



The rise of the Armchair Athlete

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The air has turned crisp and leaves have commenced falling, which has unofficially designated Sundays as the celebration of the Armchair Athlete. Are you a member of this phenomenon? If you aren't proud to say "Heck Ya!," you at least know of one, two...or more who position themselves in the proper reclining position. One hand usually wrapped around a beer, chips balanced on the lap while the other hand signals the excitement or disappointment in their voice.

The rise of sports' "Unsung Hero" - The Armchair Athlete is as American as the apple pie we will indulge over the holidays. I myself was indoctrinated into this movement. Growing up in the Windy City, I was born to loathe the cross-town baseball team, know all the words to the Super Bowl Shuffle, pray the curse of the goat to be lifted, and show homage to the names: Jordan, Ditka and Caray. I know I'm not the only Midwesterner who has become part of this unique tradition.

Truth be told, Americans are collectively fanatical with sports. Watching sports and participating in sports is such an unbelievably integral part of our lives, that a whopping \$100 billion is spent annually on this passion.

Our love begins in childhood with at least 40 percent of U.S. children playing a team sport on a regular basis. Interestingly, the obsession can be formed even if we have never participated in a sport ourselves. Just simply watching college-level, professional and international sports can become such a critical part of our lives. In fact, studies prove that for a fan, being identified with a favorite team is more important than being identified with their work and social groups. And if that is not shocking enough, being associated with a sports team is almost as important, or in some cases more important, than being associated with a religious affiliation.

Despite the money being spent on our obsession with sports, our ability to participate in sports is declining with our health and creating the rise of the Armchair Athlete. Think I'm over exaggerating? According to the CDC, nearly 80 percent of adults and one-third of children now meet the clinical definition of overweight or obese, which has led to only 1 in 4 U.S. adults participating in sports. We would rather pay obscene amounts to attend sporting events and watch others in peak physical condition than spend that money on ourselves to actively participate in our passion.

Will the rise of the Armchair Athlete claim more of us? Yes. If the top three sponsors for U.S. sporting events continue to be PepsiCo, Anheuser-Busch In-Bev and The Coca-Cola Co. this trend will continue. But, we as consumers have a secret weapon against

the movement...OUR WALLETS. The single coveted motive behind every sports sponsorship is brand loyalty. When we vote with our wallets, we change the company logos that brand scoreboards, racecars and stadium billboards. The American Public took down the cigarette giants and it can be done again to the corporations behind processed foods. So, remember to vote with your wallet this winter and halt the rise of the Armchair Athlete.