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Professor Talk: Super Bowl XLVII and Sibling Rivalries

Forget the Manning Bowl, because Super Bowl XLVII will feature a brother-verse-brother head coach match-up.

For the first time in Super Bowl history, the two head coaches pitted against one another will be brothers. On Sunday starting at 6:30 p.m., John Harbaugh's Baltimore Ravens will compete against his younger brother Jim Harbaugh's San Francisco 49ers.

All this sibling rivalry got Jonathan Caspi, Ph.D., of Montclair State University's Family and Child Studies program, thinking about the sibling dynamics involved in one of the biggest stages in the world.

Your Patch editor recently spoke with Caspi, who specializes in sibling relationships, aggression and sibling abuse, about how the sibling relationship could affect the game.

Patch: Will the fact the two are siblings have an effect on the game?

Caspi: It does change the way people feel when they are competing directly against a sibling. Each is more aware of things, and there is also the added advantage that each knows the other's weaknesses.

Competition can make people perform better and drives you to improve your skill level. If you think about Venus and Serena Williams, for example, those two competing and trying to best one another through their childhood probably got them to the level they are at now.

There has been a lot of press on the issue, too. I think it also hits home for those of us with siblings. We start to think about how we would feel if we were in those roles. In that way, it has garnered more attention.

Patch: On the flip-side, can competition be harmful, too?

Caspi: Yes, particularly if you choose to diminish the self-esteem of the other person. If one lords his or her victory over the other, it ruins the sibling relationship.

But it seems for a lot of siblings, particularly in high school and college, they still support each other and give each other advice – even when they are rivals.

Patch: Is winning and losing different when it is to a sibling?

Caspi: Winning and losing has a different meaning when it is to your brother or sister. Either one will feel good about the victory, but he or she may also feel a little bit guilty being the one responsible for the other sibling's loss.

In addition, there are no clear social rules for handling these this kind of thing. I can only imagine what Thanksgiving might be like for them next year with everyone gathered around the table!

Patch: Is something like this common in sports?

Caspi: We have brothers and sisters in the same sports, but I haven't really seen it with coaching before. It is actually more rare than common that siblings end up in the same field, and especially rare that siblings end up in the same role in that field.

Caspi is the director of the doctoral program in Family Studies at Montclair State University.

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