

It's hard to imagine that a simple football game could give us the greatest lesson about civility and respect. But then again, who would've thought that we would need such a lesson in this day and age. However, here we are... the most divisive time in American society since the Civil War. The idea of civility seems like an afterthought. Once Upon a Time we had such a thing. We could respect each other despite our different beliefs. We didn't care who one another voted for. Our politics or religion didn't matter. We could just exist within the same community and be friends or neighbors despite our differences. But not today.

Our hatred boils over when it comes to people who disagree with us. We have found hate within ourselves that we didn't even know existed. The friendships that we once had are gone because we care more about the things that divide us than the things we have in common. We are blinded from the belief that we are absolutely right and those who disagree with us are absolutely wrong. We have become what Winston Churchill defined as "fanatics," people who cannot change their mind and refuse to change the subject." And now we live in a time when respect and civility are like mythical words that sound good and wishing they were true, but are just a myth.

However, there is one football game every year that shows us what respect and civility truly are. It is my favorite college football game every year, the one game that I look forward to more than any other. It is the Army / Navy game, a hard-fought football game, sometimes in the rain or the mud or even the snow between the two most revered branches of the US Military. On the outside it seems just like a simple football game between two Military Academy's, but it is a lot more than that. It is what some call a Game of Honor, a name that doesn't get used with any other football game. And more than anything, it is a game between men who have the greatest respect for one another because no matter who wins or loses, they are on the same side. The men who play this game are soldiers, where respect and civility are part of their core fiber.

For those who have ever served, they understand this. Respect and civility are ingrained in them from the first day they enter the service. And they find that common ground that we all should walk upon in order to exist in a civil society. Most of the time that common ground is just knowing that they have spilled the same blood, gone through the same shit when it comes to training, and side by side, waded through what soldiers affectionately called the "suck." Yes, this is more than just a football game. It is the perfect life lesson on how to get along and coexist with one another. Because when the battle is done and no matter who has won the game these soldiers are still one and the same. The same folks who walk that hallowed common ground and learn to exist beyond their differences.

For me, the game is very important. It is a time when fellow veterans can get together and not only enjoy a great football game, but enjoy each other's company on common ground. No matter what our politics are or our religion. No

matter what our differences may be, we can get together, harass each other, tell jokes, talk trash one another, but still shake each other's hand as brothers and sister, and more importantly, friends when the game is done. We remember all things that we have in common and that they are stronger than that which divides us. We are not defined by our differences and we celebrate the common thread that brings us together. Some might say it's only for a football game, but it is an idea that applies to all spectrums of life. It is a lesson that should be practiced more. Many of us grew up playing sports. One of the earliest lessons that we learned was about sportsmanship... that it's more important how you play the game than whether you win or lose. Sure, it sounds like something we tell little kids so that they don't whine when they lose, but many of us forget that it's those lessons we should carry with us every day.. As adults, it's easy to forget, especially when it's easier to be angry over that which we dislike.

Yes, it may just be a football game to some, but the lessons that we can learn from such a simple game can make us better people. They can make a more civilized society and wouldn't that be something in this day and age. So when I hear some jackass on the news spewing propaganda or read hate fueled messages on social media, I think about the Army / Navy Game and wouldn't it just be nice if we could all get together, enjoy each other's company, and forget the things that divide us even its just for a football game. Could we be like the players at the end of the game who walk across the field shake each other's hand and exemplify the ultimate level of respect for one another? I dream that we can as a society. I dream that civility and respect aren't just meaningless words. And maybe...just maybe everyone will see that what may seem like a simple football game will teach us one of the greatest lessons in life. Civility and respect are the engines that keep the world running so that civilization doesn't crumble into oblivion. And perhaps that's why the Army / Navy Game is the most important college football game every year. From the lessons it can teach us to the camaraderie among fans of the game, it has the greatest impact on our life... far beyond any championship game.