

# Can Sports 'heal' Coronavirus Stress?

*How the 2020 NFL Draft is the most important in US History*



Coronavirus has redefined our lives in hundreds of ways, but one overlooked part is the loss of sports. No baseball, football, soccer, basketball, Olympics, lacrosse, NASCAR, frisbee golf, nothing. If you think *'big deal, it's just a game'* you are missing the healing element of sports. An element that might heal our community at the deepest level. You see, sports is more than just watching. Sports is about connecting, and connection is a powerful force to create an endorphin level that can boost your immune system.

Professional sports were shut down during the pandemic to stop the spread of disease which was a responsible move. Stadiums full of people who might not practice CDC approved social distancing had to be temporarily shut down. People could still go outside to exercise alone, but it's doesn't give the same psychological benefit as being on a team or watching a team with others.

Team sports create deep friendships and camaraderie among the players, and often an equally strong connection among fans. Something significant happens in a ballfield cheering for the home team.

Why do complete strangers stand up and sway together during the seventh inning stretch? Connection.

Why do we stand with hats off to hear the national anthem sung by local talent before an Orlando City game and still mist up with tears when the color guard raises the flag? Connection.

Being part of something bigger than you is healing. To be part of a community pulling together can transform hearts and minds toward a common goal. You see, during a crisis there aren't blue states or red states – there's just United States.

We saw that in Orlando after the Pulse Nightclub massacre. Orlando became #OrlandoUnited because we were united around a common cause. That same connection happens when the whole community is cheering for UCF to win a championship or to see who sinks the final putt during the Arnold Palmer Golf Classic at Bay Hill or wins the checkered flag at Daytona.

Florida is famous for a lot of things. Theme Parks, Beaches, Cruise Ships, Convention Centers – but it is also famous for MLB baseballs spring training. How can sports come back? There will be a way. Creative people will find a way to prevent disease while bringing back the connectivity of sports. Consider how FOCO already designed face masks with NBA logos, (*you can get them in a three-pack*). Wait ten minutes to see how the creatives at the University of Florida or Florida State follow suit. Personally, I can't wait to see my favorite Disney characters on creative facemasks (*I shall stick with classic Mickey*).

Coronavirus cannot stop sports – especially college sports. Once upon a time players didn't wear helmets in baseball, football players didn't wear mouthguards, golfers didn't apply sunscreen, stockcar drivers didn't wear seatbelts. Times changed to create safety standards – coaches' players and fans changed once, they will again.

As an example, consider the NFL 2020 draft on April 23, 2020. Perhaps the most watched moment in modern sports history. Fans have been waiting for weeks to see something – anything that reminds them of '*old normal*' and the draft will accomplish that. It is not about the players selected in the second round by the Dallas Cowboys or Philadelphia Eagles. Not this year. No, it will be about the shared experience as a fatigued country has something else to focus on besides feeling locked down with no certainty of any normal activities ever returning.

If that still doesn't make sense to you, sit the sports '*nut*' in your family down to open up some powerful connections with powerful conversations. This process will deepen your relationship and might cause you to want to watch the draft with them.

- Why sports?
- Why this team?
- What brings you pleasure in watching?
- What memories does watching this team bring up for you?

- How does this sport take you back to something simple or significant in your childhood?
- How can we connect with you better as a family to share that experience together? (*For instance, tailgating, grilling food, talking about player stats or stories about previous players who overcame adversity - their lives and hopes and dreams*).

That's why tonight is the most important draft in history. The one that ends COVID-19 isolation for sports fans. The one that breaks the mold and allows sports fans a chance to think about something other than global pandemics or recession. It's a chance to be together for something truly and uniquely American - how we connect through shared values and community spirit reflected by our hometown teams.

Many sports are watched by men more than women, perhaps because men can feel powerful emotions without fear of stigma. Cheering, connecting, expressing a surge of emotion is not a male/female thing – because competition is more than just a game –it's the beginning of healing for the soul. Clinical research shows there is a boost to the metabolic functions while exercising, and an emotional boost while watching competitive sports. This boost can help prevent depression, it can strengthen immunity and reduce stress and can lessen or remove physical pain. Couldn't we all use a dose of that right now?

When Tom Brady suits up as a Tampa Bay Buccaneer this fall he won't be alone. Thousands of fans will practice social distancing, while cheering for a new chapter in Tom's career. Fans who may feel like the luckiest people on earth to be back in a ballfield sharing community together. Fans who know there will always be a country, and it will always be better because of shared values that connect and heal. That's the value of sports and how it can open the door for deep emotional connection and healing.

One of the greatest moments in history happened on July 4, 1939 when Lou Gehrig stood and proclaimed he was the "Luckiest Man" in a speech given to a packed crowd at Yankee Stadium, (*which is still considered the greatest speech in sports history*).

The famed Iron Horse of baseball knew he was sick, but didn't know he was dying from ALS. He knew how to press on and played a record 2130 consecutive games for the Yankees. Listen to what he said.

*"Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. I have been in ballparks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you fans...When the New York Giants, a team you would give your right arm to beat, and vice versa, sends you a gift—that's something. When everybody down to the groundskeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with trophies — that's something. When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles with her own daughter — that's something. When you have*

*a father and a mother who work all their lives so that you can have an education and build your body—it's a blessing. When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed — that's the finest I know. So I close in saying that I might have been given a bad break, but I've got an awful lot to live for. Thank you."*

(Watch Gehrig's speech here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNLKPaThYkE> )

Singing *"take me out to the ballgame"* during the seventh inning stretch carried a depleted nation out of a Great Depression, two World Wars and everything else in between. When you sing that song next time you will feel a special connection to community. It's about deep gratitude of being part of something bigger.

It's not about grief of what we lost during the coronavirus shut down. It's about deep gratitude of being alive and being part of something bigger than yourself. Joining a community at a ballfield and hearing an umpire shout, "Play Ball" Except the next time you have that shared experience you will feel a little bit like Lou Gehrig.

You will feel like the luckiest man or the luckiest woman because we survived COVID-19 together and we are beginning the new chapter of community connection together.



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