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Despite My House Divided, We Can Unite for Our Team

By Barbara E. Thompson
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College football season is here. My husband, Jim, and I are loyal fans of the UCF Knights and look forward to the Saturdays when we load our grill, lawn chairs and cooler in the car and head out to our favorite tailgating spot on campus.

We wear our latest UCF T-shirts and visors and get set for the unpredictability and excitement of college football.

We have adopted the UCF Knights as our hometown team. We have had season tickets since 2008 and have cheered the team on through both the years devoid of wins and the year of perfection. And remarkably, we have been devoted fans without relinquishing loyalties to our alma maters.

Jim is a Gator. I knew it when I married him many years ago, and it was obvious from the moment that I saw how at ease he was with doing the Gator Chomp. He graduated from the University of Florida and is an avid, but not rabid, Gator fan.

Jim remains loyal to his team, even when the wins are lean. He has indoctrinated me into all things Gator, and so I cheer for the UF team right along with him. When UCF is playing an away game, you will find us at home flipping the channels between the Knights and Gator games. A really great Saturday is when both teams win. It is as if all is right with the world.

I am an Owl. I graduated from Florida Atlantic University when the university did not have a football team. So I admit that my loyalties to the Owls are not nearly as strong as Jim's are to the Gators. But I still want them to win, and so I will be a bit conflicted when the Knights play the Owls on Sept. 21. To be honest, I want the Knights to win so that they will, once again, go undefeated and become the national champions for the second year in a row.

My Knight pride tends to overshadow any other loyalties. But an Owl win, against any team other than the Knights, still has the power to make for an awesome Saturday.

I sense that the reality of multiple loyalties is not unique to a Gator and an Owl. When we are at the Knights' games, during halftime, they flash the scores of other games being played around the country on the scoreboard. You will hear loud cheers and painful groans in the crowd as the numbers go up, a reflection of the faithful remaining true to their alma maters. But all of these fans are in the stadium right along with Jim and me rooting for our UCF athletes.

Maybe it is more about the joy of the sport, the excitement of the game, than loyalties. Well, at least it is for me.

It is thrilling when one of our players is headed to the goal line. I, along with the other fans around me, jump to our feet, cheering the player on as if by sheer force of will we helped with the scoring of a touchdown. We high-five each other, believing that we, along with the athlete, just scored another six points. Never mind that we have not attended any practices in the Florida heat to develop our talents. It was still "our" score. We own the accomplishment.

Admittedly, the fans do grumble when a game goes awry, but the most loyal still believe a comeback is coming with the next play. And the Knights are masters of the comeback. This is when the game is at its finest, when you just aren't sure if they are going to pull out yet another win. The Knights have a long history of beating the odds and surprising the crowd with an unexpected and unbelievable turn-around. I never count them out. They are a team with heart, and it shows in their commitment to never give up.

The first home game is Sept. 8, and Jim and I are excited about this year's ride. The Knights are our adopted team, and our loyalty to them is a constant. And so, as college

football season begins, there will be a Gator and an Owl at Spectrum Stadium, filled with Knight Pride. And my guess is that we aren't the only ones.

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