

# HOW WOMEN CAN LEARN FROM FOOTBALL

## MIMI DONALDSON FINDS LESSONS FOR BOTH SEXES ON THE GRIDIRON

Mimi Donaldson, in her 20s, was watching an NFL football game on TV with her boyfriend when he noticed her wiping away a tear and asked what was wrong.

“Oh, Joe!” she said. “That’s my favorite part of football. The guy from one team knocked down the guy from the other team. Then he reached his hand out to help him up.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s just so sweet!”

“Meem, the whistle blew,” he explained. “The play is over. He’s helping the other guy up so they can start knocking each other down again. It’s efficiency, not compassion!”

Lesson learned – and career launched.

These days, Donaldson, an author and sought-after event speaker, builds her message around football and its “Necessary Roughness,” the title of her forthcoming book on “New Rules for the Contact Sport of Life.”

“I teach women how to watch football,” she says. “It’s got every strategic lesson. I believe women, especially successful women, will be drawn to football because those are the lessons they used to get ahead.

“They have commitment. They’re great team players. They’re good leaders. And they’re very in tune with intention which makes you unstoppable.”

Women can be attracted to the sport for its sheer beauty – “20-year-old guys on the field at the peak of their physical prowess running around in Spandex,” Donaldson says, not to mention the ballet grace of a leaping catch or the brute strength of a tackler-dragging run.

“They say ‘I don’t like football. It’s too rough,’” Donaldson says. “You might love it. You just don’t know it yet. It has got everything we love that’s inspiring, and it does have lessons.”

The two-minute drill, the hurry-up offense, the mutual hand-squeeze of quarterback and coach during a crucial field goal try, the choice to throw the flag or keep the game going, the shaking-off of a bad play and the second chance for the guy who dropped the pass – all fodder for Donaldson’s life lessons.

“There are 11 guys facing each other eyeball-to-eyeball on the line of scrimmage,” she says. “One team says ‘we’re going that way.’ The other says ‘no, you’re not.’

“I want people to watch football because it’s

inspiring. It energizes you to do the impossible because they’re doing it.”

Donaldson focuses on football not only for its on-field advantages but also for its off-field approach, and even for sports shows, whose countdown clocks and corner alerts to the next segment cater to men’s comfort zones.

The goal is not that women would become like men, but that they would understand a different approach and manage personal and business relationships more effectively.

“You have to know how to talk with men,” she says. “You have to learn how to get along with men. You have to learn how to work with men. And if you’re married, you have to learn how to love men.

“You can say ‘no,’ you can stand your ground in a nice way, and you can negotiate. Those aren’t men things. Those are successful people things.”

The mutual respect and dialogue that builds teams and families can also enhance businesses.

“In the corporate world, most people think management is a one-way flow from the top down,” Donaldson says. “The problem is most employees don’t know how to manage their employers. In football, smart players know how to coach the coach.”

Complaints about managers – the “ain’t it awful?” game – has no more place in the office than complaints about the coach in the locker room, she says.

Careful recruiting can also be a model for companies: “In the NFL, there’s a lot of care and testing that goes into that,” Donaldson says. “They really look at the character of the person.”

She once invoked the Rooney Rule, requiring owners to interview at least one qualified minority candidate for a coaching job, when advising a widowed friend on the resumption of dating.

“She is dating all kinds of people now,” Donaldson boasts.

Donaldson grew up in Illinois in a family rare for its African-American friends and racial openness – her father gave her a black Tiny Tears doll when she was 5. Her mother found football too violent, and the leading sport was baseball. Diversity included supporting both the Cubs and White Sox.

She has a vivid memory from age 7 of a criti-

cal point in a baseball game when a batter faced a 3-2 pitch, his team down by two with two men on base.

“My dad said, ‘That guy’s going to be a hero or a bum,’” she recalls. “I was so scared for the guy. I didn’t want him to be a bum. My little brother loved the black-and-white of it, the win-or-lose of it.

“I wanted everybody to play nice. I wanted everybody to win. I didn’t get it. Now I know. It’s going to be rough, people. There’s going to be a winner. There’s going to be a loser. That’s why it’s called a game.”

Her first football lesson – “when the whistle blows, the play is over” – remains central to her message. One application: Male lawyers have long fought each other vehemently in court, then gone out to lunch together as friends.

“Female lawyers are just beginning to do that. They do it much less than men,” Donaldson says. “Each moment is a new moment of now. Men know that. They have short memories. It’s called ‘shaking it off.’ Short memory is the key to success with men.” **RD**



MIMI DONALDSON, AUTHOR OF AN UPCOMING BOOK TITLED “NECESSARY ROUGHNESS.” PHOTO CONTRIBUTED