

# Soccer

## Tripped Up by Cheating

On June 22, 1986, one of the most infamous goals in *Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)* history took place. It occurred in the second half of a soccer match between Argentina and England.

Argentina's star player, Diego Maradona, slipped behind England's flank and received a wonderful lob pass. England's goalkeeper came out to swat the ball away as Maradona jumped up to head it. But instead of a header, Maradona faked it and intentionally used his hand to throw the ball into the net.

Unfortunately, the ref didn't have a good angle on the play and missed the dirty deed. Argentina went on to win the game. Afterward Maradona told reporters about the goal: "*Un poco con la cabeza de Maradona y otro poco con la mano de Dios*" (a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God).\*

---

\* Matt Bonesteel, "Diego Maradona Admits Video Replay Would Have Erased His 'Hand of God' Goal," *The Washington Post*, July 26, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2017/07/26/diego-maradona-admits-video-replay-would-have-erased-his-hand-of-god-goal/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.3a74034c9f78](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2017/07/26/diego-maradona-admits-video-replay-would-have-erased-his-hand-of-god-goal/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3a74034c9f78).

won the World Cup that year, and Maradona was named MVP of the game.

Maradona showed no remorse for his blatant cheating. In fact, he was more or less rewarded for it! But what exactly does it mean to cheat? Is it simply going against what's defined in the rule books? Is it cheating if you purposely step on another player's shoes during a game to trip them? What about intentionally hitting a player on the opposing team when no one is looking? Is it cheating only if a referee catches you?

Public shame and apologies are the future for anyone who gets caught bending the rules. However, what if you've perfected the art of cheating—you're so good at it that you have never gotten caught and never will? How does that fit in with your Christianity?

Now we're moving into the realm of pride. Pride will tell you that hard work isn't enough sometimes and that it's unacceptable for you to ever lose. Pride will tell you to cheat, deceive, and connive to win—but you shouldn't listen. After all, Satan's pride got him kicked out of heaven.

Basketball Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar observed: "In athletics there's always been a willingness to cheat if it looks like you're not cheating. I think that's just a quirk of human nature."\*

Abdul-Jabbar is right. We can't help the fact that we were born into sin, but we can fight it. Listening to that still small voice (a.k.a. the Holy Spirit) will help us make the right decisions.

Proverbs 11:3 says: "Honesty guides good people; dishonesty destroys treacherous people" (NLT). So the next time you're tempted to cheat, remember that pride goes before a fall. And to all those who think they're too good to lose: you're trippin'.

*I would prefer even to fail with honor than to win by cheating.*

—Sophocles

---

\* "Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Talkasia Transcript" CNN.com, July 2, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/07/08/talkasia.jabbar.script/index.html>.

## Power Source

In 1966 the *FIFA World Cup* was stolen. As part of an exhibition for the public, the trophy was supposed to go on display so that everyone could see it up close. The trophy was supposed to be under guard at all times. Unfortunately, the day after it was shown to the public, the trophy went missing. One of the guards noticed that the display case had been forced open. It seemed as though the culprits had probably escaped through a back door, because the wooden bar that normally kept the door closed was lying on the floor. Just as in any great heist movie, the finest police in London were brought in to help solve the case. While the police were busy looking for the suspects, Joe Mears, the chairman of the English Football Association, received a ransom note from an anonymous source. The note stated that unless Mears paid £15,000 (about \$42,000 in today's US currency), the trophy would be melted down into gold bricks. Mears was told not to contact anyone, but he ignored that and contacted Detective Inspector Buggy. Long story short, Detective Buggy caught a suspect by using fake ransom money. Later a dog named Pickles found the trophy.

When you look at the big picture, the plan started out OK, but went downhill quickly. Sadly, those weren't the first culprits to experience that kind of failure. In 1 Samuel 4–6, the Philistines managed to defeat the Israelites in battle. Adding insult to injury, the Philistines took the Israelites' most prized possession: the ark of the covenant. This was the special place where God dwelled and had spoken to Moses. It also carried some sacred items concerning God's history with His people. After they stole it, the Philistines had nothing but bad things happen to them while the ark was in their possession. In the cities that it went to, the citizens got tumors, and hordes of rats invaded them. Eventually the Philistines returned the ark to the Israelites, and the tumors and rats went away.

The unbelievable part to me is that in and of themselves, the trophy and the ark of the covenant didn't mean anything. They

were just material things. Even if the trophy was never returned, it wouldn't mean that new champions couldn't be crowned. If it came down to it, a new trophy could be made. Same thing with the ark. Both the thieves and the Philistines thought that by stealing these items, they would have some sort of power. However, we know that our power doesn't come from material things. It comes from the One who made those material things—God. Our power doesn't come from crosses, idols, or anything else. It comes from God. Put your trust in Him, and you will never be let down or deceived.

*God has a reason for allowing things to happen. We may never understand His wisdom, but we simply have to trust His will.*

—Unknown, adapted from Psalm 37:5

# Football

## A Lesson in Humility

The day rookie Dez Bryant said no, his actions caused quite a stir in the Dallas Cowboys camp. On July 25, 2010, veteran Roy Williams asked Bryant to carry Williams's pads off the field. Bryant refused, stating that he "was here to play football, not carry someone else's pads." Williams thought Bryant was being disrespectful, but Bryant insisted that he wasn't. Eventually the two worked things out and moved on.

This takes me back to my rookie year on my basketball team. I was forced to carry the water bottles to and from games. If I ever forgot my "duty," my older teammates always reminded me. On one hand, I detested carrying water bottles because I felt it was beneath me. On the other hand, I knew that this was a way for me to earn respect from the older team members. It's sort of like doing chores; everyone in a family has to do them. So if my team was supposed to be "family," then this was something I needed to do.

Naaman had a similar experience. The great commander of 2 Kings 5 was a decent enough guy. He'd won many battles with the help of the Lord, but he had one major setback: leprosy. Thankfully, a servant girl told Naaman to find Elisha to be healed. When Naaman finally arrived at Elisha's door, he wasn't healed

right away. There was no bright flash, no blaze of glory from heaven. Instead, Naaman was told to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times. No biggie, right? Wrong. The Jordan River was one of the dirtiest rivers in the land!

It angered Naaman that he was forced to dip in a dirty river, but then his servants counseled him: “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed!’” (2 Kings 5:13, NIV). After that, a humbled Naaman dipped himself into that dirty Jordan River seven times, and his skin was healed. (Side note: Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.)

Unfortunately there are times when team initiation rituals can become harmful. That sort of hazing isn’t constructive and shouldn’t be tolerated. However, everyone can learn to be humbler. How and when you learn it is completely up to you, but the sooner the better!

*If you have a degree of humility about you, you have the ability to take advice, to be coachable, teachable. A humble person never stops learning.*

—Todd Blackledge

## Zoom Through the Hole

In the National Football League (NFL), Emmitt Smith is considered the greatest rusher of all time. He made a living off of dashing in and out among would-be tacklers at breakneck speeds. While his highlight reel is exhilarating, the thought of his job is terrifying to me. Part of being a rusher is running through the holes in the defense. The rusher can’t hesitate, because the hole is open for only a couple of seconds. Sometimes rushers have to run even before they can see the hole they are running toward. It’s insane! They don’t really have time to think about it—they just act. They’re able to do this because they are so in tune with the

game that they have a feel for where these holes are going to be. Watching this happen is breathtaking.

I was equally in awe when I first read about a young boy in the Bible by the name of David. In 1 Samuel 17, David walked up to the camp where Israel was fighting the Philistines. Now, most of the men were cowering in fear as Goliath (who was super tall, by the way) openly dissed God. When David heard this, he didn't think, he just acted. His immediate reaction was basically, "Why is this bum talking crazy about God?" To cut a long story short, David defeated Goliath with one small stone and a big piece of God's awesome power. That's all good for a happy ending's sake, but how do you think David was able to react so quickly? Why didn't he cower in fear like the rest of the Israelite army?

I believe it was because he was so in tune with God that responding with courage came naturally to him. Every day David had time to talk with God, write psalms, and make music that proclaimed God's glory. When it came down to crunch time, it didn't matter that Goliath was humongous. Just as when he'd killed the lion and the bear, David knew that with God's help he would slay Goliath. There was no hesitation—he showed no fear.

I remember in the 1990s when a popular clothing company made a big splash. The company was called No Fear. Everyone and their mother had a No Fear sticker to wear. People liked to wear these stickers because they let everyone else know that they weren't scared of anything. Presently No Fear isn't as popular, but you can still apply the company's message to Christianity. There's nothing to fear when God is on your side. Speed toward the great opportunity ahead of you.

*Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.*

—Mark Twain

## SMH Excessive Celebration

Imagine your favorite NFL player running in for a touchdown. As soon as he crosses the goal line, he spikes the ball in celebration. However, the party doesn't stop there. He then gathers the rest of his players, and they perform some well-rehearsed choreography. The players may act like bowling pins as the player who scored the touchdown takes an imaginary ball and bowls a strike on his teammates.

This may look cool and can even be fun to watch, but Roger Goodell, NFL commissioner, deems such shows unnecessary. In fact, he dislikes them so much that he has instituted a rule that penalizes players for showing off. The penalty is called "excessive celebration." It costs the team fifteen yards, and players can be fined. Most athletes don't care and celebrate excessively anyway. Sometimes a team loses the game because of that penalty.

I don't understand why athletes feel the need to celebrate excessively. If you score a touchdown, hand the ball to the ref and keep it moving. My bigger question is: Why does Roger Goodell believe that excessive celebrations are bad? His critics have come up with the snarky joke that the acronym NFL stands for No Fun League, but I think his reasons are biblical.

Remember King Hezekiah in Isaiah? In chapter 38, Hezekiah got sick and prayed to God that he would get better. God heard his prayers and granted him fifteen extra years. Touchdown! And how did Hezekiah choose to show his gratitude? By excessive celebration.

Travelers from Babylon had heard about Hezekiah's miraculous recovery and wanted to see him. Hezekiah graciously accepted them into his courts, and because he was wealthy, he showed them just how rich he was. The Bible says that Hezekiah opened up his storehouses and showed them all the silver, gold, spices, and treasures of his kingdom. The visitors left in good spirits—but that's when the prophet Isaiah showed up. Isaiah told the king that God was not pleased with him and that his



descendants' future would not be pleasant.

Hezekiah moronically responded, "At least there will be peace in my time" (see Isaiah 39:8). Had Twitter been around back then, I think Isaiah might've tweeted, "SMH @Hezekiah." (SMH stands for "shaking my head," in case you're not up on the lingo.)

The purpose of a penalty for excessive celebration is to teach us how to humble ourselves. Remember to thank God for everything He has blessed you with, because pride always comes before a fall.

*Sense shines with a double luster when it is set in humility.*

*An able and yet humble man is a jewel worth a kingdom.*

—William Penn

## “Black Monday”

The final week in every NFL regular season, week 17, is always looming in the minds of NFL coaches. Week 17 is so threatening because the Monday after the regular season ends, coaches of teams who didn't make the playoffs face the possibility of being fired. This day is often referred to as “Black Monday.”

Eight coaches were fired following the 2012–2013 NFL season. Out of thirty-two teams, just twelve teams made the playoffs. Out of the twenty teams who didn't make it into the playoffs, eight fired their coaches. That's almost half! It's an incredibly high firing rate, and it's also a lot of pressure. Every season the coaches try their hardest to avoid being fired. These coaches realize that they have an entire season to prove their worth. If at the end of that season they don't live up to the hopes of their general managers, they often get fired.