

## Bree's story reminder of what matters

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### Document Text

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Ryan Longwell, the kicker for the Minnesota Vikings, will be playing in one of the biggest games of his life tonight.

His teammate Brett Favre will be in a Vikings uniform playing against his former team -- the Green Bay Packers -- for the first time. Minnesota fans are giddy. Green Bay fans are grumpy. The eyes of the nation will be watching Monday Night Football. Al, Jaws and Chucky will be breaking it down. Hank Williams Jr. will be singing.

Are you ready for some . . . perspective?

"Bree's story really puts football in its proper place," says Longwell, who makes his offseason home in Orlando. "When you realize what Bree is going through, the big Monday night game doesn't seem so big anymore."

Bree is Breanna McMahon, the 17-year-old Freedom High School soccer player we wrote about in this space a few days ago. She endured one of the most horrific freak accidents you can imagine last weekend at a car wash fundraiser when a driver's foot inadvertently slipped off the brake and stomped on the gas pedal. The car surged forward and pinned Bree against a wall, crushing her lower extremities and changing her life forever.

Bree has already had one leg amputated and doctors are trying desperately to save the other. She's endured multiple surgeries and been in and out of induced comas as her body tries to fight off the infection and trauma.

In all my years of writing columns, I've never written one that so resonated with the public. In a sports world too often filled with rage and resentment, who knew there were so many caring people wanting to lend a hand?

Longwell read about the story on the Sentinel's Web site and e-mailed to find out what he could do to help. There was another message from Sonny Tillman, the founder of the Sonny's Barbecue chain who was touched by the story and wanted to make a donation to Bree's recovery fund.

There was a message from Phil Gygi, a soldier in Iraq who read about Bree and immediately e-mailed his wife and told her to hug the kids for him.

There were dispatches from coaches and teachers, schools and churches -- all trying to organize a car wash or a bake sale to raise money for Bree. One local coach has ordered silicone bracelets with Bree's name on them and her soccer team will give away the bracelets in exchange for a donation to Bree's recovery fund.

There have been messages from senior citizens and teenagers, Gators and Seminoles, NFL players and Little League coaches. I've always believed that only two things truly bring a community together -- sports and tragedy.

Bree represents both.

Her story -- a story of a bright, young athlete whose future was senselessly and inexorably altered -- has made many of us realize what is really important. Life is about the people you love; not how much money you make or how many Twitter followers you have.

"It's a shame it takes a tragic story like Bree's to remind us all of the things that really, truly matter in life," one reader wrote. "Football, money, success, image -- that stuff is the background noise. Front and center is health, family, and for most of us, our faith. God bless Bree and her family."

According to family friend Brenda Newman, Bree and her family are doing about as well as can be expected. Bree woke up from heavy sedation a couple of days ago and that's when she was told her leg had to be taken off.

"She took the news incredibly well," Newman says. "It's amazing how strong she is. She wanted to know how long it would be until she could start running.

Newman's voice cracked.

"And she also said, 'You know, I'm still going to the prom!' "

Breanna McMahon may have been knocked down, but it doesn't sound as if she intends to stay there. That's the lesson of Scott Rigsby, a double amputee who two years ago completed the Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii -- a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run. After reading her story, Rigsby wanted to get a copy of his book (Unthinkable) and a message to Bree. He wanted her to know that her "life will be different, but it can also still be amazing."

Yes sir, there's a big, important game on Monday Night Football.

So big and so important Packers fans are literally destroying their old Favre jerseys because ol' Brett had the audacity to sign with the division-rival Vikings.

"Maybe we all need to step back and reassess our priorities," Longwell says. "When you think about what Bree and her family are going through, does it really make sense for people to burn Brett Favre jerseys?"

"All of us are way too selfish," he adds. "We think Monday Night Football on ESPN is life-changing, but it's not.

"It's really not."

Help Breanna

\*Donations to Breanna's recovery fund can be made through any local branch of the Old Southern Bank.

Credit: Mike Bianchi, Sentinel Columnist

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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