

Linmania, Tebow Time, Superman, and Jesus

In 2011 and 2012, the big sports stories are centered around two fine young men of the highest character, who also happen to be evangelical Christians. Both Jeremy Lin and Tim Tebow are very public about their faith in Christ, and both give all the credit for their success to God. Whether he wins or loses, Tim Tebow strikes a now famous pose in prayer on the football field that all the sports writers are calling “Tebowing”. I saw Jeremy Lin interviewed after he helped the New York Knicks win their seventh game in a row. The commentator asked him what he thought of all the excitement around the whole country about his success that he called Lin-sanity and Lin-demonium. Jeremy Lin very humbly said, “I can’t believe it, I am just thankful to God for all this.” After Tim Tebow’s 4th quarter heroics in many football games, fans in Denver were calling him Superman, and they called the fourth quarter “Tebowtime”. Whether it’s Tebow in Denver or Lin in New York, the sports fans are acting like both these guys just arrived from the planet Krypton (Superman’s home planet). Sportscasters are so amazed by their unexpected performances that they are wondering if there isn’t some kind of supernatural forces at work.

It makes me stop and think about why super heroes like Superman have always been so popular, and why sports heroes who seem to do the impossible are so popular. I think it has to do with our fantasies. In the dream world we live in as sports fans, these heroes have everything and are everything we ever dreamed of having and being. These guys are winners, they have incredible talent, incredible riches, but most of all they bask in all the glory. I really think the biggest part of why people idealize them is the glory, the spotlight, the fame and adoration that they enjoy. In the fantasies we have they have no problems, get the prettiest girls, always win, have the most exciting lives, and live in a state of perpetual gratification. In short, we like these sports heroes and their lives better than ourselves and our lives. We want to be significant, winners, and experience perpetual pleasure, and it seems like these guys have all that, so we kind of live vicariously through these heroes. I am always amazed at the extremes fans will go to in order to get autographs and pictures from these guys. People act like their sports heroes are more than human. The very idea that hundreds of kids (and adults) will line up to touch these sweaty guys as they enter or leave the arena is an amazing phenomena. Why people would dive onto the floor to get a disgusting towel that that one of these guys has used to mop up a gallon of perspiration is beyond me, but let Lebron or Kobe throw a towel into the stands and then stand back and watch. Personally, I have been driven the other way to shy away from these people because I have had the opportunity to be around numerous pro athletes, and in my experience they tend to be primadonnas who never grew up beyond about 13 years old (look up in Webster’s—an extremely vain or undisciplined person). That’s why Jeremy Lin and Tim Tebow are so intriguing to me and everybody else, because they seem to be totally unique in their humility and high moral character. I really think the press is infatuated with these guys partly because there seems to be a supernatural quality about these guys, and the press doesn’t normally believe in the supernatural. But when a guy like Jeremy Lin just drops out of heaven and miraculously propels the New York Knicks to 7 wins in a row, and by the way puts 38

points on Kobe Bryant, then something out of the ordinary is going on. In his first four starts he averaged 27.3 points, 8.3 assists and two steals per game, and was named the Eastern Conference Player of the Week.

Jeremy Lin

Jeremy Shu-How Lin was born in 1988 in Los Angeles to Chinese parents who emigrated from Taiwan in the 1970s. Both of his parents are 5' 6" tall, but he somehow grew to be 6'3" tall with a vertical leap that makes dunking a basketball easy. He graduated from Palo Alto High School where his High School team won the state championship in 2006. Lin tried for a basketball scholarship to Stanford and UCLA, but neither had any interest in him, so he entered Harvard. Even the coach at Harvard told him he was more suited for Division III ball. Nevertheless he became a unanimous selection for the All Ivy League Team. His dream was to play pro basketball in the NBA, but once again nobody drafted him in the 2010 draft. The General Manager of the Dallas Mavericks was the only one to offer Lin a chance to play in the Summer Developmental League. Lin actually played better than the number one pick in the draft, John Wall, so the Golden State Warriors offered him a contract. Since that was Lin's favorite team, he jumped at the chance. The San Francisco Bay area, with its large Asian-American population, was fired up. He became the first American of Chinese descent to play in the NBA. Unfortunately the Warriors coach did not share their enthusiasm because he sent Lin down to the D-League team the Reno Bighorns, and on December 9, 2011 the Warriors released Lin altogether. On Dec.12 he was claimed by the Houston Rockets, but then released on Dec.24 to make room for Sam Dalembert (Who?). The New York Knicks claimed Lin on Dec.27 to be a third string backup point guard, but they demoted him to the Erie BayHawks in the D league. After Lin had 28 points against the Maine Red Claws, the Knicks called him back. Then on February 4, 2012, after all their other guards were injured or couldn't play, the New York Knicks started Lin and he scored 25 points while leading them to a victory. No wonder the press calls his journey a Lin-deralla (Cinderella) story since he has been a step child all of his basketball career but now suddenly the Prince (the press) is in love with him. Mike Breen, who is the television voice on Knicks broadcasts, says that people are actually getting to the home games early instead of "fashionably late" just to watch Lin warm up. Breen says the atmosphere is like nothing he's seen in 20 years of covering basketball. For basketball fans it's pure Lin-ertainment.

The New York Knicks are a high profile team in a high profile city that gets more than its share of press coverage. When this new guy Lin who nobody ever heard of just dropped out of heaven and led the Knicks to 7 straight wins while scoring more points than any other player in the NBA in that two weeks, then New York, the sports world, and all the sports press went absolutely nuts! They wrote that he was causing Lin-demonium, Lin-mania, and their favorite game was Super Lin-tendo. The Knicks season was over and then suddenly on Feb.4 there was a Lin-tervention. Ticket sales skyrocketed, the celebrities were back at courtside, and the atmosphere was electric. You know you are popular when your 85 year old grandmother is being stalked by Paparazzi. Everybody said his first real test would come against Kobe Bryant and the Lakers on Feb.10, but Lin had 38 points and they beat the Lakers. I watched my first NBA game of the year on

Feb.19 as the Knicks played our beloved Dallas Mavericks. I have to admit that I was surprised by this amazing athlete who scored 28 points with 14 assists against the Mavericks—Who is this guy and where did he come from?

Tim Tebow

When I saw the Tim Tebow autobiography *THROUGH MY EYES* at the book store, I reluctantly bought it thinking it would be boring. Nothing could be farther from the truth. This guy is a wild man freakish athlete with all kinds of wild stories to tell. When he was like 4 years old he was playing every sport with his older brothers. Even at that age his peers wouldn't play with him because he was too rough or threw the ball too hard. At 5 years old T-ball was available, but he was already able to hit fast pitch hardball with the big boys so he jumped right to Little League playing with 9-10 year olds. When he was in 7th grade, he played on the High School Varsity baseball team, and in 8th grade he made the Varsity football team. When he was in 8th grade, he entered an adult strongman competition. He beat his brother in the finals of the arm wrestling (his brother was six years older and a college football player). He also won the arm curl competition. They had to curl a bar that weighed 55 lbs. Second place went to an adult who curled it 55 times which was very impressive to the audience. Tebow was the last contestant, and began curling as fast as he could, "At 175 repetitions my arms were really hurting, but by 225 reps, the pain was gone and numbness set in. I couldn't feel anything anyway so I just went on until I put down the bar at 315 curls." The book is full of stories like that. During his senior year in High School, he went to the U.of Florida football off season training camp. One of the drills they did was one on one tug of war. The rules were that it wasn't over until one player gave up or the coach blew the whistle. Tebow was paired against a defensive tackle in the tug of war and said, "We battled until I yanked him off his feet, I dragged him across the room, but he wouldn't concede. By the time he got up we were all the way to the wall next to the men's room. I kicked the door open and pulled him into the men's room, then kicked the stall door open and pulled him into the stall with me. Finally the coach blew the whistle." This guy has "super hero" strength.

If you are like me, you may have gone to great lengths to get your kids to church and begged them to become Christians, but in Tebow's case it was just the opposite. When he was six years old he begged his Dad to let him become a Christian but he was reluctant because he was so young his Dad didn't think he understood yet. Therefore when his Dad went to work, Tebow went to his Mom, "I want to ask Jesus to come into my heart. I'm ready to be saved." He and his Mom went to the couch and prayed for Jesus to come into his heart. "Since then, I've known that I am headed to heaven and have tried to live in a way that pleases Jesus." Enough said, right?

Today my heroes are Jeremy Lin and Tim Tebow, both for their athletic prowess and their faith in Christ; but will all their talent, fame, and faith exempt them from the trials and tribulations of life? All you have to do is study the history of past heroes to know that they also live in a fallen world with sinful dying bodies that are subject to the same pain and suffering as the rest of us. In spite of their faith in Christ or even because of it, they will suffer the same "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (as Shakespeare would

say). Lin and Tebow will even be held to a higher standard than the rest of us because of their fame, and if they fall (morally), the crash will be worse than anything we could imagine.

Mark 4:35-41---The Storms of Life

After a very hectic schedule of teaching and healing in which Jesus and His disciples barely had time to eat or sleep, Jesus commanded His disciples to get in the boats and go to the other side of the lake (Matt.8:18). The disciples were faithful and obedient to follow Christ's instructions. In the midst of this obedience, a fierce storm came upon them suddenly. Since the Sea of Galilee was below sea level with mountains around it, these storms could come over the mountains onto the lake suddenly without any warning. Before they knew it, the boats were filling up with water, and they were in imminent danger. What is surprising is that Jesus was in the boat with them, and they were obeying His instructions, yet appearances were that they would all drown. In fact, during the approximate 3 year ministry of Jesus, the disciples were constantly perplexed about what was going on, constantly in some kind of storm, and constantly being slandered and threatened by people. Their time with Jesus would end with an illegal arrest, an unjust trial, Jesus' crucifixion, and the authorities threatening to kill the disciples as well. This raises the question-Will life as a Christian be a smooth ride, and will God cause everything to go my way?

In Mark 4:38, while they were in the storm, Jesus was sleeping. Keep in mind how busy He had been, the crowds demands on Him, and the lack of sleep. But to the disciples it seemed that Jesus didn't care. Jesus had taken them out there in the lake only to be threatened by a storm, and appearances were that He didn't care. They yelled, "Teacher do you not care that we are perishing?" This episode gives us a great contrast between the peace of Jesus in a storm vs. the anxiety of the disciples. At just the right time at the peak of their fear, Jesus interceded and stilled the storm. Based on Jesus' admonishment to the disciples in Mark 4:40, Jesus used this storm to teach them at least two important spiritual lessons: First, we must live by faith and not by appearances. Secondly, we learn by experiences who Jesus is. We can study about His deity and His attributes, but it is only through the storms that we experience Christ's power and love. Jesus revealed to them that their real problem was not the storm, but their lack of faith. This experience built their faith.

After studying this story, I realize that it is safer to be with Jesus in the boat in the storm than back on the land without Jesus. Life on planet earth is a series of storms with calm periods in between---this is not heaven. Therefore, our job now is to live by faith from crisis to crisis with our focus on that finish line of the resurrection unto eternal life in heaven. I would like to believe that high character faithful Christians like Tebow and Lin will win the Super Bowl and the NBA Championship, but is that really God's plan? We need our heroes, our fantasies, and our winning teams (our country, our city, our college team, and our pro team) to build up our ego and our hopes. Great stories like Jeremy Lin give us hope, especially "underdog Cinderella" stories like Lin; and when there is a spiritual element to the story, it seems that by the providence of God the good guys are

prevailing and being rewarded. Nevertheless, I must remember that “winning” may not be in my best interest. If I actually lived the fantasy life that we all think our sports heroes live, I would be a spiritual pygmy—self centered, proud and empty. It is through trouble, pain, challenges, and storms that we grow. Without them we might be captive to the tyranny of self.

Whatever you believe the answer to the “storms of life” dilemma to be, you must admit one thing. Jesus took His own medicine on the cross. It was the most evil unjust thing to happen in all of history, yet it resulted in the best and most important thing ever---our salvation.

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