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World keeps turning on Super Sunday

By LZ Granderson
ESPN.com

On "Larry King Live" recently, a guest -- syndicated talk show host Dennis Prager -- said something curious with regard to the type of advertising he thinks should be permissible on the Super Bowl telecast.

"There has to be a safe place for kids in America and if the Super Bowl isn't, then it's just a shame," he said.

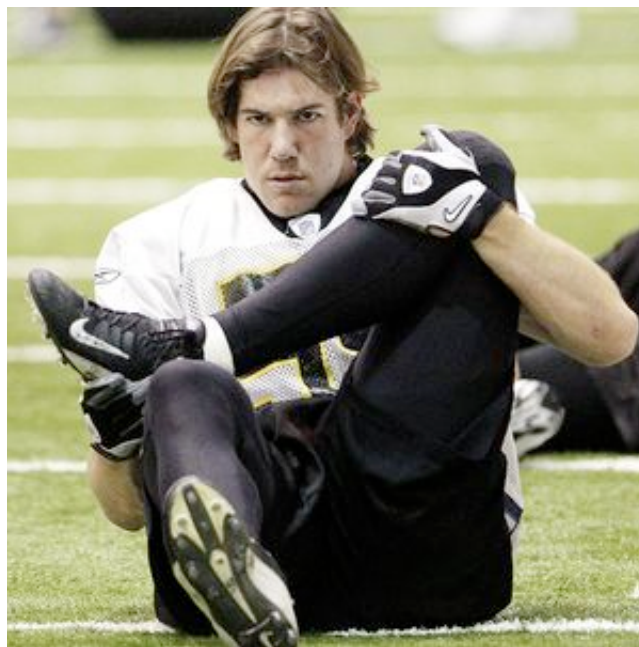
I nearly wore out the button on my remote control replaying that sentence over and over again to make sure I'd heard him correctly. Since when did one of the most violent games in the world, sandwiched between countless beer commercials, become considered "a safe place for kids"?

The comment came during a discussion of CBS's rejection of an ad for a gay dating Web site, but his point includes elements of a thought I've heard expressed quite a few times since Tim Tebow's anti-abortion ad was green-lit for the Super Bowl broadcast. That is, that Super Bowl Sunday should be about football and nothing else -- and definitely not about anything parents might have to explain to their children. No, the Super Bowl, in this line of thinking, should be a day of intellectual rest in which politics and controversy take a backseat to touchdowns and pompoms. More importantly, athletes such as Tebow, or Saints linebacker [Scott Fujita](#) -- who spent a chunk of his Super Bowl interview time with the media on Tuesday talking about his support for marriage equality -- should avoid bringing up such divisive topics this week because it distracts the nation from The Game.

Once again, this is a case of people believing that sports somehow exist detached from the rest of the world. As if Jackie Robinson was the first to integrate baseball because the hundreds of black players before him weren't good enough to make it to the majors. As if Title IX wasn't about addressing sexism. As if guns are popular only with professional athletes despite the fact that private ownership of firearms is at an all-time high, according to a 2009 FBI report.

Sticking our collective heads in the box score does not blind us to the reflection of society that the world of sports presents to us everyday. Just because The Game is on, it doesn't mean everything else is turned off.

Look, I make my living thanks to the passion people have for sports, so I am not trying to be pious about this conversation. I know and enjoy the entertainment value games such as the Super Bowl bring. But come on. We live in a country where the answer sometimes comes back "no" to the popular game-show question, "Are you smarter than a fifth-grader?" So have we really *earned* a break from talking about serious topics? A year into the Iraq war, National Geographic conducted a survey and found that more than



It was refreshing to hear the Saints' Scott Fujita step outside the interview norm this week and express support for marriage equality.

85 percent of young Americans (18-24) didn't even know where Iraq is. Six months after Hurricane Katrina, a third of young Americans couldn't locate the state of Louisiana.

My point is that we already have plenty of distractions. I actually find it refreshing that the biggest night in television is seasoned with dashes of social consciousness. Lord knows we do a pretty good job of avoiding tough topics in our daily discourse with one another already.

It's particularly meaty to me that recently, it seems to be the athletes -- the gladiators we typically dismiss as having more brawn than brains -- who are stimulating this conversation. In the past, some in the media and the public have chided the Michael Jordans for sidestepping important issues in lieu of preserving their vanilla marketability; but now, when a Tebow or a Fujita bring one of those issues into play, he is criticized for doing it at the wrong time. Well, I think a captive audience of 100 million people is the perfect time to ask the nation to think about abortion and marriage equality and Haiti relief efforts and any other topic of importance to this generation.

As much as I love football and the Super Bowl, it still is, dare I say, just a game with -- according to a recent study by the Wall Street Journal -- only about 11 minutes of action. The other 174 minutes of a typical broadcast are spent on commercials, players standing around and replays. For a country adept at multitasking, I find it comical to suggest it's impossible to juggle a couple of nonsequential thoughts during that three-hour span.

Tebow and Fujita can play for championships while talking about serious issues, but some of us claim we can only handle watching the game? Maybe the adjective in the phrase "dumb jock" should be moved to describe another noun.

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