

# Of Orchestras and Football Teams

By Duo Dickinson

Although parents are supposed to guide their children through life, it is often the children who reveal layers of life's meanings to their parents. My own two boys are doing that in spades in their high school years. One boy is completely absorbed in music, the other is a member of the Hand High football team.

As one of the people who helped found Madison Cultural Arts, it may surprise some that the value of athletics in education is something I truly believe in, having experienced them myself about a thousand years ago playing center and middle linebacker in upstate New York, and coaching at Branford High School in the previous century.

But until this year I really didn't know what those intrinsic qualities meant in Madison except for the civil but thorough beating my Branford team took at Strong Field in 1985. My guess is most people in Madison vaguely know that the town's football team has won a lot of games, but probably are not fully aware that this is one of the most successful seasons in the team's extraordinarily successful history.

Even though I've let my son know that the brutality and tribal aspects that are unique to football are part of a greater picture of selfless devotion and extreme commitment that

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are necessary for any team to perform well, he only understands the reality of these ironies participating in the grinding 20 hours a week he dedicates to the sport.

In a parallel universe my other son plays for perhaps the finest youth orchestra in the state, the Greater New Haven Youth Symphony Orchestra, has been "All State" as a horn player, performs in ensembles at his two music schools, as well as for Choate and Hand as requested. His grinding 30 hours a week of focused performance is directly equivalent to his brother's experience, and the growth derived from challenge is obvious.

My sons' twin worlds of athletic and orchestral achievement reveal a different attitude for a culture that often offers to its young sports and arts activity participants a "we are all winners" ethos of inclusion and acceptance. Clearly every individual has merit, but clearly not all teams, orchestras, or given set of individuals triumph in their efforts.

It is easy to simply dismiss athletics, especially football, as crude endeavors having nothing to do with the subtle sensibilities on an educated life. It's also easy to dismiss

elite musical performance as the inaccessible intellectual playpen of the pretentious. Both these attitudes belie the reality that when adults dedicate their heart and soul to inspiring teenagers to do more than they thought they were capable of, the education imparted goes well beyond the book learning that occurs during the morning and early afternoon hours at Hand High School.

We who sit in the audience only see the tip of an iceberg of effort, commitment, and time that these groups invest just getting onto the playing field or into the performance hall. So as you feel your pride swell for your hometown football team's extraordinary season or witness its children performing exquisite music, theater, or any other performing art, realize that arts and athletics fruitfully coexist and the value of their efforts is deeper than their "on stage" performances.

Having lived my life in the arts and having spent a portion of it as irrationally dedicated to football as any member of the Hand football team, it's obvious to me there is much to celebrate in this year of unexpected excellence, and its not just on Friday nights at Strong Field.

*Duo Dickinson is a nationally recognized architect and locally recognized philanthropist.*