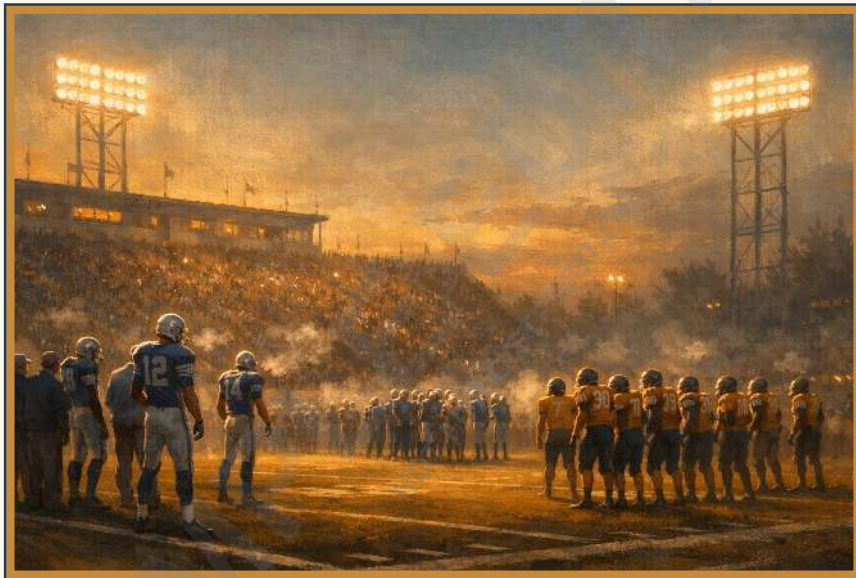


OFFICIAL EVENT EDITION

The Gridiron Supporters' Club



The Wisdom of American Football — The Gridiron of Life and the Life of the Gridiron

PRESENTED BY SPORTSMART4LIFE

A word from the organisers



The Gridiron Supporters' Club

A word from the organisers

Dear Sample Reader,

This copy is yours. Your name is on the cover, and it is inside on the pages too, because it was made for you and for nobody else. No two copies of this book are the same.

We wanted to give you something that outlasts a fixture list. Kit wears out. Medals go in a drawer. But belonging to a team you do not play for is its own kind of loyalty, and that is worth writing down somewhere you will find it again.

What follows are the real voices of this sport — players, coaches and writers, most of them talking about the parts nobody puts on a highlight reel. There is a section on pressure, and what the people who handle it best actually do differently. One on trust, and why a group that trusts each other beats a group that is merely talented. One on losing, which is the section we would ask you to read twice, because everyone in this sport has lost and everyone worth knowing came back. There is a section on joy, which is the reason any of us started. One on mastery, and the unglamorous patience it asks for. One on rivalry, and the respect that runs underneath it. And one on belonging — on being part of something whether or not you are the one on the field.

You do not have to read it in order. Keep it in the kit bag. Open it the night before a hard one. Let it fall open at whichever page finds you, and if a line is worth keeping, keep it.

The game has taught you things already — about nerve, about other people, about getting up. These pages are simply the same lessons in other people's words, gathered in one place so they are there when you need them.

Thank you for everything you give to this. It is noticed, and it matters more than the results ever say.

— **The Committee, The Gridiron Supporters' Club**

Foreword

American football is a game of covenants. Nothing happens until eleven people agree in a huddle to attempt one thing together, and nothing succeeds unless every one of them keeps their word at full speed. From small-town Friday nights to the great fall Saturdays, the game teaches the same things wherever it is played: hold your nerve, keep your assignment, watch your film honestly, protect your joy, do your homework, honour your rival, belong to something.

This collection gathers the voices of the gridiron — the players, the coaches, the great watchers and writers who loved it best — arranged around seven themes that belong as much to life as to football. Each chapter opens with an image and an idea, then hands the floor to the voices themselves.

Read it the way you would watch a big game: sometimes for the drama, sometimes for the craft, and sometimes for one moment of heart you will remember for years.

Ways to Walk with This Book

A collection like this is not meant to be read once and shelved. It is meant to be lived with — kept close, opened often, and put to work. Seven ways to begin:

- **The daily voice**
open anywhere each morning and take one voice with you into the day.
- **The reflection pause**
choose the theme your week is testing, read its essay slowly, and write one honest line of your own in response.
- **Match-day ritual**
before the big broadcast, read the theme the fixture will examine — rivalry before the derby, pressure before the final.
- **The team talk**
captains, coaches, teachers, parents: one voice a week is enough to open a changing room, a classroom or a dinner table.
- **The hard-week medicine**
when life tackles you, the defeat chapter is waiting. It was written for exactly that week.
- **The gift of a voice**
photograph the quote a friend needs today and send it with their name on the message.
- **The long read**
one theme per Sunday evening — a handful of weeks, properly kept.

However you use it, let it stay within reach of wherever you watch.

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THEME 1 OF 7

Watching & Belonging

Friday night lights and fall Saturdays — the tailgate, the town, and the tribe.



Kickoff is hours away and nobody is impatient — the gathering was always the point.

Watching & Belonging — in the game, in life

Football fandom is organised around light. Friday night lights over a small-town field, where the shops close early and the whole community gathers to watch its own children play. Fall Saturdays, when entire towns change colour and a stadium briefly becomes one of the biggest cities in the region. The parking lots tell the story best: tailgates that begin at dawn, grills and folding chairs and three generations of one family in the same colours, neighbours who have parked beside each other for thirty years and know each other's grandchildren by name. The remarkable thing is how little of it is about the game. Kickoff is hours away and nobody is impatient — because the gathering is the point, and the football is the excuse a community gives itself for keeping its promise to assemble. Football does this better than almost anything else its home country has built. It gives a town one calendar, one set of colours, one shared vocabulary of hope; it hands children an inheritance measured in Saturdays; it teaches, without ever saying so, that you can care desperately about something alongside people you disagree with about everything else. Watch the stands during a freezing November game: the blankets shared, the breath rising, the grandmother who has missed two home games in forty years. That is loyalty with a windchill. And underneath sits the belonging paradox that supporters everywhere have always understood: you do not feel your way into joining — you join, you keep showing up, and the feeling follows. So find your Friday night lights, in sport and beyond: the choir, the congregation, the community hall, the parkrun. Claim your parking spot and keep it for thirty years. The game gives the gathering its occasion. The gathering gives the life its warmth.

“What those who were contemptuous of sports misunderstood was not merely that a middle-class sports fan might revere football to the same degree that an inveterate theatergoer revered Shakespeare, but that he might do so for many of the same reasons.”

— Michael MacCambridge

Watching & Belonging

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Running out of the tunnel knowing I was the starting quarterback for the Miami Dolphins and playing in front of the greatest fans in the world. That’s what I miss most.”

— Dan Marino

“If you allow a passion to become an obsession, you’re in trouble.”

— Dick Vermeil

“I’m gonna see what happens, but I’m leaving it up to the 12s. I think they’ll know exactly what to do.”

— Pete Carroll

“They will love you in this city, if you love it the way you love your brother. You will be loved by going above and beyond to show that you care because they care.”

— Jason Kelce

“Why did football bring me so to life? Part of it was my feeling that football was an island of directness in a world of circumspection. In football a man was asked to do a difficult and brutal job, and he either did it or got out.”

— Frederick Exley

“I expect you to think about only three things while you are part of this organization: your family, your religion and the Green Bay Packers.”

— Vince Lombardi

“I didn’t figure the people in the stands wanted to sit around in the cold any longer.”

— Vince Lombardi

“We had the idea of the quarterback being the cat, and the defensive line being the dog.”

— Hanford Dixon

Watching & Belonging

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“A Michigan man will coach Michigan.”

— Bo Schembechler

“The hardest damn part of the summer is not jumping the gun. Fans are like players: You can't peak too early.”

— Wright Thompson

“I was rooting for drama, a close game — and excitement. I loved the ebb and flow. I wanted extra innings. I wanted overtime. I wanted controversy, strategy, anything you could talk about with your friends for days afterward.”

— Al Michaels

“Their sons grow suicidally beautiful / At the beginning of October, / And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.”

— James Wright

“Tiger Walk has become the most copied tradition in all of college football.”

— David Houzel

“Football stood at the very core of what the town was about, not on the outskirts, not on the periphery. It had nothing to do with entertainment and everything to do with how people felt about themselves.”

— H.G. Bissinger

“It's the place where opponents' dreams come to die.”

— Les Miles

“If you love New Orleans, it will love you back.”

— Drew Brees

Watching & Belonging

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Not so fast, my friend!”

— Lee Corso

“New Orleans is a great example and symbol of how it can come back when you have this community that bands together and continues to press on.”

— Drew Brees

“Nobody circles the wagons like the Buffalo Bills!”

— Chris Berman

“Once I bought the Jimmy Cannon dictum that 'Sports is the Toy Department of life.' I don't now and never will again.”

— Howard Cosell

“I know that there are a lot of kids out there with various deformities or birth defects or whatever labels people want to put on them, and they're going to be doubted, too.”

— Shaquem Griffin

“Every time somebody calls this organization, remember they own the team, we don't.”

— Bob Harlan

“George, just one personal request: Go out there and win one for the Gipper.”

— Ronald Reagan

“You have that comfortable feeling with fam, and it's not always perfect.”

— Stevie Johnson

THE GRIDIRON SUPPORTERS' CLUB

More from Watching & Belonging



Belonging, in the stands.

“I fought because I understood, and could not bear to understand, that it was my destiny — unlike that of my father, whose fate it was to hear the roar of the crowd — to sit in the stands with most men and acclaim others. It was my fate, my destiny, my end, to be a fan.”

— Frederick Exley

A few more from Watching & Belonging



The people who turn up.

“I wish I could say that I went in and ran for the winning touchdown, but I did not. I simply stood by in case my team needed me.”

— E. King Gill

“To me, football is very personal. Even as a kid, I looked at football in dramaturgical terms. It wasn't the score that interested me, it was the struggle.”

— Steve Sabol

“The Bayou Classic is not just a football game; for me, it's a celebration of heritage, hard work and the unbreakable bonds formed through music.”

— Nikole Roebuck

THEME 2 OF 7

Pressure & Nerve

Fourth down, the two-minute drill, the kick with the season on it — what the biggest snaps ask, and how the brave answer.



Seventy thousand people are screaming, and the huddle is the quietest place in the stadium.

Pressure & Nerve — in the game, in life

American football compresses pressure like no other game, because it is played in discrete, numbered moments. Every snap is a small examination with its own consequences, and the sport saves its hardest questions for the end: fourth down with the season leaning on it, the kicker jogging out in silence while the whole stadium stands, the two-minute drill in which a quarterback must think faster than chaos while enormous men arrive to prevent it. Watch what the composed ones do. The huddle slows down as the clock speeds up. The quarterback's voice goes quieter, not louder. The kicker keeps the same rehearsed rhythm, plants the same foot, follows the routine he has kept since he was a schoolboy — because routine is the container that carries a shaking human being through the loudest minute of his life. Football teaches that pressure moments are not survived by inspiration; they are survived by preparation so thorough it takes over. The two-minute drill only looks like improvisation. In truth, every scenario was rehearsed in the summer heat when nobody was watching, so that in the winter cold, with everything at stake, nobody has to invent anything. There is a life lesson in that with sharp edges. Your own fourth downs are coming — the interview, the diagnosis, the conversation you have rehearsed in the car. Prepare before you need it, because the moment itself is a terrible classroom. When everything accelerates, slow your voice and your walk. Run the drill you built in calmer weather. And if the kick fails — sometimes it will — remember that every great kicker has a miss that still wakes him at night, and that he jogged back out the very next week. That, more than any percentage, is what nerve finally means.

“As a football player, you have critics in the stands and critics in the press. Few of them have ever centered a ball, kicked a punt or thrown a touchdown pass with 100,000 people looking on, yet they assume they all know the answers. Their comments helped me to develop a thick hide.”

— Gerald Ford

Pressure & Nerve

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I knew he was going to miss the kick, but I thought it was going to be out of bounds. As it was falling to me, I knew it was going to be short and I was going to be able to field it."

— Chris Davis

"When it's grim, be the Grim Reaper."

— Andy Reid

"The harder you work, the harder it is to surrender."

— Vince Lombardi

"I'm sitting there holding my breath saying, 'Come on baby, come on baby, come on baby.' I couldn't 100 percent tell it was good or not until the referee stepped forward and raised his hand."

— Adam Vinatieri

"And don't forget, men — today is the day we're going to win. They can't lick us — and that's how it goes."

— Knute Rockne

"I told them: we give you scholarships, we give you stipends and meals and a place to live. We give you nice uniforms. I can't give you guts, and I can't give you heart. And tonight it was BYOG: bring your own guts."

— Dabo Swinney

"This is not a must-win. World War II was a must-win."

— Marv Levy

"When it's too tough for them, it's just right for us."

— Marv Levy

Pressure & Nerve

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"I closed my eyes and said a Hail Mary."

— Roger Staubach

"Fatigue makes cowards of us all."

— George S. Patton

"I would just look at them and grin, and in the next minute run for an 80-yard touchdown."

— Fritz Pollard

"If you're not pissed off for greatness, that just means you're okay with being mediocre."

— Ray Lewis

"Playoffs? Don't talk about — playoffs? You kidding me? Playoffs? I just hope we can win a game! Another game."

— Jim Mora

"I can be very, very tough, and what's wrong with being tough? If tough were used to describe a man in my position, I don't think it would be perceived as a negative."

— Amy Trask

"I thought the most important thing was not to get wrapped up into being a Black quarterback. I knew what color I was. I didn't go there thinking I gotta do this because I'm Black."

— Doug Williams

"So many people are going to have doubts about what I can do. There's going to be a lot more doubters saying what I can't do, and I'm ready to prove them wrong."

— Shaquem Griffin

Pressure & Nerve

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Run it! And let's get the hell out of here.”

— Vince Lombardi

“Arrogant, pompous, obnoxious, vain, cruel, verbose, a showoff. I have been called all of these. Of course, I am.”

— Howard Cosell

“‘If’ implies a choice. He knows there are no choices for leaders in the biggest moments. ‘If’ gives your brain an out. ‘I’ makes a commitment.”

— Trevor Moawad

“Be a pro. Act like a champion. Respond to adversity; don't react.”

— Tony Dungy

“They always told me ‘Warren, you've got to represent.’ Well I'm standing here to say I hope I did represent while I played in the National Football League.”

— Warren Moon

“Dance with the one that brung ya.”

— Darrell Royal

“What? How long have I been a black quarterback?”

— Doug Williams

“We're gonna win the game. I guarantee it.”

— Joe Namath

More from Pressure & Nerve



The moment before it starts.

“Because I am true to my board.”

— Ozzie Newsome

A few more from Pressure & Nerve



Nerve is not the absence of fear.

“Look, H — there’s John Candy.”

— Joe Montana

“You know the Bible speaks of a healing place. It’s called a threshing floor. The threshing floor is where you take your greatest fear and you pray for help from your great God.”

— Michael Irvin

“The future is now.”

— George Allen

THEME 3 OF 7

Teamwork & Trust

Eleven assignments, one huddle — the covenant game where unseen blocks make every visible moment.



Every famous touchdown rides on five anonymous blocks — the line paves roads and leaves no name on them.

Teamwork & Trust — in the game, in life

Football is the most interdependent game ever devised. Eleven players on every snap, each with an assignment, and one missed assignment anywhere can undo brilliance everywhere else. The sport's emblem is the huddle: eleven heads bent together, one play spoken, a covenant agreed in ten seconds — this is what we are about to attempt, and each of us is trusting the other ten to do their part. Then there is football's great moral institution: the offensive line. Five large men whose work is entirely for others, whose names are called on television only when something goes wrong, who labour in anonymity so that faster, lighter teammates can be famous. Every touchdown pass rides on their protection; every long run follows a road they paved and left. Linemen have made peace with a truth most of us resist — that the deepest contribution is often the least visible, and that a job can be worth doing precisely because nobody will praise it. Football squads carry more players than almost any other sport, and the game needs every one: specialists who play four snaps, scout-team players who spend their week impersonating the next opponent so the weekend holds no surprises. It is a whole society organised around one lesson — you are a part, and the whole is the point. Your family, your ward, your company all run on the same physics. Someone has to block. Someone has to do the anonymous labour that makes another person's visible moment possible. Do it the lineman's way: thoroughly, without applause, snap after snap. And break your own huddles — say plainly what you are attempting together, and what you need from each other. In the long season of a life, the team that trusts beats the team of talents. Every time it matters.

“People don't understand what it took to be a fullback in our system, the sacrifices you made not simply with your body but your whole spirit. You took care of me as though you were taking care of your little brother. Without you, without you, I know today would not have been possible. I love you from the bottom of my heart.”

— Emmitt Smith

Teamwork & Trust

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Football is a microcosm of America. All races, religions and creeds living, playing, competing side by side.”

— LaDainian Tomlinson

“One week was Jim Kiick, the next week was Mercury Morris, maybe I had a shot at it, then Jake Scott stepped forward, Dick Anderson on occasion, Nick Buoniconti — every week there was someone that snatched it out of the jaws in the closing moments in four or five different close games.”

— Larry Csonka

“The Lord is first, my friends are second, and I am third.”

— Gale Sayers

“No man is more important than The Team. No coach is more important than The Team. The Team, The Team, The Team.”

— Bo Schembechler

“I accept the fact that I'm the first African American quarterback, but I also remember all the guys before me who blazed the trail to give me the inspiration and motivation to keep going forward.”

— Warren Moon

“You win with people.”

— Woody Hayes

“Everything that starts has an end. For me, today, I told my team that this will be my last ride.”

— Ray Lewis

“The melting pot of geographic location, economic background, race, body type, personality, and athletic traits of an NFL locker room is truly remarkable. And we all rely on each other.”

— Jason Kelce

Teamwork & Trust

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“My vision that I’m living is to see two more daughters get married, dance at their weddings and then hoist that Lombardi several times. I’m dancing at two more weddings and we’re hoisting that trophy together.”

— Chuck Pagano

“My great-grandfather was at Pearl Harbor, and a lot of my family has gone and fought in wars, and I really haven’t done a damn thing as far as laying myself on the line like that. And so I have a great deal of respect for those that have and what the flag stands for.”

— Pat Tillman

“The secret to success is good leadership, and good leadership is all about making the lives of your team members or workers better.”

— Tony Dungy

“You never lost that chip on your shoulder. You never let anyone define you as a person or player. On the biggest stage and in the biggest moments, you always came through.”

— Tom Brady

“When you’re a part of a team, you understand your teammates. Their strengths, their weaknesses. And work together towards the same goal, to win a championship. In this context, I advocate we become Team America.”

— LaDainian Tomlinson

“This is about a family, this is about teammates, this is about everybody pitching in to make you better and for you hopefully to make them better.”

— Michael Strahan

“Running a football team is no different than running any other kind of organization — an army, a political party or a business. The principles are the same.”

— Vince Lombardi

“Mediocre people don’t like high achievers, and high achievers don’t like mediocre people. So if everybody doesn’t buy into the same principles and values of the organization at the same high standard, you’re never going to be successful.”

— Nick Saban

Teamwork & Trust

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“What time is it? Game time! What time is it? Game time! Any dogs in the house?”

— Ray Lewis

“Willie, I want you to know that we made the trade for you because we think you can help us.”

— Vince Lombardi

“Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose.”

— Peter Berg

“They want to go to school, they just want a chance to do something better with their lives, and American football is pretty much a sport that gives them that opportunity.”

— Osi Umenyiora

“If we're all being intellectually honest about him, he hired without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, or any other individuality which has no bearing whatsoever on whether one can do a job.”

— Amy Trask

“Mental toughness is doing the right thing for the team when it's not the best thing for you.”

— Bill Belichick

“You took care of me as though you were taking care of your little brother. Without you, I know today would not have been possible.”

— Emmitt Smith

“This is a special group of guys who unselfishly worked together and accomplished the perfect season, a mark that has never been matched in the 100 years of the NFL.”

— Jim Kiick

THE GRIDIRON SUPPORTERS' CLUB

More from Teamwork & Trust



Nobody does this alone.

“He has the heart of a giant and that rare form of courage that allows him to kid himself and his opponent — cancer. He has the mental attitude that makes me proud to have a friend who spells out the word ‘courage’ 24 hours a day, every day of his life.”

— Gale Sayers

A few more from Teamwork & Trust



Trust, built in the ordinary weeks.

"You flatter me by giving me this award, but I tell you that I accept it for Brian Piccolo. It is mine tonight, it is Brian Piccolo's tomorrow."

— Gale Sayers

"Even though I'm the first, the most important thing is I'm not the last."

— Katie Sowers

"Listen, I have a healthy dose of fear of letting you down. That's why I went so doggone hard. I never wanted to let you down."

— Brian Dawkins

THEME 4 OF 7

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Monday's film room after Saturday's heartbreak — the honest tape, and the team that runs out again.



The film never flatters and never lies — which is exactly why the best teams watch it.

Defeat & Bouncing Back — in the game, in life

Football's calendar is merciless about defeat. The season is short — a dozen or so games, each one enormous — and the week after a loss follows a ritual the sport has refined into a discipline: Monday, the film room. The lights go down, the tape goes up, and every player watches the truth at quarter speed, with a coach's pointer resting on the exact frame where the assignment was missed. There is no argument to be had with film. The sport calls this correction, but it is really a philosophy: a loss is not an identity, it is information — and information wearing an unpleasant coat is still information. What the best teams do next is as instructive as the film itself. They allow the loss its weight — the quiet flight home, the sombre locker room — but they put a deadline on the grief, because next week's opponent does not care about last week's heartbreak. The lesson is extracted; the shame is binned; the plan for the coming game is installed. Twenty-four hours, the old coaching wisdom runs: celebrate a win or mourn a loss for one day, then let it go, because the season plays on either way. Football people learn early that a season is never one game — that championship teams almost always carry a defeat that forged them, an ugly afternoon they later name as the turning point. Your own losses will not come with film, but the ritual travels. Watch your tape honestly — the failed venture, the rejected application, the plan in pieces — and find the two or three frames that were truly yours to fix. Fix them. Give the hurt its day, and only its day. Then install next week's plan, and run out again. Resilience is not a temperament. It is a schedule.

“If you ask me how I want to be remembered, it is as a winner. You know what a winner is? A winner is somebody who has given his best effort, who has tried the hardest they possibly can, who has utilized every ounce of energy and strength within them to accomplish something. It doesn't mean that they accomplished it or failed, it means that they've given it their best. That's a winner.”

— Walter Payton

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Failure is a part of life. It’s a part of building character and growing. Without failure, who would you be? I wouldn’t be up here if I hadn’t fallen thousands of times, made mistakes.”

— Nick Foles

“Parents, hug your kids every chance you get. Tell them you love them every chance you get, because you don’t know when it’s going to be the last time.”

— Tony Dungy

“I am hurt, but I am not slain; I’ll lay me down and bleed a while, and then I’ll rise and fight again.”

— Marv Levy

“We often can’t see what God is doing in our lives, but God sees the whole picture.”

— Tony Dungy

“We know that the Superdome was symbolic of a lot of misery. It’s now a symbol of our recovery.”

— Kathleen Blanco

“You are what your record says you are.”

— Bill Parcells

“It was a game. It was an important game. I wish we would’ve won them, but I’m proud we got there. I’m proud we bounced back. I’m proud of the people on our team.”

— Marv Levy

“It’s not going to crush my life, even if it does crush my body.”

— Steve Gleason

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"It's kind of going through a state of survival. So what I do today, I don't take anything for granted. I don't take this opportunity for granted because it doesn't come so easily."

— Efe Obada

"They'd see those guys stepping on us and heard them saying things and just turn their backs. That kind of crap went on for two or three years until they found out what kind of players we were."

— Marion Motley

"The past isn't predictive. If you can absorb and embrace that belief, everything changes. You'll instantly feel more calm."

— Trevor Moawad

"That was the high point, Darling thought, fifteen years ago, on an autumn afternoon, twenty years old and far from death, with the air coming easily into his lungs, and a deep feeling inside him that he could do anything, knock over anybody, outrun whatever had to be outrun."

— Irwin Shaw

"That was the end of the road. It was the end of my dream. It was over."

— Y.A. Tittle

"I say, Please, help me raise them for some young lady so that they can be a better husband than I. Help me raise them for their kids so that they could be a better father than I."

— Michael Irvin

"Integrating the NFL was the low point of my life. If I have to integrate heaven, I don't want to go."

— Woody Strode

"But what that pain did for me, it increased my faith exponentially. I have grown leaps and bounds because of the things that I've gone through, and that's one of those things I went through. When I say, went through, that means I came on the other side of it."

— Brian Dawkins

Defeat & Bouncing Back

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“So for those who are going through it right now, there's hope. You do have hope. There is something on the other side of this. Don't get caught up where you are. Don't stay where you are. Keep moving. Keep pushing through.”

— Brian Dawkins

“I think I owe it to the fans to answer some questions.”

— Scott Norwood

“Winning is a great deodorant.”

— John Madden

“Every time I've been told that I can't do it, every time that I've been pushed down, I come back stronger than ever.”

— Alex Smith

“I knew that my dad would have wanted me to play. I love him so much, and I love this game.”

— Brett Favre

“There's a scripture reading, 2 Timothy 4:7: I have fought the good fight and I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Well, I've fought a good fight. I've finished my football race and after 18 years, it's time. God bless all of you and God bless football.”

— Peyton Manning

“Hungry dogs run faster.”

— Jason Kelce

“Those who stay will be champions.”

— Bo Schembechler

THE GRIDIRON SUPPORTERS' CLUB

More from Defeat & Bouncing Back



The walk back.

“I have been the underdog my entire career and I mean this when I say it, I wish I still was.”

— Jason Kelce

A few more from Defeat & Bouncing Back



And then you come again.

“Treat mistakes with a vengeance! Don't brood over them, profit from them.”

— Vince Lombardi

“I can never forget the kindness of the people of Cleveland, the fans that supported the Browns for years, but frankly, it came down to a simple proposition. I had no choice.”

— Art Modell

“We're on to Cincinnati.”

— Bill Belichick

THEME 5 OF 7

Joy & Love of the Game

Backyard spirals and Thanksgiving mornings — playing because playing is the point.



Before the playbooks and the floodlights there was a backyard, a wobbling spiral, and the best hour of the day.

Joy & Love of the Game — in the game, in life

Before it is a spectacle, football is a backyard game — and every autumn, across a continent, it still is. A ball with its strange, wonderful shape, spiralling across an October afternoon. Two kids going deep past the flower beds, a parent throwing wobbling passes, cousins counting to five before the rush. The game arrives in most lives not through a stadium but through the smell of cut grass and wood smoke, through Thanksgiving mornings when the whole family plays before the meal — grandmothers at all-time quarterback — and the score is disputed forever and never mattered at all. That is football's first language, and everything the sport later becomes is built on top of it or it is built on nothing. You can still see the backyard break through at the highest level, and it is always the crowd's favourite moment: the enormous lineman who somehow catches a touchdown and celebrates like a nine-year-old; the impossible schoolyard scramble that no playbook contains; the pure, helmet-slapping delight of a sideline when something ridiculous works. Players who last in this brutally demanding sport tend to be the ones who protect that feeling — who still talk about the flight of the ball the way children do, who love the drills, the autumn air, the locker-room noise, and would play catch on any lawn on any evening. The lesson folded inside is one of life's most practical. Duty is a good engine and a terrible fuel; the energy for your hardest seasons comes from the play you refuse to surrender. Keep your backyard game — the guitar, the garden, the Saturday morning ride. Do it badly, do it laughing, do it until the light fails. Growing up was never the goal. Remembering why you started is.

“The pleasure of sport was so often the chance to indulge the cessation of time itself — the pitcher dawdling on the mound, the skier poised at the top of a mountain trail, the basketball player with the rough skin of the ball against his palm preparing for a foul shot, the tennis player at set point over his opponent — all of them savoring a moment before committing themselves to action.”

— George Plimpton

Joy & Love of the Game

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“It was never about the money or fame or records.”

— Brett Favre

“I can just go out there and I feel free on Sundays. Special teams is perfect for a guy that's wired the way I am.”

— Matthew Slater

“Who's got it better than us? Nobody!”

— Jim Harbaugh

“Well, first things first, I've got to thank my Lord and Savior up above — thank you, Jesus!”

— Kurt Warner

“I firmly believe that any man's finest hour — his greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear — is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle — victorious.”

— Vince Lombardi

“Where else would you rather be than right here, right now?”

— Marv Levy

“Some moments are just special. Couldn't be more proud of you TJ. Truly.”

— J.J. Watt

“Last chance for the Steelers. Bradshaw, trying to get away. And his pass is... broken up by Tatum. Picked up! Franco Harris has it! And he's over!”

— Curt Gowdy

Joy & Love of the Game

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Holy moly! Man, woman and child, did that put 'em in the aisles! Johnny 'The Jet' Rodgers just tore 'em loose from their shoes!”

— Lyell Bremser

“Goodbye! Hello, Heisman!”

— Keith Jackson

“I could not have dreamed big enough to imagine that this day would ever come. Though it's a dream I never could have had, now it's a dream other girls can grow up and have.”

— Jen Welter

“Competing... because it lasts longer.”

— Pete Carroll

“I want you to be a better man than me, but more importantly, a better person than I could ever be.”

— Jerome Bettis

“He treats us all the same — like dogs.”

— Henry Jordan

“Laughter is the only thing that cuts trouble down to a size where you can talk to it.”

— Dan Jenkins

“He could... go... all... the... way!”

— Chris Berman

Joy & Love of the Game

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"Pain heals. Chicks dig scars. Glory lasts forever."

— Vince McKewin

"Harvard Beats Yale, 29-29"

— The Harvard Crimson

"Football is a part of my life but not life itself. Football doesn't define me. It's what I do and how I carry out my faith."

— Troy Polamalu

"If possible, I believe we should 'coin a phrase' for the Championship Game. I have kiddingly called it the 'Super Bowl,' which obviously can be improved upon."

— Lamar Hunt

"I love most everything about Southern football, but more than anything else, I love for it to begin."

— Wright Thompson

"Life is great, football is better."

— Steve Sabol

"I'm always remembering how lucky I've been. And I have this crazy, unscripted drama known as sports to thank for it all."

— Al Michaels

"I couldn't breathe. I didn't know what to say. I was trying to get the words out, but I couldn't talk."

— Shaquem Griffin

THE GRIDIRON SUPPORTERS' CLUB

More from Joy & Love of the Game



Why anyone starts.

“I’m the luckiest guy in the world. I never really had a job. I was a football player, then a football coach, then a football broadcaster. It’s been my life. Pro football has been my life since 1967. I’ve enjoyed every part of it. Never once did it ever feel like work.”

— John Madden

A few more from Joy & Love of the Game



The part nobody has to be told to love.

"I've got a lot of emotion right now. It ranks up there, there's no doubt. I'll probably be able to answer that tomorrow."

— Gus Malzahn

"That's the reason why I had the moves that I did, because when you have an angry sister and angry brother chasing you with a broom and a wet dish rag, you tend to pick up moves you never had before."

— Walter Payton

"It really isn't so much achieving the end result — the national championships and the trophies. I love the process — the preparation, the effort, the strategy, the players, the games."

— Tom Osborne

THEME 6 OF 7

Mastery & Practice

The playbook, the film room, the summer practice field — homework wearing a helmet.



The game is won Monday to Friday; the weekend only collects it.

Mastery & Practice — in the game, in life

Football may be the most studied game on earth. Its players carry playbooks the size of novels; its quarterbacks sit examinations every week — coverages to read, protections to change, a hundred plays with branching answers, all recalled in the two or three seconds before very large men arrive. The public sees a game of collisions; insiders know a game of homework. Mastery here wears two uniforms. One is the film room, where the dedicated arrive early and stay late, watching opponents until tendencies become predictions — the receiver who knows what the defence will do before the defence does has not guessed; he has studied. The other is the practice field in the summer heat: the same route run at full speed until its timing lives in the body, the same footwork drilled until the feet no longer consult the mind, the drop-back performed so many thousands of times that on game day it performs itself. Football's masters testify to an unglamorous secret — that the game is won during the week, and merely collected on the weekend. And the craft is democratic in the way all real crafts are. The film does not know your reputation; the route's timing does not care about your ranking; both respond to attention, repetition and honest error, and to nothing else. Nearly everything in your life worth being good at obeys the same law — the trade, the language, the difficult art of being patient under pressure. So build your own film room: the honest review nobody requires of you. Find your own summer field: the repetitions nobody counts. And when someone eventually calls you a natural, accept it politely, knowing it is simply the name people give to homework they did not witness.

“I think one commonality between kicking a football and putting yourself into a piece of music is you have to have an attention to detail. And also you have to find a balance between finding that attention to detail and being fluid with the situation.”

— Justin Tucker

Mastery & Practice

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

"They call it coaching, but it is teaching. You do not just tell them it is so, but you show them the reasons why it is so and you repeat and repeat until they are convinced, until they know."

— Vince Lombardi

"In order to be good at anything you had to work hard and practice hard."

— Ray Nitschke

"Game films. You couldn't coach today without them. Studying films is the most important thing a coach can do."

— Sid Gillman

"A good leader is always learning. The great leaders start learning young and continue until their last breath."

— Bill Walsh

"I wanted the honor of being the first black coach more than anything else."

— Fritz Pollard

"I read a cool quote the other day, it said, 'I didn't come this far to only come this far.' So we've still got further to go."

— Tom Brady

"All I want to do is be a good influence to the young girls out there because there were times I struggled in sports, but I'm so thankful that I stuck with it... literally you can do anything you set your mind to."

— Sarah Fuller

"Wins and losses come a dime a dozen. But effort? Nobody can judge effort. Because effort is between you and you."

— Ray Lewis

Mastery & Practice

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Always compete.”

— Pete Carroll

“It took me 27 years to play 27 seconds to make that tackle.”

— Daniel “Rudy” Ruettiger

“It was evident in my first year at Akron back in 1919 that they didn't want blacks in there getting that money. And here I was, playing and coaching and pulling down the highest salary in pro football.”

— Fritz Pollard

“I've always felt that three things can happen to you whenever you throw the football, and two of them are bad.”

— Darrell Royal

“My ball — when I'm on — spins three and a half times, no movement. You're always in search of the perfect rep.”

— Jon Dorenbos

“If you're going to give me 110 percent, you can rub that rock. If you're not, keep your filthy hands off of it.”

— Frank Howard

“The one thing I try to pride myself on is my work ethic. At the end of the day, that's the one thing that no one can take from you — how you work, how you prepare.”

— Matthew Slater

“Being the first in any of this is not what I set out to do, but being a mom first is what I am to do.”

— Sarah Thomas

Mastery & Practice

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“If your dream ain't bigger than you, there is a problem with your dream.”

— Deion Sanders

“The emphasis on good habits is something that I learned from Coach Lombardi and have preached to myself over my years as a business leader.”

— Willie Davis

“In life, as in a football game, the principle to follow is: Hit the line hard; don't foul and don't shirk, but hit the line hard!”

— Theodore Roosevelt

“Self-praise is for losers. Be a winner. Stand for something. Always have class, and be humble.”

— John Madden

“One knee equals two feet.”

— John Madden

“I'd like for people to remember me as a winner, 'cause I ain't never been nothing but a winner.”

— Paul “Bear” Bryant

“I know it goes without saying, but as cornerbacks — and I guess as NFL players in general — we study a ton of film. Ad nauseam. Until our eyes hurt.”

— Richard Sherman

“I've never known a man worth his salt who in the long run, deep down in his heart, didn't appreciate the grind, the discipline.”

— Vince Lombardi

THE GRIDIRON SUPPORTERS' CLUB

More from Mastery & Practice



The thousandth repetition.

“Don't ask anybody to give you anything, just ask them to give you an opportunity. You can be anything you want to be, just know you're going to have to work for it.”

— **Michael Strahan**

This copy belongs to: Sample Reader

The Gridiron Supporters' Club · Mastery & Practice

A few more from Mastery & Practice



Hard-won, quietly.

“We get one opportunity in life. One chance in life to do whatever you're gonna do.”

— Ray Lewis

“Son, there's not much that I can give you that's more important than our good name. So don't screw it up.”

— Jerome Bettis

“As opposed to working guys into the ground, his motto was work smarter, not harder. His main goal was to improve us as athletes and make us stronger, faster, more explosive.”

— Jason Kelce

THEME 7 OF 7

Rivalry & Respect

The circled date, the trophy game — and the handshake at midfield that makes it sport.



One afternoon a year the whole season weighs nothing and everything — and the handshake still ends it.

Rivalry & Respect — in the game, in life

Football keeps its rivalries the way other institutions keep their founding documents. The circled date. The trophy with a homely name that both sides would run through walls to keep. The border game older than the stadiums it is played in, handed from generation to generation like a family Bible — town against town, school against school, some of the fixtures more than a century old. Rivalry week changes everything it touches: practice sharpens, crowds arrive earlier, and players who will barely remember ordinary games can recount every snap of this one decades later. Records are famously irrelevant; the worst team in years can redeem its whole season in one afternoon by beating the one opponent that matters. And yet watch the field when the rivalry ends. Helmets come off, and the players who spent three hours in honest collision seek each other out — the handshake, the swapped word of respect, the brief embrace between two people who have just given each other the hardest and therefore most truthful afternoon of their year. The best rivalries run on that paradox: the contest is fierce because the respect is real, and the respect is real because the contest was fierce. Rivals do for teams what comfort never could — they find the exact edges of a programme and push on them annually until the edges move. Life issues rivals too, though we are usually too polite to use the word: the colleague whose work makes ours look ordinary, the peer whose progress needles us at midnight. Use them the rivalry-week way. Circle the date; let the standard rise. Envy studies a rival's trophies; wisdom studies their preparation. And when the game ends, take the helmet off, cross the field, and mean the handshake.

“Our players and fans really enjoy this week. We do as coaches. You love the challenge of it, the competition of it, and the excitement of going into their state fair and going to the Cotton Bowl and playing and competing with Texas. It's the best.”

— Barry Switzer

Rivalry & Respect

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“We do the flag thing at OU-Texas, so that's just something I got caught up in an emotional win. It should have been something I did in the locker room, so I apologize for doing it in the middle of the field.”

— Baker Mayfield

“Johnny Unitas has been a great, great, great quarterback. But Starr did the winning in the 1960s. And that is the object — to win.”

— Vince Lombardi

“Competition to me is not about beating your opponent. It is about doing your best; it is about striving to reach your potential; and it is about being in relentless pursuit of a competitive advantage in everything you do.”

— Pete Carroll

“In that locker room, I was more excited than probably any game other than the Super Bowl.”

— Roger Staubach

“If you don't win the Michigan-Ohio State game, buddy, that's a problem. You're not going to be recognized for too much success.”

— Earle Bruce

“Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that, upon other fields, on other days, will bear the fruits of victory.”

— Douglas MacArthur

“The object is to win fairly, squarely, by the rules — but to win.”

— Vince Lombardi

“Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing.”

— Henry Russell “Red” Sanders

Rivalry & Respect

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Sometimes people that are standing on third base think they hit a triple, but they didn't.”

— Jim Harbaugh

“You made me a student of the game.”

— Michael Strahan

“Damn you, Bo, you'll never win a bigger game!”

— Woody Hayes

“If you think you want to play in the NFL, and if you want to find out if you can handle being hit by Ronnie Lott, here's what you do: Grab a football and throw it in the air, and before you catch it, have a friend belt you with a baseball bat.”

— Ronnie Lott

“That school up north.”

— Woody Hayes

“My father always used to say 'treat everyone as a gentleman; not because they are, but because you are.'”

— Steve Sabol

“The Army-Navy game is the only game where both teams are willing, in our life of service, to put their life on the line for everyone that is watching.”

— Jeff Monken

“It's the only game where everyone playing is willing to die for everyone watching.”

— John Trainor

Rivalry & Respect

Sit with the voice that speaks to you today.

“Make sure when anyone tackles you he remembers how much it hurts.”

— Jim Brown

“When I played pro football, I never set out to hurt anyone deliberately — unless it was, you know, important, like a league game or something.”

— Dick Butkus

“I didn't plan it. I never would have said it if that loudmouth hadn't popped off. I just shot back.”

— Joe Namath

THE GRIDIRON SUPPORTERS' CLUB

More from Rivalry & Respect



Opponents, not enemies.

“It is a reality of life that men are competitive and the most competitive games draw the most competitive men. That's why they are there — to compete.”

— Vince Lombardi

A few more from Rivalry & Respect



Respect, earned the hard way.

"We've fought and quarreled for years but we're great friends."

— Woody Hayes

"We do not pull in and fill up. And I'll tell you why we don't. It's because I don't buy one goddamn drop of gas in the state of Michigan! We'll coast and push this goddamn car to the Ohio line before I give this state a nickel of my money!"

— Woody Hayes

About The Gridiron Supporters' Club

The Gridiron Supporters' Club is a demonstration client, invented to show how a branded edition looks and reads. In a real edition this page carries your own history, your own words, and the details your people would want to keep.

Website: sportsmart4life.co.za

After the final whistle



Until the next one.

Between the Whistles

The final whistle is only ever half true. Somewhere a ball is already spiralling across a backyard — a practice ending under lights, a garage-door game starting, a child running one more route before the porch light comes on. May the voices in this collection walk with you between the whistles of your own life.

SportSmart4Life is the intelligent spectator's toolkit — learn the games you love, watch them smarter, and let the wisdom of sport walk into your life. Explore the sports, SpectatorIQ and the Voices of the Game at sportsmart4life.co.za.

Go Deeper with SportSmart

This collection began as a way of watching. If the voices in these pages made you want to watch with sharper eyes — and let more of the game walk into your life — here is where the journey continues.

- **The American Football Spectator Module**

eight tools that teach you the game itself — read the play, know the laws, follow the season's plots, and grow your Fan IQ match by match.

sportsmart4life.co.za

- **SportSmart4Life Membership**

the intelligent spectator's home — modules across 80+ sports, one member dashboard, and wisdom tools that turn watching into wellbeing.

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- **SpectatorIQ — the Quiz Show**

test your sports brain in our quiz show — ladders, live rounds and power-ups across every sport we cover.

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- **Voices of the Game**

the living library behind this book - thousands of verified voices to explore, sport by sport and theme by theme.

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Every quotation in this collection is real, verified and honestly attributed — that is the Voices of the Game promise.