

What it means to be a fan

Alabama comedian dissects our love of sports — and what it says about us

By Jermaine “FunnyMaine” Johnson



We, the people of Alabama, love our sports and there's nothing you can do about it. There's nothing *we* can do about it, either. Most folks' priorities around here? God. Family. Sports. In some order. And if we're being honest,

God enters the equation most often when we're praying for a win in order to peacefully co-exist with — or gloat over — our families.

Why do we have this obsession with games, some of which were made for children to enjoy? Maybe because the vast majority of us are highly competitive people — who weren't blessed with the tools to compete at a high level in sports. I've made a living talking about my favorite team and ragging on other teams from my couch. At 5-9 and 198 pounds, that's probably the safest place for me to do it. Most fans of college football, myself included, wouldn't last a single down on an SEC field. But we provide something valuable, too. Our fandom — the traditions we create, even the banter we throw around — shapes our shared culture here that we love so much.

We also cheer because, despite all the rivalries and all of our differences, we want to come together. We need the community that sports offer. And our sports need us, too. What would sports be without the roars, gasps, and boos of the crowd? How meaningful would these games be without town bragging rights and the constant chatter between fan bases? More importantly, our state's stellar athletics reputation gives Alabama something positive to be known for nationally.

Not all of us will make it to the biggest stages in sports, but most of us dream of it as kids. And that hope of “being somebody” and representing your home state is important when you come from a place that ranks

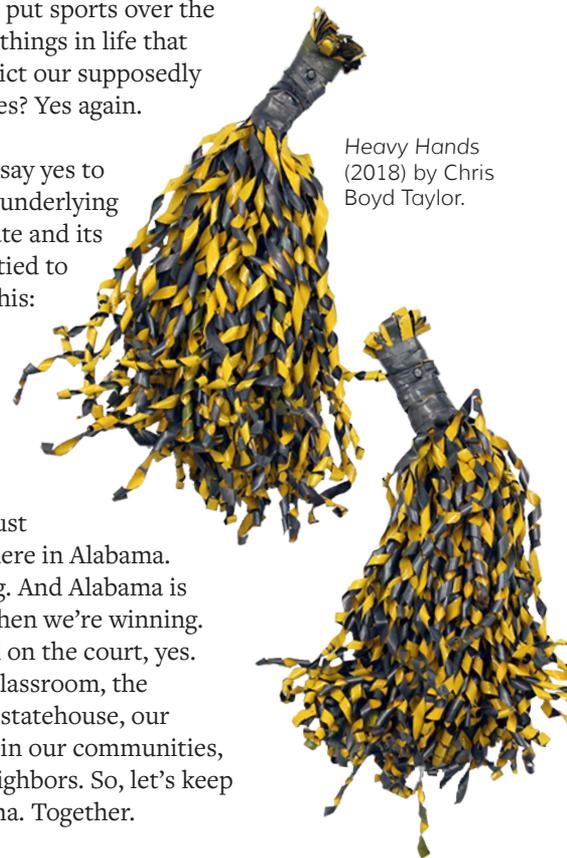
near the bottom nationally in education, wages, quality of life, and other measures. Alabama is a place where you can be forgotten because of your circumstances, but it's also where you can be remembered forever by overcoming adversity and winning.

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Do some of us live vicariously through athletes far younger than ourselves and scream at them on the television for underperforming? OK, maybe. Do we sometimes taunt our rivals to the extreme that it sometimes ends in unnecessary altercations? Yes. Do we too often put sports over the truly important things in life that directly contradict our supposedly biblical principles? Yes again.

But we can also say yes to this: Is there an underlying hope for this state and its potential that's tied to sports? And to this: Do sports often keep us striving for greatness in our personal lives?

I think it's not just sports we love here in Alabama. We love winning. And Alabama is a better place when we're winning. On the field and on the court, yes. But also in the classroom, the boardroom, the statehouse, our neighborhoods, in our communities, and with our neighbors. So, let's keep winning, Alabama. Together.



Heavy Hands (2018) by Chris Boyd Taylor.