

God squad: Testifying at the Super Bowl

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After St. Louis Rams receiver Isaac Bruce made the game-winning touchdown against the Tennessee Titans in the Super Bowl, he gave credit to God. “It was all God. I knew I had to make an adjustment on the ball, and God did the rest.” Sports fans are accustomed to this kind of piety. Players regularly kneel to pray in the end zone, point to the heavens in thanksgiving after a touchdown, and offer “Thank you, Jesus” for victory in the postgame interview.

Though we hesitate to criticize any passion for praising God, we do wonder on such occasions if the one being praised is the God of Jesus Christ—the God who disciplines those he loves and who sends rain on the just and unjust—or some more domesticated gridiron god. Can we really discern just how God is acting in the ups and downs of life? More to the point: If God was positioning the Rams for a touchdown, what did God have against the Titans?

Bruce generated further theological consternation at the Super Bowl by saying that the reason he escaped unscathed from a 70-m.p.h. car crash last year is that he called out Jesus’s name as the car flipped over. He went on to suggest that if golfer Payne Stewart, a born-again Christian, had remembered to call out Jesus’s name, he would have survived his plane crash last summer. “There’s certain rights you have as a Christian,” Bruce explained, “certain things you can use, and the name of Jesus is one.” Use is right. For Bruce, apparently, having Jesus’s name on your lips is like having a lucky coin in your pocket.

Happily, a humbler and more compelling Christian witness was also on display at this Super Bowl in the person of Rams quarterback Kurt Warner, who was voted the game’s most valuable player. Warner is as eager as anyone to use his public platform to talk about his faith, but he never suggests that God is at his beck and call or that God is even interested in who wins football games. Warner also makes it clear that his faith is unrelated to tangible kinds of success. “Three years ago I was

working in a grocery store and had nothing. Three years from now I might have nothing. But I'll still have my faith and, I hope, my family."

Until this year Warner hadn't had much success at football. He had been released by several NFL teams, had toiled for several years in obscure minor leagues, and at one point was stocking grocery shelves at minimum wage in Cedar Falls, Iowa, to support his family. He joined the Rams last year as a backup, and made the starting lineup this year only after the starting quarterback was injured. He is reportedly devoted to his family, which includes a son who is blind.

Perhaps because of these trying experiences, Warner can talk about his faith in Christ in a natural and winsome way, conveying the sense that it's not for us to tell God what miracles to perform, and that God's notions of winning and losing are rather different from the ones we usually live by. We hope Warner gets lots of chances to give his testimony.