

The Football Analogy for Writing

Copyright 2023, Robert Quattlebaum

I apologize in advance for picking football for this analogy. I realize that most readers, writers, and editors are women and, as such, are less likely to identify with football. I'm not a football fan either, but this is the best analogy I've been able to think of to date.

Writing is like football. The football stars of today started playing the game as kids, just for fun, in backyards and away from the public eye. During this time, they were first exposed to professional football, and likely began watching NFL games on TV.

A few of these kids went on to play on a school team during their early teens. With the rigors of daily practice, and with playing against other teams, those few got better.

Many of the younger team players went on to play on a high school team. Many—but not all. And a fraction of those high school players went on to play for a college team. A select few of the very best high school players were actually recruited by college teams.

College football players are good. Some of them are really good and actually become household names in their home state. But only a small number of college players move on to become professionals.

The best of the best college players make it to the NFL. But of those, only a tiny fraction become household names. I'm showing my age, but I remember names like Joe Namath and Rosey Grier. I knew very little about football as a kid, but I knew those names—and remember them to this day.

Most high school football players think they have a good chance at playing college football and, perhaps, making it to the NFL one day. But few of them do.

Many college football players believe they have what it takes to make the NFL. But few of them do.

NFL players believe they are the best of the best. But few of them are household names.

And so it is with writing.

A student might make straight A's in their early teens, receiving praise for every English paper they turned in. Does that mean they will do as well in high school?

Some will. Some won't.

A student may make straight A's in high school. They've got spelling, punctuation, and grammar down pat. They write well. Does that mean they can do the same in college?

Some will. Some won't.

A college student may major in English. They may get all A's in that subject. They may even become an English teacher or professor. Does that mean they can write and publish a quality book?

Some can. Many can't.

You see, writing for publication is like being in the NFL. Only a fraction of good writers make it. And they didn't do so by writing a first draft, checking it over for errors, and then whisking it off to the publisher. There are *tons* of things even the most gifted writer needs to learn to be ready for publication.

Writing is a craft that is learned through years of practice and study. Even the most gifted writers must learn the craft of writing. Those who pursue the goal with all diligence move forward in their writing career. Some sell well. Some become popular. A select few become household names.

If you want to reach even the lowest level of successful publication (getting a book published and selling a few thousand copies) then you must study the craft. You need to join a critique group. You need to read books on the subjects of writing AND editing. You need to write daily—or at least with great frequency. You need to get feedback from a professional editor and heed everything they tell you.

Just because every friend and family member who reads your manuscript gives you glowing praise doesn't mean you're ready for publication. That's like your high school friends saying you're good enough for the NFL. What do they know? You may have talent. But you must hone that talent before you showcase it to the world.

Just as NFL recruiters don't come knocking on the doors of high school players, big-time publishers rarely take on a new author who has thrown his first effort over the transom to them. Want to make it big? Join the ranks, put in your time, learn your craft, and become an excellent writer. Hint: A professional editor can help.