

Brandons' remarks about fans were counterproductive

Contributed by Jack Carle - Sports Writer Sentinel Tribune
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I read something years ago that has stayed with me through numerous youth and prep seasons with my three children.

The thought was that the players or team you are cheering for need to hear you more when they are losing than when they're winning, because when you're behind you need the encouragement.

While the thought has stayed with me, it's one of the hardest things for me to do as a fan.

It's much easier to be supportive when things are going well because there are plenty of positives to cheer. When your team is losing, it takes a far better person than me to continue to encourage the team to keep playing hard while also verbally supporting your child and their friends.

It is even more difficult to remain positive when a team you are following, which doesn't include a close relative, continues to rip your heart out because of unfulfilled expectations.

That's why I'm not surprised that there weren't that many casual or even hardcore fans in the stands last Friday for Bowling Green's home football game with Buffalo.

The fans were there for Bowling Green's first three home games with 23,184 in attendance for the home-opener with Minnesota and an average of over 18,200 for the first three games.

In each of those three games, Bowling Green was close or ahead in the fourth quarter, only to lose. Two of the losses were to MAC bottom-feeders Eastern Michigan and Miami, who are both currently 2-9 overall. Each time the fans wanted to believe, but were sorely disappointed.

Still, the Falcons went into last Friday night's game with a chance to win the Mid-American East title, advance to the conference championship game and qualify for a bowl game.

However, the fans decided to stay away in droves. Maybe it was it the starting time (6 p.m.); weather (a temperature of 26 degrees with a wind of 11 miles per hour out of the west and a light snow falling); or the economy (in my mind, BG's single-game tickets are expensive, unless you get a deal. There's no general admission and charging youth, 17-and-under, anything more than \$5 per game is unnecessary). Or was it a combination of all of those plus other factors, including work, family requirements, high concession prices?

Or could the fans just not bring themselves to attend because they couldn't face the possibility of another fourth quarter letdown?

What some call reasons, others call excuses.

BG head coach Gregg Brandon decided any reason given not to attend the game was an excuse and that his team deserved better.

Maybe so, but for those thoughts to be the first statements out of his mouth in the post-game press conference Friday night seemed counterproductive.

What should have been addressed was why the team collapsed again in the fourth quarter? Why was there a change in the defensive scheme that allowed Buffalo to move up and down the field at will? Why did the offense suddenly stop moving the football?

Yes, there were a couple of bad breaks, most notably the botched hold on a field goal that probably would have put the game away.

But all the fans, even the ones who could not attend the game, deserve the reasons why the team collapsed, not getting roasted by the head coach for not showing up.

On Monday when given a chance to rescind or reduce his criticism, Brandon stood his ground.

"I'll stand by that 110 percent. I've gotten support from people about it and I've got some negative comments about it," he

said. "The bottom line is the game had championship implications and it (the attendance) was disappointing.

"The one thing that maybe got misunderstood, I realize that there are true fans throughout the world who support Bowling Green who couldn't make the game," he continued. "That's not what I was talking about. I was talking about the people who just flat out decided not to show up for whatever reason and I know we're struggling at home this year, but the game had championships implications."

Brandon then went on to point out the good support at Central Michigan last week for the Chippewas game with undefeated and nationally ranked Ball State.

He later added: "When you're struggling a little bit and you've got to fight it. I hear all the excuses, you're losing coach. Well, OK, there are a lot of teams losing games and they (fans) still come out, just because it's college football, to support the team ... I expect more out of the university. I expect more out of the students, I expect more from our fans in a crunch-time big game like that and we didn't get it."

Brandon did admit that the team wasn't able to do its part at home, but that was no reason, or excuse, to stay away from the game.

I support Brandon's right to say whatever is on his mind, but I'm not thrilled about when and where he made his feelings known.

If he wants respect and support from the fans, he should be willing to show them the same in return. The tongue lashing he gave is not likely to gain fans.

Give them something to cheer for and there's a better chance fans will show up. Turn them off with heart-breaking losses and verbal tirades and you may never win them back.