

Homer had his Greeks: a homer has his Birds
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The ancient Mayans' high-stakes ball game was very different than American football. For one, the losers sometimes were decapitated or had their hearts cut out as an offering to the gods. Fortunately for the Eagles, human sacrifice is not part of our cultural glue. Most fans don't want players' heads after a defeat — even the Jacksonville loss. But we wouldn't mind seeing some Eagles-green blood if they catch a cleat on the shin this Sunday against Tennessee.

Brian Westbrook and Correll Buckhalter, you were unstoppable Sunday against Washington, bouncing off defenders like pinballs off bumpers. And Brian Dawkins and company, wow! The image of big cats toppling buffalo comes to mind. The green blood seemed to be boiling Sunday. But it's been absent since at least Dallas.

The question is, do we get green-blooded Eagles for the rest of the season, or not?

No offense—and, please, no late-night visit from the offensive line. I merely want to remind players of the covenant between them and the fans: You give your all on the field, and we scream our heads off in the stands, in front of the TV, or in the car while we're driving like our hair's on fire to get to the stands or a TV.

If a player thinks, "Get a life—it's only a game," then we've gotten to the core of the no-green-blood-on-the-field problem. Maybe he doesn't realize how important a game is to us. Then, again, how could they? We're not a warm and fuzzy lot, are we?

So let's open up. How important is an Eagles game to us? "Symbolic of a timeless struggle between opposing forces, with an outcome governed by supernatural powers

in conjunction with human skill and honour,” was how a BBC article described the Mayans ball game. Maybe the Eagles aren’t quite there, but this is still serious stuff.

First of all, their struggle on the field is our struggle in life. A dropped pass might connect to a feeling of shame — for the insensitive remark to a loved one blocking the TV during a crucial fourth-quarter play. A costly penalty may tap into a generalized sense of frustration — maybe a career move that hasn’t worked out or a relationship on the fritz.

Second, the game is chock full of lessons and inspiration, including the learning-how-to-win-and-lose theme, the overcoming-adversity saga, the too-old-for-the-game-but-still-playing attitude, and the striving-for-excellence philosophy.

A football game is one episode in a quest for a holy grail, the Super Bowl trophy. It’s a hero’s journey. At the Linc, we watch our heroes struggle. They rise and fall—and, hopefully, rise again.

They may not have been thinking hero when they signed with the Eagles. Doesn’t matter. The second they donned the green and white, they stepped into the role. Fortunately, they already have almost all the tools they need for success: intelligence, skill and talent. If they keep bleeding green, they can’t be stopped.

How do they keep bleeding green? By giving their lives to something bigger than themselves. That something would be us, the fans. That’s not to say there aren’t other motivations, such as to be the best player in the NFL or to play for the glory of God. However, those motivations won’t make them heroes.

Only we can do that. We, the multitudes at the Linc and the thousands glued to the TV every Sunday, are their witnesses. We give them meaning on an epic scale. We honor their service by preserving their stats, their highlights, their football soul, if you would, in our memories. Then we make them immortal by passing their story on to our sons and daughters. We are their advocates, historians, and biographers.

Being an Eagle is not easy. They have to deal with the booing, the second-guessing, the armchair quarterbacking, the booing, critical reporters, locker-room scandals, stadium fights, the booing, snowballs, high expectations, abusive banners, potty-mouth chants and did I mention the booing? Unfortunately, that behavior is unlikely to change. But they can forestall booing for the rest of the season by simply accepting the hero's journey. We'll know when it happens. There will be green blood on the field—every game.

—Mark Liskey