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Seeking the Essence of Tim Tebow in the Midst of Controversy and Ridicule
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The Denver Broncos football team made the second round of the AFC playoffs, despite having only an even win-loss record during the regular season (8-8) and losing the season's last three games. This is thanks in large part to the Broncos' young quarterback, Tim Tebow.

Since Tebow rose to the Broncos' starting QB position in mid-season, he has become the most infuriating QB in the entire league. In most games he has played three quarters of middling-quality football only to pull out a win in the last quarter (or overtime) with a combination of spectacular plays and good luck.

But to judge by the reaction of football fans, the sports media and the Internet, the most infuriating aspect of Tebow is his religious beliefs and actions. Tebow often punctuates media remarks with thanks to his "Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," and will bless those with whom he talks. Sometimes he has written his favorite Bible verse, John 3:16, on the black patches under his eyes.

His most widely known religious act is that after each touchdown, Tim goes down on one knee in prayer. This move has become known as "Tebowing" and has spawned a range of YouTube videos of people Tebowing in front of famous world sites and local hotspots, and doing flash-mob Tebows.

Needless to say Tim Tebow has become a controversial figure, partly because of the way he plays football and partly because of his evangelical Christian persona. Many who weigh in on the debate think the two do not fit together. Why does he thank Jesus for the way he plays football when his play is clearly so mixed? Why does he so unabashedly and overtly act as an Evangelical when football is so tough, so seemingly against Christian values?

The answer lies in who Tim Tebow is, at the core of himself. Good athletes perform best when they are centered, when they have put all distractions out of their minds. Tebow lives, eats and breathes his religious beliefs -- not as a conscious act, but as part of his unconscious character. This character was developed over the course of his upbringing.

Tebow was born in the Philippines to Baptist missionary parents. His father is a pastor and his mother homeschooled him throughout primary and secondary school. He grew up almost solely within an Evangelical world, with little influence from non-Christian sources. High school football seems to have been the primary exception to this observation. But he did not attend the school he played for; before practice every day he attended his family's home school.

Tebow's religious personality and activities began to gain national attention when he was the quarterback for the University of Florida Gators. Even when he won the Heisman Trophy, as a sophomore, he was already gaining notoriety for the verse references on his eye black. This evangelizing action has been seen by many as a stunt.

But whereas many evangelicals secretly fear evangelizing (because they do not like to be embarrassed or ridiculed anymore than the rest of us), Tebow's upbringing made it an unquestioned part of his inner personality. He evangelizes when he is playing well. It is not a distraction that prevents him from getting in the zone and staying focused.

So how should we understand Tim's Tebowing? Most commentators, as well as the ridiculers, have seen it as part of his evangelizing. They understand it as part of his evangelical actions of trying to use public attention to win people to Christ.

I think it stems from the inner essence of his being. That is a fancy way of saying that Tebow has his moment of prayer because that is who he is. By pausing to connect with his God, Tebow recenters himself. In the midst of celebration and struggle, he takes a moment to connect with his core being, a being who believes unquestioningly that his first priority is his God, not his football. One does not have to have the same beliefs as Tebow to understand that he is sincere.