

# An open letter to the Vikings family I married into

By Cody Benjamin

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To my in-laws,

Somewhere, in the bottom of our hearts (or the pit of our stomachs), we knew this was coming.

We mused about it. We laughed about it. For a while, we might have even become ignorant of it. But we *always*, somewhere deep inside, knew this was inevitable.

Eagles vs. Vikings.

Loser goes home. Winner goes ... to the Super Bowl.

When my wife, your own blood, first invited me to Minnesota as we began our formerly long-distance relationship, I appreciated your passion for the Vikings as a passion for *football*. I had no reason to despise the guys in purple. Heck, even Donovan McNabb finished his career in the Midwest. If anything, growing up an Eagles fan, I had a healthy respect for Minnesota's product on the gridiron, if not a subtle empathy.

When I finally moved to Minnesota, proposing to my wife as I settled into unfamiliar territory, I didn't abandon even a trace of my Pennsylvania roots, clinging to the Eagles as both a friend away from home and a continued business partner — the center of so much of my professional sports writing career. And yet never did your hometown Vikings emerge as the catalyst of any early family feud.

It's safe to say, in fact, that they became *more* favorable in my eyes upon the ironically timed trade of Eagles quarterback Sam Bradford to Minnesota. Seriously, what were the odds that the very year I moved from Eagles Country to Vikings Country, Philly would not only draft Carson Wentz from my wife's brother's college, North Dakota State University, and then turn around and ship Bradford to Minnesota, where I'd talk to him at training camp the following year?

It was as if, you know, we were meant to be family — as if "our" teams were meant to be linked. (It didn't hurt that "my" team got the better of yours in 2016, too.)

But then came this season.

Then came this moment that we knew — or should have known — was coming. The compass has always been pointing in this direction. The Eagles and Vikings, if not for their remarkable similarities as football

teams in 2017, were destined for this culminating showdown because of their overt role at the heart of our relationship and our family, which blended so effortlessly despite 1,000 miles of separation on the map.

My one question: Why did this have to happen only a year into my marriage?

In reality, that question may haunt my wife even more. Remember, she's *your* precious daughter/sister, which means she grew up under *your* Vikings household but is now just days removed from cheering on an Eagles playoff victory from the chilly confines of Lincoln Financial Field. As she watched the "Minnesota Miracle" unfold on Sunday night, she shouted in shock but, inside, cringed in horror. This confirmed the inevitable: She would be forced to choose sides — or revert to sitting on the fence — as you and I hoped desperately for the "right" team to go to the Super Bowl.

Now, in all honesty, for more reasons than one, I can respect the Vikings that will come to the Linc on Sunday. I think most Eagles fans can also respect Minnesota for a fan base that, too, has long been deprived of chances like the one both sides will have this weekend. Both teams warrant adoration for what they've done in 2017, and Sunday's NFC Championship should be a genuinely good game. We both know, too, that regardless of the outcome, we'll still have — and love — each other.

You'll know, then, that when I say this with unequivocal passion stemming from a childhood of bleeding green, I also say this with love ...

I hope this Sunday night is the absolute worst of your year.