

A Badger In Gopherland Suffers 'Sports Shock'

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Imagine growing up twenty minutes from Lambeau Field and spending seven years at the University of Wisconsin. Then imagine moving to the home of the Vikings and Gophers, your hated NFC Central Division and Big Ten rivals. Please understand if I sound a bit incoherent, but I'm suffering from "sports shock." However, it didn't start out that way.

When I first moved here in April to assume the duties of Golf Course Superintendent of Hillcrest Country Club in St. Paul, the North Stars were just starting their playoff miracles. Since Wisconsin doesn't have a National Hockey League team, I adopted the North Stars and rode their emotional roller coaster all the way to the Stanley Cup finals. Coming from Wisconsin, it was quite a thrill to cheer for a winning team.

I felt my first tinge of "sports shock" when the baseball season opened. I've been to a number of Brewer opening days, and not being able to even listen to the game on the radio made me a little edgy. However, once the Brewers went into the tank, I didn't feel so bad. In fact, when the Twins started their winning streak, I found myself cheering for them. Since the Twins are in the AL West and the Brewers are in the AL East, I could rationalize this split loyalty.

At the time of this writing, the Twins had just defeated Toronto four games to one in the ALCS. Unbelievably, both of my adopted Minnesota teams had reached the championship of their respective sports. What sports euphoria for a winner-starved Cheesehead!

However, even the success of my adopted Minnesota hockey and baseball teams did not lessen the "sports shock" that I fell into when the football season started. Every sportscast, every sports page, on billboards and on buses, all I saw or heard

was Viking or Gopher football. I started to get ill even at just the sight of the color purple or maroon. It wasn't just the saturation of Viking and Gopher propaganda that got to me, but the total lack of information about the Packers and Badgers as well.

The worst day was that first Sunday in more than 20 years that I sat down in front of a television and couldn't watch a Packer game. That's when I knew I had "sports shock." I made a frantic call to my brother in Wisconsin and asked him to tape the game on his VCR and send it to me. I now receive tapes of Packer and Badger games, and I have to watch these games the day I receive them. Anyone who would intentionally watch a Packer or Badger loss after the fact must be ill. I admit I have a problem.

The reason I've shared this story with you is because I think that too many Minnesota sports fans take their teams for granted. Your pro hockey team went to the Stanley Cup Finals and your college hockey team always competes for the WCHA title. Your baseball team won the World Series in 1987 and probably will have won it again by the time your read this. The Vikings and Gophers will finish the season with better records than the Packers and Badgers.

So, the next time you get down about the Vikings or Gophers, just think about this: it could be a lot worse; you could be a Wisconsin sports fan.

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P.S.: Thanks to all of you for making me feel welcome during my first year in Minnesota.

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