

WHAT JACKIE WALLACE SAID, AND LESS IMPORTANT SUPER BOWL 52 TRASH TALK

Here we all are, at the end of yet another NFL, and other, football season. Like parting, the Super Bowl is always such sweet sorrow. It is the ultimate American football game, and yet it is also the end. Sure, there is the pretentious and ever petulant star driven NBA, and, sure, pitchers and catchers are reporting within days for those who think the boys of summer really belong in the pre-spring.

But, this weekend, is the Super Bowl. Even in an insanely Arctic like location as the 6⁹ stupidity of Minneapolis, it is the biggest event there is. Sure, Goodell and the @NFL needs to encourage every franchise city to rape their taxpayers for a publicly funded stadium, but placing the biggest event in American sports in insanely inhospitable locations is a craven price to pay and play.

Enough of that though. It is now Super Bowl weekend. Eagles and Patriots. There are a ton of compelling stories athletically.

Yet none of them stack up. None even hold a candle, to the story that NOLA photojournalist Ted Jackson published today about Jackie Wallace:

One foot in front of the other, the hulking old man trudged up the ramp to the Pontchartrain Expressway. A cold wind stiffened his face, so he bundled tighter and kept walking. His decision was made. A life full of accolades and praise meant nothing to him now. A man who was once the pride of his New Orleans hometown, his St. Augustine alma mater and his 7th Ward family and friends was undone. He was on his way to

die.

The man was tired. In his 63 years, he had run with the gods and slept with the devil. Living low and getting high had become as routine as taking a breath. A hideous disease was eating his insides. He was an alcoholic, and he also craved crack cocaine. He was tired of fighting. He was tired of playing the game. He crossed the last exit ramp and continued walking the pavement toward the top of the bridge. He dodged cars as they took the ramp. No one seemed to notice the ragged man walking to his suicide. If they did notice, they didn't stop to help.

Only a half-mile more and it would all be over. One hundred and 50 feet below, the powerful currents of the Mississippi River would swallow his soul and his wretched life. He dodged another car. But why did it matter? Getting hit by a car would serve his purposes just as well as jumping.

How did it come to this? This was long after Jackie had turned his life around, or so we both thought.

Jackie Wallace played in three Super Bowls. He was not just a good player, but a great one. Yet Ted Jackson found him in a fetal position underneath a bridge in New Orleans. Yes, there was a heartwarming redemption story:

But the best was yet to come. Three years later, I sat working at my desk writing photo captions for some run-of-the-mill story. Above my desk, a large glass wall separated the photo lab from the newsroom. As I worked, I was startled by a sharp rap on the glass. I looked up to see Jackie Wallace's 6-foot, 3-inch frame towering over me, dressed in a three-piece suit with his

arms stretched as wide as he was tall. Beaming with his gap-tooth grin, he exclaimed, “Do you believe in miracles?”

But, no, it did not end there. It went very dark. These are the NFL stories none of us want to hear. But their presence and message are all too clear. Let them whisper in your ear. Please, I implore you, read Ted Jackson’s account on Jackie Wallace. It will rip your guts out, and you will be better for that.

For Act II, I want to point out a seriously awesome contribution from my friend Will Bunch of the Philadelphia Inquirer titled, and legitimately so, “I nearly quit watching the NFL. The humanity of Malcolm Jenkins and Chris Long brought me back”:

For Chris Long’s former high school football coach John Blake, there is one moment – and one image – that really showed the world what the Eagles defensive end is all about. And it wasn’t Long’s headline-grabbing announcement that he’d donate all his 2017 game paychecks to worthwhile causes, including two scholarships to send underprivileged kids to his Charlottesville, Va., alma mater, the St. Anne’s-Belfield School.

It was the preseason game back in August when the 10-year NFL veteran stood up for the national anthem and – in a gesture of solidarity and support – put his arm around his teammate Malcolm Jenkins, who was raising his fist to protest racial injustice in America. It was no little thing, as Long became the most visible white supporter of the protests that have roiled pro football for the last two seasons.

“What Chris was trying to do, basically, was to say that we need to listen – he’s got a point, all of these guys who are

doing this are doing this for a reason,” said Blake, still head coach at the Virginia prep school. It was a brave political statement around the time when no less than the president of the United States was berating any athlete who protested during the anthem as a “son of a bitch,” but that arm-wrap also set the stage for all the giving-back good deeds that Jenkins, Long, and, increasingly, their Eagles teammates did in the Philadelphia community in the days that followed.

It does not end there. Will Bunch’s discussion of what Malcolm Jenkins of the Eagles has done, and how he has conducted himself, is even better.

While Jenkins drew flak from some for raising his fist during the anthem, he was also forging close ties with the Philadelphia Police Department, not just meeting with top brass but riding around with rank-and-file officers to learn how cops and the communities they serve can develop better trust – a real-world strategy for reducing shootings by police. While some angry fans, with Donald Trump’s hateful “son of a bitch” rant burning in their ears, chortled that protesting black athletes didn’t even know what they were protesting for, Jenkins made a mockery of that ignorant claim. He was busy writing a searing series on criminal justice in the Philadelphia Citizen, traveling to Harrisburg to lobby lawmakers on “Clean Slate” legislation to wipe clean the records of low-level nonviolent offenders, urging sweeping reform of the broken bail system, and calling on Pennsylvania to release inmates given life-without-parole sentences as juveniles. One such ex-offender who did win his freedom recently, Kempis

Songster, will be in the stands at the Super Bowl – because Jenkins paid his way to get there.

Seriously, go read it.

Okay, enough for the emotional moralizing. Though I think it is a more than decent time and platform to do so on and from. Let's get down to the Wild Night:

Lot of people yak about the high holy commercials. Save for a couple (Hi early Apple!) I think they are WAY overrated. So, let us talk for a moment about the halftime shows. As Vulture does with many bands and things, they have drilled down to an all time ranking of Super Bowl halftime shows.

Honestly, I take issue with a LOT of their rankings. There are two I do not, however. The first is their top rank for Prince in 2007. In the driving rain, Prince was beyond awesome. That was indeed the best.

The second best, however, to me was Diana Ross at Super Bowl XXX which Vulture has at only number 6. I will have to admit, I am far from impartial as that was at Sun Devil Stadium and I was there about fifteen rows up from the floor. Diana was unreal, and the helicopter thing was simply insane. Were the acoustics etc. perfect? Nope. But Diana Ross owned the place. I wish I could describe it, but I can't do better than that. It was more memorable than the game, and remains so to this day (Aikman and Cowboys beat Neil O'Donnell and the Steelers in a fair, but not that close game).

So, the Pats are taking on the Eagles. Who wins? For all those saying it is a slam dunk, remember, the Pats never win by much or clearly in Super Bowls. They may be the dynasty they are, but the margin in the Super Bowls, whether they win or lose (Hi Eli!) is always small, at best. This looks to be another one of those. Nick Foles is better than people give him credit for, and, AGAIN, if Doug Peterson turns Foles

lose and lets him rip, this may be a far different game than most people and oddsmakers think. I see it as a pick em 24 hours ahead of time. Enjoy!

Okay, in the musical selections for this week, I may have substituted Jackie Wilson for Jackie Wallace. The joy with which Van Morrison plays on Jackie Wilson and Wild Night seem right for the joy Jackie Wallace played with in his prime. Let's remember that, and think of Jackie and all the aging stars of our youth. They brought great joy then, time to give back that appreciation. Enjoy the Super Bowl one and all.