



From the executive director

Charles W. (Chuck) Holmes

A column like this generally offers readers a preview of what's inside the magazine. But before we get to that, let's take a minute and make a list.

First, name those things that we absolutely need for human survival.

Shelter. Check. Water and food. Of course.

Love? Sure, because poets and songwriters tell us that life is not worth living without it. Plus, perpetuation of the species.

Survivalists might suggest that we add a good sharp knife and some rope. The righteous would surely add faith.

One thing not on our list so far? Sports. And another? The humanities.

They are missing because they are completely unnecessary. Our existence simply does not require them. Yet, as human beings we were compelled to invent them. We crave them. We are incomplete without them. We live vicariously through them.

Virtually every culture on the globe has created games that test the body and mind. Just as every civilization has established the means of human expression (literature, history, philosophy, ethics) to explore the meaning of our lives.

As Birmingham plays host to The World Games 2022, this issue of *Mosaic* is devoted to the intersection of sports and the humanities in Alabama. The stories and images in these pages reflect and embody everything that makes us human. They tell the tale of statehood and injustices, of human endurance and shared experiences, of triumphs and defeats.

Examining our state's life and history would be impossible without noting the games and athletes that distinguish us. Jesse Owens and Joe Louis. The Negro Leagues. The Iron Bowl, Talladega, and the countless playing fields, courts, and sandlots where sweat and dreams mingle every day.

For those who read this issue and want to learn more about the history and cultural impact of sports in Alabama, I highly encourage a virtual visit to the Encyclopedia of Alabama. We developed this resource 15 years ago in partnership with Auburn University and other allies across the state; today, the site has more than 125 articles on sports, in addition to hundreds more on history, folklife, literature, and the like.

No, we don't need sports in order to live. But the games we play and enjoy as fans shape our collective identity.

Plus, they're fun. Our guest essayist, comedian and Alabama superfan Jermaine "FunnyMaine" Johnson, attests to that in this issue. We also asked ESPN's Rece Davis, a native of Muscle Shoals, to list his top four moments from our state's rich football history, and he delivered. And we've got recommendations on the best books and documentaries highlighting our sporting past.

You will also find the work of one of Alabama's most renowned humanists, historian Wayne Flynt. A particular sport, he observes, holds a singular place of reverence in Alabama culture: "If the Bible is correct when it states that where a person's treasure is there his heart will be also, then the state's true affection could be found at Bryant-Denny or Jordan-Hare stadium."

Bless our hearts. War Eagle. Roll Tide.