

The culmination of my 10-year youth football career was so incredibly anti-climactic, it forever tainted my view the entire sport of football. My senior night for football was the last game of the year and the last football game I would ever play in. A game I had been playing since the third grade. I was originally provoked by a couple of my friends in my class, so I caved and signed up the next fall. My stepdad also decided to coach my team as well. Though I have never been the best at the sport, football was by far my favorite sport ever since I joined. My junior season was my favorite season of all high school. I had not been setback with a lingering knee injury like I had been in the two years prior. I played exclusively Junior Varsity, but I did not care. I had lots of fun playing cornerback, defending passes and sprinting up and down the numbers. My senior year was much less fun. To start off, the JV season was cancelled because we coach decided we did not have enough players to have both a varsity and junior varsity. Personally, thought that was stupid. For one, my freshman football team had only 12 people on the roster at the beginning of the season and about 15 at the end. I also thought it was dumb because coach only ever played the same 16 people on offence and defense and much of special teams, so player numbers were never averse to his coaching style. To fast forward to senior night against Windham HS, we came into the game with a record of 2-6. The team has not been good since 2014 but that's beside the point. The tradition of senior night is to start all the seniors at the beginning of the game. We had nothing to lose by doing this, our playoff hopes diminished weeks ago. This did not stop coach from sitting me for the entire game. I had not got any extra playtime other than my usual spot on the kickoff team that I have had most of the season, which he had no control of because he does not coach the special teams. I absolutely hated standing on the sideline play after play, drive after drive, quarter after quarter. We ended up losing the game. I have tried to forget this memory so much, I cannot even remember the score, which I know for most games. I tried my best to leave as fast as possible, head down, listening to the *Interstellar* soundtrack composed by Hans Zimmer. I did not even get any of the food the team moms made for us on my way out because I was so upset. While driving myself back home at about 10pm, I took a few extra turns and ended up in the parking lot by Broken Ground School, where I had first started football ten years prior. I sat in my car for a bit as I contemplated my journey through youth football and all the friends I made along the way, all that I had learned about myself and the game, and all of the Patriots games my stepdad took me to when younger. When I was done, I finished driving home and went straight to bed. I had not checked my phone to see all my teammate's social media posts about their careers coming to an end as well because I knew it was just going to make it hurt that much more. Both of my parents knew how I was feeling so they left me alone so I could go to sleep. For weeks after, I could not stomach watching a Patriots game on TV because I knew what it meant to me. For the months after that night, football was my least favorite sport. I practically skipped the equipment turn-in the following Monday to go and run with the track team. I would later be named a team captain for the track team's indoor season and scored points for my team in the Division 1 state meet with my relay team. I then waited anxiously for weeks leading up to the spring season to start (which never did).