

Sports

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Is God taking sides?

AND ON the seventh day, the New York Giants shall play the Denver Broncos.

Just call it Super Sunday. As if the Lord's Day wasn't super enough, it has taken on special significance this week with the addition of that all-important ritual known as Super Bowl XXI in Pasadena, Calif.

When the Broncos and Giants go at it for the championship of the National Football League, the audience will include 101,000 spectators in the Rose Bowl, an estimated 135 million television viewers across the U.S. and untold millions in 40 foreign countries receiving the telecast.

In light of such intense interest in this super event, the question that now arises is: "Does God care who wins the Super Bowl?"

One has to wonder after some of the things the players have said in recent days. In fact, to hear the Broncos tell it, Denver made it to the Super Bowl by Divine Intervention.

In the American Football Conference title game in Cleveland, Rich Karlis of the Broncos kicked a 33-yard field goal to give Denver a 23-20 victory in overtime.

In recounting that dramatic moment, Karlis said: "There wasn't a single player on our side, including me, who wasn't praying for that field goal. I prayed real hard."

SOME OF the Browns allowed Karlis would miss the kick, but for whatever reasons, their prayers weren't answered.

Another Bronco, linebacker Jim Ryan, recounted in a post-game television interview that he prayed to intercept a pass and he was thankful "the Lord gave it to me today."

So, this is what the power of prayer is all about? Or is it? Some Tulsa ministers don't quite see it that way.

Said Janet Newman, a minister at All Souls Unitarian Church:

"If someone came up to me and said, 'Does God listen to a prayer about winning or losing?' I would ask, 'Are we really talking about that small of a God?'"

"Life is full of winning or losing. To think that God would arrange things and move people around like men on a chess board — that would be a very petty God."

The thought of football players praying in the huddle or on the sideline before a crucial play reminded Newman of the biblical verse in the Book of Matthew, Chapter 6: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

"Jesus tells us to be humble in prayer, not self-righteous," said Newman.

THE REV. Warren Hultgren of First Baptist Church said there is nothing wrong with players praying for God to help them do their best, but the essential point of prayer is commitment to the will of God.

"Long before it is getting things, it is giving things," he said.

Hultgren also said: "God loves everyone and is concerned about everyone. He does honor commitment to practice and sport, and it does help us to do our best to know God is with us. But God is not for East or West, per se."

Marvin Phillips, the pastor of Garnett Church of Christ, just returned to this country from South Africa and did not know until Wednesday night which teams were in the Super Bowl. He will have to videotape the game to watch later because on Sunday he will be in church "along with about a thousand other people."

Phillips has no favorite in the game, nor does he believe God does.

"I don't think God cares at all (who wins)," he said. "He is more concerned how we treat each other."

As Newman said, "God has bigger things on God's mind than the Super Bowl."

That is reassuring. With all the problems in the world, it would be discomfiting to believe God was busy helping someone kick a field goal Sunday.

And, for all those fans who have been wondering if the Broncos have a prayer against the Giants, the answer is simple. It depends what they are praying for.