



The Time I Debated the Football Team

By: Austin Rader

November 8, 2020 — It was two years ago, almost to this day. I was enjoying a nice weekend in Charlotte, North Carolina with my family at a cousin's bar mitzvah. I was getting the usual "how's college?" "Do you have a girlfriend" questions.

As Alabama football was gearing up for a much anticipated matchup with top ranked LSU in Baton Rouge the following week, I was preparing for a matchup of my own.

My debate with the back-up quarterback and All-American defensive lineman.

That back-up quarterback was Mac Jones. And that All-American defensive lineman was Quinnen Williams who went on to get drafted #3 overall in the 2019 NFL Draft.

You see, we were all taking a Sports Law class together. Our professor put us into groups earlier in the semester. He would randomly select dates for each group to face off against each other in a "debate" in front of the class.

I love debating about sports. A day doesn't go by where I don't have a good debate with my friends. I love watching "First Take" and hearing Max Kellerman say hot take after hot take and make a fool of himself.

The topic we were given was a commonly debated topic. Should the number of teams in the College Football Playoff be expanded or not?

We had a ten page paper due on the day of the debate, five pages each arguing both sides of this topic. In other words, we had to be prepared to present arguments "for" or "against" increasing the number of teams from four to six, or eight in the future.

I was a little nervous. I had no experience debating in front of an audience for a grade. Our debate also had to be at least a half hour, so we had to have solid arguments, and prepare for our competitor's arguments too.

Today, teams prepare every week to play guys like Quinnen Williams and Mac Jones. They study offenses, schemes, players tendencies. I just needed to study "arguments".

But still I was a little nervous. This wasn't about muscle, it was about "debate." Mac and Quinnen spent time in meetings with Coach Saban and Steve Sarkisian. I was in "coach" meetings at a family event getting their advice. "Talk about this," "focus on that," they were saying.

The night before the debate, I met with the two girls in my group, and we finished our ten-page paper, outlining our position on both sides of this argument. I also learned that night that they knew nothing about football. Uh-oh, I think I will be carrying our debate team when we get into the ring.

That night, I got more advice from my fraternity brothers. "It's all about the money," or "teams five through eight deserve a chance too." Others said the "final four" works well - no reason to change what's working.

The previous season saw Alabama sneak into the playoffs with an 11-1 record and no conference title (or division title), over a 11-2 Ohio State team that won the BIG 10 Championship.

I would say now the chances of an expanded playoff aren't happening anytime soon, and no one's talking about it anymore.

The morning of the debate (or game day as I thought about it), I woke up very early. My class was at 9:30 AM. I looked over my notes one last time and put on my business casual clothes and made the ten minute walk to class.

During the first 30 minutes of class while the teacher was lecturing, I could see Mac and Quinnen going over their notes with their 3rd team member (he worked for the team, I'm not sure what he did).

When our professor called us up to the front of the room, I started to think how much of a football fanatic he was. He went to LSU during their 2007 championship run and loved talking about them. He loves the football players, always calling on Mac during his lectures and asking the players about the team.

I knew he was going to side with the football guys during this debate. I channeled my inner Kellerman knowing they were Stephen A. Smith in this situation.

The football team won the toss. They elected to keep the college football playoff system as it is.

Bad move.

Personally, I am not in favor of a college football expansion. But in a debate, I knew I could argue it either way.

The teacher gave us a few minutes to write down some notes on a blank sheet of paper we were allowed to take into the debate.

One of the girls led off the debate with our opening statement about how it should be expanded. After a few minutes of basic talking points and follow-up questions from Quinnen and their other teammate, it ended up being Mac and I going back and forth each one-upping each other with our points.

I talked about how we should give teams in smaller conferences a chance to play on the big stage like UCF, and how it would have been great to see what 11-2 Ohio State could have done last season (2017). I brought up Auburn (2004), Utah (2004, 2008), Boise State (2006, 2009), and TCU (2010), and how they were teams that had gone undefeated in the 21st century but didn't get a chance to play in the national championship.

I also got into the business side of everything and talked about how much more revenue TV networks, sponsorships and the programs that profit off of college football would make.

Now we were rolling.

Mac would counter by saying that two loss teams aren't worthy of being in the playoff and pushing the playoffs deeper into January, as it messes with the NFL draft.

I mentioned that there had been a two loss team that had won it all, in LSU in 2007.

I started throwing out how an expanded playoffs gives smaller programs a chance to get more national exposure.

Our professor eventually chimed in and started asking us both questions regarding our philosophies on the matter. I had come up with a 8-team format that gave two-loss teams a chance as well as a "group of 5" program like a UCF.



Before I even got this question, I brought up the value in rivalry football games and how they won't lose their luster, even if they will meet again in the playoffs.

At this point we got grilled with questions from our professor and students in the class. Mac was getting heated with most of the questions going towards his take on the topic. At one point, the teacher had to tell the kid to calm down.

After 40 or so minutes of us debating back and forth, we each gave a closing statement. The class voted on the winner (the winner received 5 extra credit points). The vote was close and the football team got the edge.

One of the girls in my group yelled "ya'll are biased," towards the class. I think it was the first words she said all morning. In some ways, she was right, they did need the better grade than us so they could play on Saturday's.

I felt accomplished after my first experience of a public debate. I never did debate team so it was really cool to debate about sports for a grade.

After class I talked to Quinnen and asked what his actual take was on the topic. He said he wanted a 6-team playoff, with the top two teams earning a first round bye.



Looking back on it, this was one of my favorite memories from college in the classroom. It looks like I was able to debate two eventual NFL first rounders about a topic we each felt strongly about. They had every advantage going into the debate - notoriety, playing on a national championship team. But I felt like I held my ground - better than Georgia did against these guys.

My professor later mentioned to me that he thought I did a really

good job, and actually won the debate, (no surprise, I win the debates on “What’sOnTheRadar” all the time!).

I actually support NOT expanding the CFP. I think four teams is enough. Mac Jones, keep winning this year, so I don’t have to change my position, and debate this topic once again!

Roll Tide!