

## What Makes Rivalries Great

By: Austin Rader



Sports rivalries are filled with passion, tons of emotion and sometimes vivid memories of great wins and losses against your opponent. You grow up knowing what team to hate, and you are told at a very young age what side of the aisle you sit on. *"We are Buckeyes fans; we hate Michigan."* It's true for college football, baseball, and even international sports, such as soccer.

When I was a kid, I learned at a very young age that my Mom's family were life-long Alabama fans. Every Thanksgiving, we watched the Iron Bowl and pulled against the Auburn Tigers. I also grew up in a baseball family and we were huge St. Louis Cardinals fans; we hated the Cubs (even though they weren't very good for most of my childhood). We still didn't like them.

Rivalries are very good for sports. In the NFL, each team has one opponent who they hate the most. The Bears hate the Packers. The Steelers hate the Ravens. The Cowboys can't stand the Redskins. You often see these teams play each other in prime time, because they get the highest ratings, and draw the most interest.

When College GameDay airs in the fall on Saturday's, you always see fans with signs that demean their opponent. They are usually quite funny, and draw up something nasty about the other team.

For some fans, this is all in good fun. For others, there is an intensity about their rivalry. Just ask a RedSox fan how they feel about the Yankees.

For me, I love how much Bama fans hate Auburn. It doesn't begin the week of the Iron Bowl; it starts the day after the Iron Bowl for next year's game. It's an all out battle, almost worse than a national election cycle.

But rivalries sometimes take a backseat to the realities of life. As much as I hate the Auburn Tigers, or the Chicago Cubs, I am a fan of the game, and know that the the opponent's players and fans are just like me. Yes, we hate each other, but we also have a heart.

Recently, the Auburn Tigers main sportscaster, Rod Bramblett, and his wife were killed in a tragic car accident. They have two young kids, and their deaths shocked the entire Auburn community. In fact, one fan started a GoFundMe page, and they raised over \$100,000 in the first two days. It's now over \$200,000 and still growing.

It was a time of reflection for Bama fans too, who came out in their support for all of the Auburn community, in sending their thoughts and prayers to the families affected by this tragedy.

This is one of the things I love most about sports. Even though rivalries are filled with hatred, anger and mean feelings toward the other team, when tragedy hits, most people drop their jerseys and banners and show their true respect for the other team.

Walt Gary, is a 36 year old with down syndrome. He was considered an Alabama super fan, who has been attending practices, and giving team speeches for the past two decades. He passed away last week, and all of the Bama family felt the pain of this loss. Head coach Nick Saban was one of the first to speak about how much this young man meant to Bama faithful. Even Auburn fans sent messages to his family during this difficult time. Rivalry or not, people come first.

This past season, the Purdue Boilermakers were affected by a fellow college student who was dying with cancer. His name is Tyler Trent, and the entire school got behind him, wearing "Tyler Strong" shirts on game day. He even was on the field during the Ohio State game, and in the locker room receiving the game ball after they won.



The Ohio State game is a big rivalry game for Purdue. They hate the scarlet and grey, and wanted to win this game badly for Tyler. Not only did they win, they did it in a dramatic fashion for Tyler. When Tyler Trent was awarded the Humanitarian award in December, they aired a video on Tyler Trent's impact on the team and showed players coming up to him before and after the game thanking him for his heroics in battling bone cancer. Even Ohio State fans were moved by the outpouring of affection and support for Tyler. They too dropped their fandom, and did the right thing by supporting Tyler. Unfortunately, Tyler died a few months later.

You see it all the time in rivalries. While it is filled with anger and hatred, this all goes away when something bad happens to the other team. We saw it this month with Auburn losing its

sportscaster. We saw it last season when Purdue was spurred to victory by #TylerStrong. And we see it every season in all sports.

Keep hating your rival team. But always be there when they are hurt by something bad that happens off the field.

That's what makes you a "true fan".