



# Great Balls of Ire

Michael Callahan wants to know why watching sports like football—when Cher’s *not* singing the national anthem—makes a gay man feel like a freak.

IN MY DEFENSE, let me first say this: I was simply trying to voice a humble opinion about the Patriots’ defensive secondary.

It was the night of the 1997 Super Bowl, and I was standing in Fritz, which is sort of like Boston’s gay Cheers, except the bartenders are not nearly as cute as Sam Malone and nobody knows your name. My friend Jon and I were watching the New England Patriots struggle against the Green Bay Packers while all around me my fellow patrons chatted and swirled cosmopolitans, counting the minutes to the halftime show.

Then quarterback Brett Favre completed a long bomb to wide receiver Antonio Freeman, and I couldn’t contain myself. “Where was the outside linebacker?” I screamed at the TV. “Where was the rush? You call that a blitz? He could have written a *novel* standing in the pocket!”

The bar went quiet, and I looked into a sea of disbelieving eyes. They knew I was gay—I mean, I was drinking Zima, for chrissake. But the idea of actually *enjoying* football seemed unfathomable. “Darling!” one kerchiefed gentleman exclaimed dryly to his lover. “This one actually knows the lingo!” For the rest of the evening everyone watched me watching the game, as if I were some exotic anthropological discovery worthy of Margaret Mead.

To these guys, the Super Bowl was an excuse to socialize—a tea dance with a scoreboard, where the joy lies in the witty commercials and the cheerleaders. (I can only imagine the

pandemonium a couple of years later, when Cher sang the national anthem.) But to me, the Super Bowl is the ultimate sudden-death competition, a contest between the best of the best. I walked home muddled with questions. Was I some sort of gay freak? How was I ever going to find a boyfriend who shared an interest in sports? And what happened to the god-damned New England passing attack?

In truth, there were no easy answers (which you’d know if you followed the Patriots). That’s because, ever since I’ve come out, my interest in sports has invariably led my fellow homosexuals to assume that I was forced by bullying brothers to hide my Barbies and learn the infield fly rule. Not so.

Now, like many gay boys, I couldn’t play sports to save my life. But I grew up in perhaps the country’s most zealous sports town. Philadelphia, in a house where there was a hockey net in the basement and my mother had an informed opinion on whom the Eagles should be starting at linebacker. I know of a lot of guys who grew up similarly only to rebel against sports and its heavy hetero overtones. I don’t know why I didn’t. Maybe I wanted to fit in. Maybe I liked the competitive spirit of it all. Or maybe I just liked looking at all those fine asses in tight pants. If you haven’t noticed, pro sports is loaded with eye candy. I have a mad crush on Marvin Harrison, the Indianapolis Colts’ star wide receiver, who I think has the sexiest lips in the NFL. (Note to Marvin: If you’re reading this, call me.) → (page 111)

While I look at the Masters and wonder whether  
Tiger Woods should be using a 9-iron,  
my friend José is polling the bar,  
asking who would bottom for him.

But try explaining this in a dim bar shouting to some guy over the "Oops!...I Did It Again" dance remix and, well, Allan Houston, we have a problem. Still, every once in a while lightning strikes. On one memorable first date, I went to his place and we spent the day wrapped around each other on the couch, watching the NFL draft on ESPN. We kissed and cuddled amid Chris Berman's commentary on the Saints' first-rounder and rumors that the Cardinals were looking to trade up. Unfortunately, my date traded *me* not longer after. But the experience gave me hope that I was not alone.

In the ensuing years I have grown to cherish my sports-loving side: While I look at the Masters and wonder whether Tiger Woods should be using a 9-iron, my friend José is polling the bar, asking who would bottom for him. My sports fetish provides me with a personality trait that both surprises and amuses people and, in doing so, breaks a stereotype—a more exhilarating feeling than I would have ever imagined. Now, when the topic of who will win the NCAA Tournament arises, I am the big butch expert. And let me tell you: For a guy who can spot a Kate Spade bag at 20 feet, *that's* a championship feeling. ■

Bette

The new album featuring  
the **Bette** theme song  
"Nobody Else But You,"  
"Bless You Child" and  
"Love TKO"  
**IN STORES NOW**

Watch Bette on her  
new Columbia Tri-Star/CBS  
television series.



[www.wbr.com](http://www.wbr.com)

©2000 Warner Bros. Records Inc.

