

Enthusiasm for Eagles can benefit your mental health

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by Tara Munkatchy, Special to The Mercury, 1 Feb 2005 ([full article \(http://www.pottstownmercury.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=13862427&BRD=1674&PAG=461&dept_id=18041&rft=6\)](http://www.pottstownmercury.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=13862427&BRD=1674&PAG=461&dept_id=18041&rft=6))

With green and white on their face and in their hearts, some Eagles fans will do most anything, travel most anywhere, for their favorite team. But is all that affection healthy? Serious fans have families, jobs and lives much like the rest of us, lives that can't always be shut down, then revisited during the half-time of a football game.

Believe it or not, when kept in perspective, being a die-hard fan can have a positive effect on a person's mental health.

"It definitely provides an opportunity for bonding, sharing a common interest, camaraderie, pride and identification with figures perceived as heroes," said Judith Freed, a licensed psychologist, behavioral consultant and a life and business coach based in Exton...

Because being a fan allows people to identify with physically powerful athletes, it gives them a sense of empowerment, said Jeffrey Bernstein, an Exton-based psychologist...

"In terms of the Philadelphia Eagles, I think that what has become a really strong theme is tenacity and resilience," he said, as he explained the general belief by residents of the city that provided the setting for the sports drama "Rocky" that persistence will help you fulfill your dreams. "I think (quarterback) Donovan McNabb represents that, as do all the players. In our everyday lives, we have obstacles. Deep down we all want to overcome our own personal struggles and achieve."

... Being a fair-weather fan isn't intrinsically bad. "But Philadelphia fans seem to very much pride themselves on sticking with their teams as long as they feel their teams are taking the necessary steps to be successful," he said. "In the case of the Eagles, I think the surge in the loyalty started before their success (during) their drafts, I think, as the fans are seeing the organization has really tried to strengthen itself. Most reasonable people have seen a progression with the Eagles. I don't think there is a fair-weather phenomenon with the Eagles."

Bernstein, however, has been an Eagles fan for some time, and can recognize the importance a fan can place on a team's successful season.

"I found myself, between the Minnesota game and the game with Atlanta ... I just couldn't wait," he said. "I was amazed at how much it can fulfill our lives to identify with this team." ...

For many, supporting and following your favorite team is a "drug of choice," Bernstein said, as he stressed that at the same time, it shouldn't become a substitute for reality...

Overall, supporting a team as a family can improve family connections. Freed stressed team attachment can be learned at a very early age...

Bernstein gave the example of hearing an Eagles fan recall on the radio her family experiences supporting the team, including family members who had died.

"This win is moving her to such a place of connection," said Bernstein of the playoff victory.

"There is an intergenerational link," he said. "I think it's a tremendous opportunity for people to feel a common interest, to unite around that interest and to support each other in sharing, the joy of seeing a team pursue an incredible goal." ... (full article (

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Unfortunately, for this article's contributors, the Eagles lost by 3 points on 6 Feb 2005. SPowsner