us Packers fans project lightly on Rodgers, keeping in mind that he's mortal. As Rodgers has been doing*, hopefully he remains humble, so that — as happened with Favre — his hubris doesn't become his nemesis.

Given Rodgers's ability, success, apparent sense of honor, & extant humility*, his most challenging feat will be to Maintain his humility, which will help him maintain his success by permitting him to make wise decisions. (Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.") Realizing that heroes sacrifice of themselves for the masses & doing so (e.g. by helping others) will help Rodgers stay humble, hopefully — because I want to continue to feel good about my favorite football team!

* In an Aug. 13, 2011 issue of the Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel, an article by Craig Gilbert noted that President Obama thought of Rodgers as "... one of the best quarterbacks in the game, ... of all time." Yet Rodgers expressed doubt that Obama would even hang up the jersey of Rodgers that he presented to Obama.