

# TEBOW MANIA

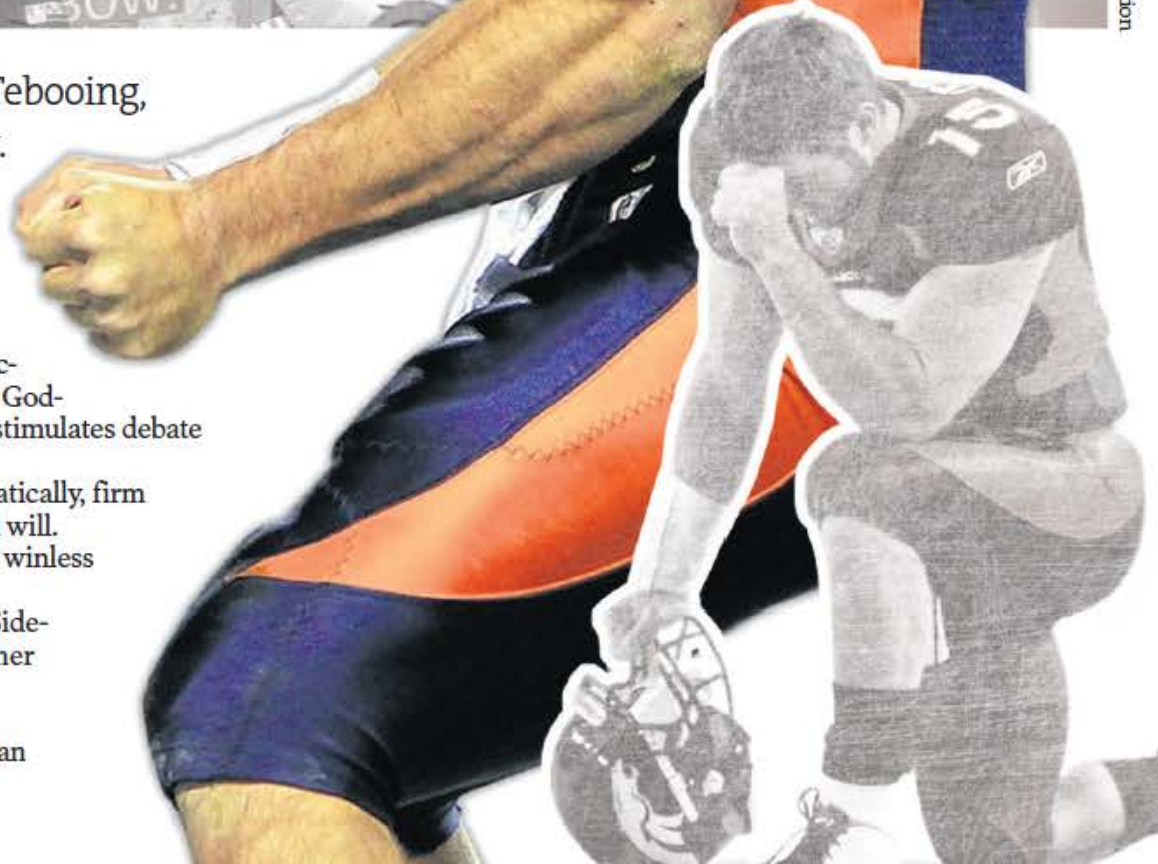


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● Loving him or hating him, Tebowing or Teboing, curiosity seekers are fixated on Tim Tebow.

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Tim Tebow.  
Tim Tebow. Tim Tebow. Tim Tebow.  
There.  
That ought to be enough to flood the online comments section. For just the mere mention of the Broncos' hard-working, God-fearing, awkward-throwing-but-still-winning quarterback stimulates debate like few other sports topics.  
Here's the part where the Tebow enthusiasts nod emphatically, firm believers in the unifying power of this kid's confidence and will.  
Rewind 42 days. Denver owns a 1-4 record and trails the winless Dolphins 15-0 with 5:23 to play in Miami.  
Jared Kleinstein, a 24-year-old Broncos fan, sits inside Side-Bar, a tavern in New York, annoyed he has invested another Sunday to watch this train wreck.  
"Yikes," he thinks. "Not good."  
Yet somehow, 30 minutes later, after Tebow has delivered an



Tebow continues on C4 ►



# TEBOWMANIA

## TEBOW FROM C1

unfathomable rally and an 18-15 overtime victory, Kleinstein finds himself down on a knee, his fist pressed against his temple in imitation of the quarterback's prayer pose.

"It felt like the Super Bowl," Kleinstein says.

Five other Broncos fans join him for a photo, all down on a knee.

A Tim Tebow miracle?

That. Just. Happened.

And it hasn't stopped happening.

In Week 9, Tebow pulls the Broncos out of a 10-point third-quarter hole to deliver a 38-24 victory in Oakland.

Eleven nights later, a 20-yard Tebow touchdown run in the final minute caps a ridiculous 95-yard drive and punctuates a 17-13 upset of the Jets.

The next time out, the Broncos steal a 16-13 overtime victory in San Diego.

Now, Tebow is 5-1 as a starter. Denver is somehow 6-5 and just a game back of the Raiders in the AFC West. And Kleinstein is the suddenly popular founder of Tebowing.com, one iconic pose going viral and circling the globe 10 times over.

The photo submissions multiply daily.

Six Marines form a Tebowing pyramid in Okinawa, Japan.

Here's a Tebowing pancake and a Tebowing surfer and, yep, even a Tebowing dog.

There's a man Tebowing at Stonehenge and another doing so on the Great Wall of China.

"We now have people Tebowing at all eight new wonders of the world," Kleinstein says. "For a while, we were stuck at seven. I wondered whether we could get anyone to Tebow at Machu Picchu. Within a day, we had three submissions."

Yep, all this has mushroomed in the past six weeks.

### Pick a side

Sunday, the Tim Tebow circus sets up at Mall of America Field.

Two lines will quickly form — one for Tim Tebow admirers, another for the cynics and critics.

Choose carefully. Because in this debate, switching sides seems to be prohibited.

Says Woody Paige, a columnist for the Denver Post: "Tim Tebow is like gun control and abortion. Everybody has an opinion. And you can't convince anyone to change the opinion they already have."

Paige takes a pro-Tebow stance, a believer that the 24-year-old quarterback deserves all this success and is "100 percent the real deal" when it comes to both his religious devotion and his natural leadership skills.

Yet Paige also knows the detractors will continue rolling their eyes.

Seriously, what's with all this Tim Tebow hype?

We're honestly talking about the possibility of sending him to Honolulu for the Pro Bowl? Has anyone watched this kid wind up and throw? Two out of every three of his passes, it seems as if he's heating a toaster oven instead of a football.



And isn't Tebow's incessant Christian sermonizing a bit much?

Vikings cornerback Asher Allen considers the phenomenon. He saw Tebowmania in college form, his Georgia Bulldogs battling Tebow and the Florida Gators three times in Jacksonville, Fla.

Allen acknowledges Tebow has many qualities worth admiring.

Plays hard. Respects the game. Encourages teammates. And man, he's a load to tackle.

"So much more of a load than you think," Allen says.

All that said, Allen shrugs knowing full well that no matter how long Tebow continues winning, no matter how long he continues prioritizing his faith, no matter how long he stays grounded and driven and polite and devoted to helping others less fortunate, the legion of haters will inevitably grow.

"It's strange," Allen says. "I think sometimes when a person devotes himself to doing good, other people don't like it. I don't know why that is. Tim's a guy who obviously tries to do good both on and off the field. I applaud him for that. But for whatever reason, there's a lot of people who don't like that."

### Questions from within

Perhaps the hate continues spreading because so much outside doubt

bounces off Tebow, like BB's pelting the Terminator.

All those who question whether Tebow is truly as cheery and benevolent as portrayed? The legions of football experts who say he's a below-average quarterback incapable of succeeding long-term?

With skin as thick as a rhino, Tebow shrugs it off and says he feels blessed to have this opportunity.

Count John Elway, Denver's executive vice president of football operations, as one of the apparent naysayers. Elway played quarterback with breathtaking grace. His combination of arm strength, accuracy and athleticism deserved an exhibit at the Louvre.

Tebow's clunky mechanics and Pamplona running style? It's like a mangled collection of silverware, rusty hubcaps and Pepsi cans fused together and marketed as artistic brilliance.

No wonder Elway has been so hesitant to buy in, refusing to cast a long-term vote of confidence in his quarterback.

And Broncos coach John Fox? He will readily laud Tebow's toughness and positivity. Hey, it's been a pretty intoxicating six weeks.

But asked about sustaining this buzz with a college-style option offense and a quarterback who completes

### TEBOW TIME

The Broncos are 5-1 since Tim Tebow took over as starting quarterback, notching a series of comebacks by featuring the second-year player in a lead rushing role:

**Oct. 23: Broncos 18, Dolphins 15**

Trailing 15-0 on the road, the Broncos tied the score with two TDs in the final three minutes, the biggest three-minute comeback in the NFL since 1970. Tebow rushed for the tying two-pointer with 17 ticks left in regulation, then led an overtime field-goal drive.

**Oct. 30: Lions 45, Broncos 10**

Tebow's starting status was shaky after Denver was pounded at home by Detroit. It would be the last time that status was in doubt.

**Nov. 6: Broncos 38, Raiders 24**

Tebow had 118 rushing yards and became the sixth quarterback in NFL history to run for more than 100 yards and throw two TD passes in the same game. The others? Michael Vick (three times), Donovan McNabb, Aaron Brooks, Randall Cunningham and Tobin Rote.

**Nov. 13: Broncos 17, Chiefs 10**

Third consecutive road victory. Tebow had a career-long 56-yard TD pass to Eric Decker in the fourth quarter.

**Nov. 17: Broncos 17, Jets 13**

Tebow accounted for 92 yards in a game-winning 95-yard drive at home. He capped the drive with a 20-yard touchdown run with 58 seconds remaining.

**Nov. 27: Broncos 16, Chargers 13 (OT)**

Tebow led a nine-play, 68-yard drive to set up the winning field goal late in the fourth quarter with passes of 39 and 23 yards before Denver won in overtime. Tebow's 22 rushing attempts were the most by an NFL quarterback since 1950.

less than 46 percent of his passes, Fox delivers a perfect four-word slogan for Tebowmania.

"Long term? Not sure."

### You gotta have faith

Shouldn't all this be enough for Tebow to have at least a brief meltdown, a frustrated moment to lash out at all these people who see so much of what he isn't and don't value what he is?

"This has been a lot of fun to live out my dream every day," Tebow says. "I consider myself blessed to come into this office and play quarterback for this great organization and with some great teammates. It's been a lot of fun."

Asked to identify his favorite element of the Tebowing craze, Tebow immediately references Joey Norris, a young boy stricken with cancer who tweeted a photo of himself "Tebowing while chemoing."

"It was really cool to see that you could create some hope in somebody to help them have a brighter day," Tebow said.

Naturally, Tebow took the next step. He says he has invited the boy to be his guest at Denver's regular-season finale against Kansas City.

Yep, Tebow has become football's version of Ned Flanders, somehow succeeding in a gladiator's world with

an "okely-dokely" spirit and a belief that football is a platform for him to serve a higher purpose.

Which is another thing that rankles his critics. It's not so much that Tebow is deeply religious but that he's constantly reminding everyone.

Last week, former Broncos quarterback Jake Plummer suggested Tebow tone it down.

"When he accepts the fact that we know he loves Jesus Christ, then I think I'll like him a little better," Plummer said.

To which Tebow promptly responded during an ESPN interview: "If you're married, and you have a wife, and you really love your wife, is it good enough to only say to your wife 'I love you' the day you get married? Or should you tell her every single day when you wake up and at every opportunity? That's how I feel about my relationship with Jesus Christ."

Another nationwide shouting match erupted: "Good for him" vs. "Give it a rest."

### That's entertainment

Now it's gameday in Minneapolis. And the lines are forming. Paige knows where the conversation will head at sundown.

"Every game Tim Tebow proves everybody right," he says. "The people that hate him are convinced he can't throw it. And the people who believe in him say, 'Look, he wins games.' They're both right. ... Every week it's 'Alice in Wonderland.' It just gets curiouser and curiouser."

So here's where NFL Network analyst Joe Theismann comes in, willing to offer his advice to the audience of this fable.

Theismann has no problems criticizing Tebow's faulty mechanics and woeful accuracy.

Yet he has found a way, as Tebow would request, to stay firmly planted in the now. Forget where Tim Tebow will be in 2015, Theismann recommends. Just enjoy his visit Sunday.

Watch him play. Judge for yourself.

But notice that no matter how horrible Tebow seems to play, his teammates never lose confidence in his ability to deliver the end result.

Says Theismann: "His teammates see the success building and they have no choice but to say, 'Hey, he may be the ugly duckling. But the ugly duckling is ours.'"

Theismann says this has little chance to last. As electric as it seems right now, Tebowmania eventually will fizzle out.

After all, in Tebow's six starts, the Broncos actually have battled to a 116-116 scoring stalemate. Plus with Tebow's rugged running style, the physical toll will add up fast.

With that said, Theismann won't take his eyes off the spectacle.

"I say enjoy it while it's here."

Tebowmania? Maybe, just maybe, Theismann suggests, this is a spectacle fit for the Vegas strip.

"We've all been invited to Cirque du Soleil," he says. "Enjoy it. And take your mind out of it. Don't analyze it. Don't try to figure out how the guy attaches himself to a pole 60 feet in the air. Don't try to figure out how people can balance their bodies on top of another person's big toe. Don't try to figure out how they can throw things around. Just live for the moment and enjoy the show."