

Coronavirus Ripped My Heart Out

Every first Monday in April the most unpredictable championship in American sports is played. It's a single-elimination tournament where the results of the games are so erratic it's known affectionately as March Madness. The winner has to survive and advance six games over three weekends, sometimes in three different regions of the country. It is rare the best team wins because an invite to the big dance and a date with destiny is all it takes to become immortalized in the record books as that year's victor. In 1983, North Carolina State Wolfpack upset a highly favored Houston Cougars team that featured Hall of Famers Hakeem Olajuwon and Clyde Drexler. To make the run even more improbable, they had to win the ACC tournament to get a guaranteed bid because their regular season had many pundits saying they were not going to be selected for the tournament.

The following day at school my best friend and I discussed the upset as intensely as two non-athletic, nerdy second graders were capable. We dreamed how great it would have been to be there and see the event live. We couldn't play the game well but we loved basketball with all our hearts. Hoops completed me. Being an only child in rural Georgia, there were no kids my age close by. Basketball was the only sport I could play alone and it got to be like oxygen for me. When we became old enough, we would watch the game together every year. As we got older, raised families of our own, and moved further away from each other one of us would make the pilgrimage to the other's home to uphold our childhood tradition. While other people's main memories of March Madness are of Duke, Syracuse, or UCLA, ours are also interlaced with classic stories of the adventures of me and my brother from another mother. From the time I accidentally hit reset on my Nintendo console celebrating my certain victory in Tecmo Bowl to the time he surprised me with the news of his third child, this was always our event. Nowadays, we only see each other once a year.

This year the Final Four was going to be held in Atlanta and after over 30 years those two second-graders' dreams were finally coming true. We were going to be there and breathe in the magical atmosphere of America's premiere championship tournament. Then the pandemic known as COVID-19 or coronavirus caused the NCAA to cancel March Madness and rip my heart out. Although I haven't been this disappointed since I clicked on a twerk video and got nothing but Hannah Montana, I understand the NCAA's decision. Human life is more important than money, sports, or entertainment. The game is what brought us together but in actuality, it isn't. We shared a love for the game and that led us to discover how much alike we were.

Sports don't choose your friends but it creates opportunities for people from all different walks of life to bond and find out we aren't that different. Sports more than anything in life proves that together everyone achieves more. The most talented team doesn't always win but never does a team not play together and win. Although we don't have a game to watch, I will still drive the two hours to spend the evening catching up and this year I think I will also tell him what our friendship has meant to me and that I love him like the brother I never had.