

Text One

'I am a Sports Fan'

adapted from an article by Karin Swanson

I don't pretend to enjoy all sports, nor do I claim to know more about a player, team, or game than the next fan. But I don't take basketball lightly and find it insulting when people tell me I only enjoy attending or watching games because I want to prove I can 'hang out with the guys.' Part of the issue for women like me who enjoy sports is that some girls do perpetuate the stereotypes by watching sports to get attention from men. There are also plenty of men who don't enjoy following sports (least of all college basketball). It's fine if you don't like sports – regardless of your gender.

Some men, and women too, feel the need to assert their superior sports knowledge over female sports fans. In my experience it's a fine line – guys typically find it attractive that a girl likes sports, but don't like a girl who claims to know more about them. But, there are many different sorts of fans – some people just care about a particular team or even a specific player in one sport or only feel compelled to watch during high-profile sporting events such as the football World Cup or the Olympics.

Personally, I am not the type of person who intensely scrutinizes every aspect of every play during every game. But just because I might not know which sports blog had the best recap of last night's game or find myself concerned that a certain player is being traded, that doesn't make me any less of a fan. I applaud the fans who admit they don't know much about sports but enjoy watching the game to be a part of the shared experience.

To me, watching sports has always been about feeling connected to something you have no control over. It's about putting blind faith in a group of people you will probably never meet, but feeling their triumphs and failures with them. Marveling at their athletic abilities while accepting you will most likely never possess their skills.

While I am passionate about more than just college basketball, I have been a devoted supporter of my team, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), for a solid five years now. I have stuck with them through thick and thin (let's be real, more so the latter) – cried for them, sacrificed sleep (among other things) for them, and suffered a handful of anxiety attacks for my boys in blue and gold.

I'm not very patriotic, but when I watch my team hit the court, I feel a unique sense of pride. It's this feeling that keeps me up at night on the East Coast of America, streaming the UCLA basketball game, often unapologetically alone, in my room.

The lack of predictability in any sports game or match is what I find most appealing. You can never really know with absolute certainty how any given play will develop, as even the simplest move can be interrupted. While this is an obvious statement, it never fails to entertain me. I live for the surprises and the upsets, the underdogs and the last-minute winners.

In my varied experience of both playing and watching sports, I've met some unusual characters and bonded with complete strangers. I chatted with a professor from Columbia University at a basketball game, played a game of pick-up soccer with local Peruvians at 12,000 feet along the Inca Trail, and was stampeded by Spanish teenagers when they won the European Football Cup.

At the end of the day, sports bring us together, regardless of gender or class or ideology or age. Whether or not you know or care about the logistics of the game – whether you're a loyalist or a fair-weather fan – you can appreciate this feeling.