



National humiliation, epic storms, a reactive return to last year's must-have accessory: the ill-fitting mask. But, hey, who cares that the world's a swirling stew of nastiness? Stock prices rise. So do home values. Along with public debt loads and retail prices, but who's counting? Up is up. More is more, even when it comes to absurdity and despair.

No matter...it's football season again. High school teams are three games into their campaigns. Most major colleges are kicking off this weekend for the first time this fall. The NFL starts its slog to the Super Bowl on September 9. Our great American distraction has arrived just in time.

You might have a commander-in-chief as unsteady as the 1976 Tampa Bay Buccaneers (0-14, before losing another 12 in row the following year), but you're not concerned. September 11th is a football Saturday this year, and your team hasn't been mathematically eliminated from College Football Playoff-berth contention yet. Tailgating seems like an awkward way to mark the somber 20th anniversary of the collapse of World Trade Center Towers One and Two. But after a six-pack and a stack of brats, you'll probably forget the Taliban is still celebrating the biggest upset since Appalachian State (Division I-AA, at the time) shamed Michigan's maize-and-blue in 2007. You can't be blamed for tuning out the clash between civilized, modern humanity and regressive barbarism and hate. Instead, you tune into fancy-outfitted Oregon against venerable Ohio State. The Ducks versus the Bucks. And you've got U of O and the points.

Apologies for the cynicism. Sometimes the focus of our collective attention feels a little Nero-ish, given the complexities that riddle the modern world; though, it's quite likely that unserious interests are healthy antidotes to everyday horrors and stress.

And, you know what? I love football and I'm glad it's back. I think I can manage being an informed and productive citizen, properly loving my country and contemplating its challenges, while rooting for the Nittany Lions at the same time. So, I'm going to.

Let's add a little extra intrigue to the aforementioned distraction-effect. If you haven't tried our football pool game yet, look for it on page 32. Play along. Submit your entry. Perhaps, win a prize.

I'm not suggesting we ignore or forget or accept. Rather, I'm recognizing a conundrum: Where is the line between reverential and reactionary? Or the one between resilient and cavalier?

NFL opening weekend 2021 and the 20th anniversary of 9/11/2001 are at once incredibly disparate (evocatively) and exactly concurrent (as the calendar dictates). A sort of levity-gravity barbell that can be hard to reconcile. But we'll try. To root some and remember – doing a bit of both – is probably a reasonable compromise.

Scott A. Lauriat



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