editor's commentary

really made me the sports fanatic I am today. I hold the Pokes’ fans and their unwavering passion fully responsible for all the fun I have had in my life going to sporting events all over this country. I've been called a maniac, obsessed and downright ridiculous. All these names have been warranted at some point or another, but I simply refer to it as passion. Through my passion, I have been able to witness some amazing games, travel from coast to coast, including more than 30 states, and most important, to have unbelievable memories that will last a lifetime. I have paid a financial toll, and my life has taken some unexpected turns because of it, but in the end, I don’t have a single regret about my commitment to follow my sports dreams.

As much as I love watching my teams on TV, there is nothing like seeing them live. Watching every one of my teams live and traveling to their home stadiums is something I have strived to do my whole life. I have been lucky enough to accomplish that and then some. There is just something different about eating a Philly cheese steak in Philadelphia.

One fateful day, which I consider nothing short of a miracle, something happened that sums up the very reason I do what I do. On May 29, 2010, in Miami, Fla., 10 rows behind home plate at Sun Life Stadium, I witnessed Major League Baseball history when Phillies pitcher Roy Halladay threw only the 20th perfect game in the 135 years of professional baseball. In other words, the odds of seeing this amazing feat are roughly 20,000 to one. I would love to know what the odds are of being at the perfect game, watching my favorite team and my favorite pitcher throw a perfect game. Uneducated guess—which odds don’t exist. This was truly a miracle of sorts and one I will never forget.

Memorable moments are a part of any true sports fan’s life, but witnessing them firsthand is just a different feeling. I have been lucky to see some amazing specials in the sports world. I witnessed future Hall of Famer, quarterback Brett Favre come out of the tunnel at Lambeau Field to a standing ovation before playing his first home game after the death of his father against the Denver Broncos.

I saw Denver Broncos’ Pro Bowl cornerback Darrent Williams play against Wyoming in Stillwater, Okla., during his college days at Oklahoma State University, and watched the final game of his life on New Year’s Eve, before his life was prematurely ended later that night in a drive by shooting.

I have been to newly remodeled Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin, Texas, in the midst of more than 100,000 Longhorn fans in burnt orange, clapping along to Wyoming’s fight song, “Ragtime Cowboy Joe,” as we all mourned the sudden death of Cowboy Ruben Narcisse.

There is just something different about eating barbecue in Texas.

I have been privileged to see the first game played by Michael Oher, inspiration of the movie “The Blind Slide,” and walk through “The Grove” at Ole Miss, attend midnight yell practice at Texas A&M, watch an extra point attempt miss at the University of Virginia and rush the field in Albuquerque and Las Vegas after Wyoming bowl victories.

I’ve watched the Phillies from the spacious confines of the Ballpark at Arlington in Texas and the rusty, old seats in the final year of Shea Stadium in New York City. There is just something different about eating a pizza in NYC.

I’ve seen the Pokes play at the stadiums of every team in the Mountain West Conference, including a game on the “smurf turf” of MWC newcomer Boise State University.

I saw U.S. Olympic goal tender Ryan Miller and my Buffalo Sabres play in Denver for the first time in my life from front row glass seats.

I’ve seen the Liberty Bell light up in right-center field at beautiful Citizens Bank Park in Philly after a towering homerun off the bat of the National League’s Most Valuable Player, Ryan Howard. I saw the roof open on a 100-degree day at Chase Field in Phoenix to boos from the crowd and heard the final broadcast of Phillies Hall of Fame announcer Harry Kalas from the stands at Coors Field as he called the game-winning homerun by well-traveled major leaguer Matt Stairs.

I’m sure you have heard the old adage, “It’s just a game.” Well, clearly it isn’t “just a game.” For me, it is a way of life. I don’t know anything else, and I’m not sure I want to. I have had so much fun, met so many new people and have such special memories of each and every place I have been lucky enough to visit.

If you have a passion for something in life, go do it! Have fun in this short lifetime. Next time you catch yourself saying you wish you would’ve done something or gone somewhere— make sure it never slips by again.

There is just something different about being there.
When you deal with athletes on a daily basis as I do, you see it all. Whether it's ego, arrogance or pride, most amateurs have at least one or all these traits.

I know this from experience because I was one of them and still occasionally catch myself being the "cocky jock."

When you get a little older, and hopefully wiser, as I feel I have, the act really gets old. Dealing with athletes as a sports writer makes you look back and regret all the times you sounded and acted exactly as some of them do.

Some athletes just don't get it.

However, other athletes serve as good examples of how to be role models or even heroes, especially to children.

On the Laramie County Community College campus, we have one team in particular that really shines in the "class act" department, and the members always continue to amaze me with their welcoming, friendly and helpful demeanors. That team is the LCCC rodeo team led by its head coach, David Browder.

Since the day I stepped on campus as a 25-year-old freshman looking for a second chance, Browder and his team have welcomed me with open arms. With no background in rodeo, a fear of horses and definitely not a cowboy bone in my body, I suppose they could have just ignored me and not showed a lick of interest in what I was doing. Instead, they all introduced themselves, taught me about rodeo and answered my questions, even the plenty of idiotic ones.

Cowboys just get it.

Unlike a few coaches on campus, Browder has always been helpful with anything I've ever needed as a reporter. Whether it's a quick quote, information on a rider or just a plain good conversation, Browder is more than happy to accommodate. Although he is stern and to me, is the typical, quiet type of cowboy, Browder is genuine. He won't lie to you and has no problem telling you exactly how he feels.

I will never forget interviewing Browder last year at the rodeo in Casper. I got to see his genuine side on full display. After a regrettable first day of rodeo for the Golden Eagles, I approached him for his thoughts on what had transpired. In that moment, he said it all by saying nothing. He respectfully declined comment, and the look on his face showed me this man really cared when his team was not performing to its potential—it hurt him inside.

The next night, star bull rider Loncy Johnson reeled off an 85-point championship ride that turned Browder's frown upside down. He was right back in front of my recorder telling me how proud he was of his young bull rider and the rest of his team bouncing back from such an awful first day.

Browder just gets it.

This rodeo team works hard, too. I really don't think people understand, realize or appreciate how much work this team puts into being successful in and out of the arena. I know I didn't.

I have always had the preconceived notion that cowboys are just hard-partying, wild, fun-loving people with a nutty side. Although some of that is true, these folks put in work.

From the early morning animal feeding, class, jobs, gym and four-hour practices almost every night, these athletes are dedicated. For the most part, they are all seeking one thing and one thing only—championships and a spot in the College National Finals.

We have had numerous teams on campus with major successes in their sports, but does anyone truly understand what an accomplishment it is to qualify for the CNFR?
The misery and torment don't end with the numerous abandoned mills and plants that dot the Western New York landscape, either. The people of Buffalo have long been witness to heart-breaking, near-miss, championship-lost sports seasons as well.

The two major sports teams, the Buffalo Sabres and Bills, have put the city on their backs and taken them to the pinnacle of their sport six times, just to break its heart and lose all six. In the 1990s alone, the city watched five pro sports titles slip through its grasp in one way or another. One in particular made me feel the pain that a tortured town endured for decades. In the spring of 1999, my Sabres made it to the Stanley Cup finals for only the second time in the then-29-year-history of the hockey franchise. Buffalo took on the heavily favored Dallas Stars team, which featured a star-laden lineup compared to Buffalo's blue-collar, hard-nosed team who represented the place they called home. The Sabres battled and took the seven-game series back to a game six in Buffalo.

In the third overtime, the Stars and Brett Hull added another chapter to the book of misery that is Buffalo sports with an "illegal goal" to clinch Dallas' 12th Stanley Cup in what will forever be known as the "No-goal game."

On March 13, I made my first trip to the "Queen City" to live out a childhood dream and finally see my Sabres play on home ice. Traveling to HSBC Arena gave me a glimpse at how tough the times really are in Western New York and how truly lucky we are to have what we have in Wyoming. Most of the city looked war torn, and the sunless, windy, snowstorm didn't help. I have always heard Buffalo was a "dump" and no one in their right mind would ever want to go there on purpose, let alone on spring break. They had a point, to an extent, but I loved it.

To me, Buffalo looks like a tough, blue-collar town that has worked for everything it has. Buffalo, although not the prettiest town on earth, was oozing with pride.

Doesn't that sound familiar?

To me, Buffalo and Wyoming share a lot of the same qualities. First and foremost, we are tough and hard-working. Along with the cold weather, we have in common, we also have an overwhelming sense of pride. Like Buffalo, we care about and take care of our own. We also love our sports. Although people from outside of Wyoming might not think of us as a sports state, they would be wrong. Wyomingites really want to win, and, win or lose, most of us have blind faith. I know I do.

On game day in Buffalo, all problems were forgotten outside of the arena. The poverty, weather, empty buildings and dying economy were a mere after thought, because, for three hours, Buffalonians could lose themselves in their team. These people put their heart, soul and passion into this team. This is truly a town that lives and dies with wins and losses. On this day, the Sabres and the city won the game but lost a hero.

Although the Sabres went on to beat the hated Ottawa Senators, 6-4, there wasn't a dry eye in the house after it was announced that a Sabres' great, Rick Martin of the famed "French Connection," died earlier in the day after suffering a heart attack while driving in the Buffalo suburb of Clarence. Martin was more than a hockey great in the region. He was one of the few who actually stayed behind and called Buffalo his permanent home.

He was one of them.

Sports can mean so much to people, and that was never more evident than that cold, wintery day in Buffalo. One city, one heart beat would be the way I describe the people of this forgotten city. To watch a team bind together a community as one is truly an amazing sight.

I wish Cheyenne had half the pride in Laramie County Community College as Buffalo does in one of many a wing joints. I can't tell you of one person in the community who is truly a Golden Eagles' fan, and that is sad. This is a great institution that does put effort and emphasis on its sports programs. For some reason, the city is just not rallying around it.

I can only hope that one day, hopefully this year, my Sabres can have the privilege and honor of giving the people of Western New York its first title and making the city of Buffalo a champion. It has been a long time in the waiting and Lord knows they deserve it.

Let's also hope that LCCC can find its way into the heart of Cheyenne residents and make this an athletic program that people live and die with. We have a lot of work to do.