

# Football's arrival marks special time of year

Within a week, the unofficial start of a new school year will be upon us. No, classes won't be starting this soon, but football players will report to their respective practice fields Monday morning to begin preparations for the 2002 season.

The beginning of football season serves a breath of fresh air, not just for sports fans at all levels, but ushers in the promise and excitement of a new school year, at least on the high school and college levels.



Brad Monastiere

No sport has quite the following football does. Not to say other sports aren't wonderful to watch and their participants brimming with athleticism. But what is that special something that sets football apart from all the rest? Is it the atmosphere of the games? Is it the character of the athletes? The passion of the coaches? The cheerleaders? Although that last suggestion was made somewhat in jest, football does indeed possess something that appeals to such a broad spectrum of people.

Let's take a look at the qualities football has that makes it so different from its cousins on the athletic playing field.

**Teamwork.** In basketball, one player can dominate a game and bring victory for his team. In baseball, the game often boils down to one batter against one pitcher. In football, the running back can't go anywhere without good protection from the offensive line. In football, the quarterback will not gain a single yard of passing unless the wide receiver catches his passes. A linebacker can't make a sack without a hole opening up through the work of the defensive line. If a holder can't get the ball down, a kicker likely won't be able to send one through the uprights.

The point here is football's foundation is in teamwork. Eleven players, doing different but complementary jobs, all to one end. It's a sport that can humble you and make a star out of you in less time than it takes to watch an episode of "Friends."

The teamwork nature of the sport filters down to those who actually play it. More than any other sport I've covered, football

players are the first to give credit to anyone and everyone else before taking it on themselves. There's an intricate code of honor with football, and one of those rules states you don't take glory for yourself, you spread it to those around you. How many stories do you hear about pro running backs buying Rolex watches for their offensive linemen after a productive season. Or quarterbacks doing the same? Yet, who is the first one to hoist a heroic running back on its shoulders after a great win? Yep, that same beefy offensive lineman.

**Character builder.** Anyone who's watched a practice session in the oppressive summer heat can testify to the fact that these guys work. And I mean work hard. Exercises like up-downs, Oklahoma and four corners test not just physical endurance and strength, but mental toughness. In those drills, the ground looks so inviting to just collapse upon after a couple rounds of these. But players have no option than to complete their tasks.

And do them with more energy at the end than the beginning. In order to do this, mental preparation is almost as important as physical.

When you see you can finish

drills like this, you get the mental belief that you can do anything on the football field. That often translates into confidence, which leads to better physical results.

**All-Weather:** No other sport demands the physical and mental sacrifices football does, and asks them to do it in 85-degree heat in Week 1 and snowy conditions in the first round of the playoffs.

Cross country runners come the closest, having to run unpredictable and uneven courses in all sorts of conditions. While the miles they run and endurance they possess is impressive by any standard, they don't get knocked on their tails by a 230-pound safety running at full speed.

I have covered games where the sweat would be pouring off your body, and where you were so cold, your pen would freeze up trying to write. This was all within the same season.

Anything I felt, I know the players had to be feeling it tenfold. Playing in these extreme conditions is a test to anyone's character, and these guys pass the test year after year.

**Sense of Community:** No other high school or college sport draws the sheer numbers

of fans to games than football. We all knew about the 110,000-plus that turn out to Michigan Stadium for home games and most Division I college stadiums filled with at least 50,000 every Saturday.

But high school football is the same thing, obviously on a smaller scale.

When I covered the Grand Blanc at Clarkston district final in 1999, most estimates had the crowd at 10,000 people. The Plymouth Canton at Clarkston playoff game a year later equaled that amount. That's astounding to me, to have that many people attend a high school event. Games like that bring entire towns together.

Why else would signs be hung on the township hall buildings saying "Go Chiefs!" Parents stand tense, watching their boys play. Dads remember their days of gridiron glory, and moms hope they don't get hurt.

Younger brothers and sisters play their own little game in a field just beyond the fence, perhaps foreshadowing their own future on the playing field. Older brothers and alumni gather to reminisce about days not too long gone by. Friends watch their friends compete in the ultimate competition, and

talk about the various gatherings after the game.

Football brings all these things to the places in our society it touches. It's a simple game — get the ball across the other team's goal line — yet has complexities and texture lifelong coaches haven't yet fully decoded.

Football is a builder of boys and maker of men. It is a life lesson teacher, showing that like a pebble compared to a stone, alone one player can make a ripple, but together they can make a splash.

Football is about doing whatever is necessary for the greater good. On high school teams, sometimes there are as many as a dozen players who won't see one down of significant action during the season.

But you won't find anyone celebrating a touchdown harder than them. That's what the essence of football is all about. It's about teammates, togetherness and many hands working towards one sculpture — a win. Let the fun begin.

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## CC grad to play basketball in Belgium Professional League

BY BRAD ENOKS  
STAFF WRITER

Chris Young is used to playing basketball in his own backyard, but now the Plymouth native and Redford Catholic Central High grad is taking his game overseas.

The 6-foot-9, 252-pound starting center from the University of Michigan embarked Wednesday for Brussels to play for Antwerpen (R.B.) Racing Basket of the Belgium Professional League.

After going through a pre-draft workout with the Detroit Pistons, the 23-year-old spent the summer working out at Detroit's St. Cecilia, Michigan and Eastern Michigan, while

awaiting a call from his agent, Herb Hudlog of Interperformances (based in Milan, Italy).

"Herb came highly recommended by Tommy Amaker (Michigan's coach)," said Tom Young, Chris's father. "Herb's represented quite a few Duke players. It was the best location and the best money. They play only once a week so he'll have a lot of free time. They speak Flemish, French, and most speak some English. There are two Americans per team. The other is a guard from Pepperdine (Calif.) University."

Young, the Wolverines' starting center, was named the Bill Buntin Most Valuable Player Award recipient for his efforts

both on and off the court. He set career bests in 16 statistical categories as the Wolverines finished 11-18 overall and 5-11 in Big Ten play in Amaker's first year.

Young, who started 57 games in his U-M career, averaged 11.4 points and nearly six rebounds per game as senior. He scored a team-high 25 points in a December loss to Duke.

He also led Michigan in blocked shots (40) while appearing in all 29 games, averaging a career-best 31.6 minutes.

Young also won Michigan's Iron Man Award and joined fellow tri-captains Leon Jones and Rotolu Adebisi as winners of the Thud Garner Leadership Award. "Chris is still young enough to be

able to keep chasing the dream," Tom Young said.

"He had a lot of fun working out with the Pistons and the

people there told him just to continue to play."

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