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Does God really care who wins a game?

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The little kid looked into the compassionate face of his hero, the star quarterback for the Dillon Panthers, and asked, "Does God love football?"

The quarterback should have said, "Don't be so silly," or, "Don't be so picayunish," or, even better, "When your mother was pregnant with you, was she exposed to high levels of radiation?" But, of course, he gave none of those responses, and so that same question, so memorably asked on *Friday Night Lights*, comes up again and again, each and every week of the football season.

At least I assume it comes up because it continuously gets answered. And the answers often get uncomfortably specific, suggesting that not only does the Deity love football, but that He loves certain teams and players more than others.

After the Indianapolis Colts defeated the Chicago Bears 29-17 in the Super Bowl, the winning owner, James Irsay, and coach, Tony Dungy, both suggested God had something to do with the victory. And last month, when Jon Kitna returned in the fourth quarter to direct the Lions to a 20-17 overtime victory, the quarterback credited God with helping him recover from the first quarter, when, to use his word, he was knocked "woozy," and with giving Detroit the win over Minnesota.

Even Terrell Owens answered the God-love-football question a couple of years ago. Before the 2005 Super Bowl with New England, the wide receiver, then with Philadelphia, dispelled suspicion that he might not be able to play because of an injury by reportedly saying, "God brought me here for a reason."

No doubt, but winning the 2005 Super Bowl wasn't it. New England won 24-21.

Of course, something like this happens somewhere every weekend. And it happens in all sports. Even Barry Bonds will point to the sky after a homer.

The Colorado Rockies, who have kept their overwhelming momentum rolling into the playoffs, will soon start mumbling about destiny. Their CEO, Charlie Monfort, already has talked about seeing signs from, yes, God.

And remember when Marion Jones indignantly denied using performance-enhancing drugs? She said it was her "God-given talent," not BALCO-supplied drugs, that enabled her to win five medals, three of them gold, in the Sydney Olympics.

What are these people thinking?

Did Jones, who recently pleaded guilty, think that because she was chosen by God to receive extraordinary talents she was then entitled to cheat with impunity? Did Kitna think God took the Lions and the points? Did Irsay believe God suspended all other obligations so that He might watch the Super

Bowl? Or maybe Irsay simply believed God had become a Colts fan.

And if God was a Colts fan, then he couldn't have been a Bears fan, or at least he wasn't after the opening kickoff of the Super Bowl. And if He directed Detroit to win Sept. 16, then He must have caused Minnesota to lose. And that's a problem; that's why such thinking can be mildly offensive. Aside from trivializing God and turning Him into some channel surfing sports fanatic, crediting Him with a victory also blames Him for a loss.

Even worse, a person who starts thinking God is on his team and not on theirs can rationalize almost anything.