

Transcript

The Bill Walton Show

Lamaar Thomas – Maureen O'Donnell

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- Bill Walton: Welcome. I'm here today with my good friend, Lamaar Thomas, and we're going to follow up on a conversation we had a few weeks ago about football and families. Joining me is Maureen O'Donnell, who is our associate producer, and Maureen has reliably informed me that she knows a lot more about football than I do.
- Maureen OD: That's a little bit-
- Bill Walton: Welcome back, Lamaar. How are you?
- Lamaar Thomas: I'm good, how are you?
- Bill Walton: I'm good. We were talking last time about your family and your family coming from a flag football background. Amplify.
- Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, so family comes from a flag football background, they've been playing flag football before I was born and now continue to play. My mom plays, my dad plays, my brother, myself, we're all on the same team, so it's a lot of family fun football. Our football takes place Saturday mornings instead of Sunday evenings, afternoons, but yeah, flag football, that's our family right there.
- Bill Walton: Who's the best athlete in your family?
- Lamaar Thomas: Best athlete is my mom and there's plenty of people in the family that would love to take the title of the best athlete, including myself; I wish I could. Mom is the way to go when you're looking for an athlete in the family to do whatever it is you need to do.

Bill Walton: If your mom's watching, this was all on cue?

Lamaar Thomas: If my mom's watching, this is all on cue.

Bill Walton: You're saying that, you were one of the best athletes in Maryland when you were growing up and played football, held a lot of records, I think went to a lot of bowls. Also, you were the championship track athlete and then went onto Ohio State and to New Mexico State and then ended up playing professional football, first with the Denver Broncos and then with the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Lamaar Thomas: Jaguars, there you go.

Bill Walton: Your mom must be some athlete.

Lamaar Thomas: My mom is quite athletic. She doesn't have the accolades to follow it up, but I can show you a lot of flag football trophies at my house that-

Maureen OD: Have all her name on it, right?

Lamaar Thomas: Her name on it. You would think they'd be my trophies and they're not mine.

Maureen OD: Your mom's name is?

Lamaar Thomas: Elwanda.

Maureen OD: Elwanda.

Lamaar Thomas: Elwanda Thomas.

Bill Walton: You're obviously a gifted athlete and you played the skill positions. You played running back and wide receiver and we got to talking about what it takes to do that. With track, I suppose you just learn how to run fast. Probably more to it than that, but what do you do to become a top-flight wide receiver?

Lamaar Thomas: There's a lot. A lot of things goes into it and attention to detail, being precise, as you could understand. There's a lot that goes into that. You work on playing receiver, you work on hand/eye coordination. I was telling you a story about me just catching tennis balls and that's Ohio State. I couldn't catch a tennis ball to save my life, but those are some skills that you need to help you as a receiver.

Bill Walton: You show up at summer camp and you've got the picture of all these big athletes tossing tennis balls back at each other?

Lamaar Thomas: Yes. I'm thinking that I'm shining up for my football team and here we are catching tennis balls. I wish I had known, I would've maybe practiced a little bit catching the tennis balls.

Bill Walton: What about foot work? What do you do for foot work?

Lamaar Thomas: Football, you have ladder drills, a lot of cone drills, a lot of precise drills where your foot has to hit right here or hit right there in order for you to make this cut or that cut and go to that direction or this direction.

Bill Walton: Now, do you start learning this in high school, grade school? What's the progression to be good at this?

Lamaar Thomas: I started playing football when I was six, so the skills weren't as detailed when I was six, but a lot of the things started ... as I got to that-

Bill Walton: Well, at that point, the tennis balls were pretty big.

Lamaar Thomas: Exactly, and a lot easier to catch. I can use two hands when I was six. When I got to Ohio State, they're like, "Hey, catch it with just one hand."

Bill Walton: Your mother asked you to be a track star, too.

Lamaar Thomas: Yes, my mom asked me to run track when I was seven and I didn't want to do it, she made me run track. She said, "Hey, if you don't like it, the next year you don't have to, but I promise you it'll help you out with football." I've now learned, to this day, my mom isn't wrong too many of the times when she tells me that I need to do something because the track translated into football and from there it took off.

Maureen OD: You really liked it

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, and I enjoy it. I didn't enjoy it at the beginning, but I think it was more of just because I didn't want to, but as I started to see how good I could be and how it helped translate into football and how fast I actually was, I enjoyed it, I enjoyed winning and competing and so track stuck with me

Maureen OD: How fast were you?

Lamaar Thomas: I ran a lot of different times. My fastest hundred time was 10:32. 10.3 seconds, and my fastest 40 time was 4.32 seconds. I've run pretty well to say the least.

Bill Walton: Well, one of the reasons I wanted to have you on the show is that you've got a long record of achieving success, doing things you set out to do. I think at seven, you were in the Special Olympics?

Lamaar Thomas: I was in the Junior Olympics.

Bill Walton: The Junior Olympics? Sorry, not Special.

Lamaar Thomas: I was in the Junior Olympics when I was seven, that was the first year I actually had to run. My mom made me run and I ended up making it to the Junior Olympics, which was one of the reasons why I continue to run because I'm like, "Hey, this is cool: I'm in the Junior Olympics. I know there are some guys in the Olympics, maybe I can get there one day, but if I'm seven and I'm eight and I can make it to the Junior Olympics, hey, I want to stick to this and see where I can actually take this."

Bill Walton: Well, one of the claims that Maureen made was that her family is also very involved in football but as fans, though.

Maureen OD: We watch the Redskins every Sunday, whenever they play, and we're sad because they aren't doing very well, but we also watch the other teams as well. We like to watch Dallas lose. My son is a big football fan and played football growing up and he watches Classic ESPN, so we definitely watch football. I enjoy it.

Bill Walton: We get to see it on TV. I think what's really interesting is what goes on behind the scenes. You show up, you come on the field, there's a lot that goes into that. What's a game day like for you?

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, a game day, it's a lot more complicated than just showing up, going out there, hey, catching some touchdowns. You practice throughout the week, you have preparation, you're preparing for a particular team, the coach is getting into the detail during the week when your game plan ... as far as, hey, on third downs, they like to run this play 90 times out of 100, to the point where, now, we're making a defense or we're making a play to stop that.

The predictability, you want to stop. Your game plan for things like that, so throughout the week there's a lot of detail that goes into different aspects of the game and a lot of times people look at just the catching and the scoring and the running, but then you have field goals, you have special teams that play a big part of the game, play a big part of field position and like I said, a lot of people think that you just go out there and you toss a ball around and you catch touchdowns, but there's a lot of preparation that goes into what's actually going to be done on Sunday.

Bill Walton: Well, one of the things that we wanted to get into is you brought along some notes you took when you were playing with the Denver Broncos. It's not the actual playbook, but you took the trouble to actually write out most of what you were doing and you had Peyton Manning as your quarterback.

Lamaar Thomas: Yes, exactly.

Bill Walton: We're looking at this playbook, it's very beautiful, purple ink. Very nice. We've got the plays in here and the diagrams and I think we've got a camera that's going to close in on some of this. Is there a particular place you want to point us to that would be a ... what's going on here with all of this? You can point it out easier.

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, so it's nothing in particular going on, but you have different concepts on each page. This is a concept of dig routes and what you call a dig route is a basic in-route.

Bill Walton: I'll do the pointer here.

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, a lot of these routes have ... at some point they have an in-cut. This route here, this would be your dig, that's your in-cut there and then you have your in-cut over here.

Bill Walton: Why do you call it a dig?

Lamaar Thomas: A dig, I have no particular reason to why it's called a dig.

Maureen OD: You're running as fast as you can and you're digging your feet into the field?

Lamaar Thomas: That could easily be why. Digs always go in towards the quarterback, so anytime you run a dig, your route's going to break inside and not break outside where ... you can see on this opposite page, you have a few dag routes and dag routes will break outside. You have dig that breaks in and the dag that breaks out.

Maureen OD: Okay, a dig and a dag.

Bill Walton: Now, we've also got a dish.

Lamaar Thomas: A dish. That's another concept off of the dig, so your basic dig is the in-breaking route, which you have from here.

Bill Walton: Right here.

Lamaar Thomas: Then the dish part of the play is just basically what everyone else is doing.

Bill Walton: Okay, so how many of these plays do you have to memorize?

Lamaar Thomas: Man, it's endless, the number of plays. You can come up-

Bill Walton: 50?

Lamaar Thomas: A lot more than 50.

Bill Walton: 100?

Lamaar Thomas: Probably closer to 200, I would guess. 200 plays that you have to remember. Now, all these 200 plays aren't going to be called every Sunday.

Bill Walton: Yeah.

Lamaar Thomas: In the weekly production, you have your pool of 200 plays and you say, "Hey, these 75 plays are what we're going to run," or "These are more likely to be called on Sunday," because we think that that's going to work against the Cowboys, even though it didn't work against the Redskins or it didn't work against whatever team it is. This week we'll run these group of plays because it looks good against that opponent.

Maureen OD: There's a lot of memorization?

Lamaar Thomas: Yes, a lot.

Maureen OD: Do any players decide, "I'm not going to do that, I'm just going to wing it"? Do they-

Lamaar Thomas: Those are the players that normally don't make the team. The players that say, "Hey, you know what? I can't really get these plays, I'm just going to do my own thing." Most of the players that you don't see on Sundays. You don't see those players on Sundays.

Maureen OD: Okay.

Bill Walton: What are we looking at here with something called Runs and Bolt Practice? This is hieroglyphics.

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, so these were just run plays.

Bill Walton: Yeah.

Lamaar Thomas: Your first box here, you have your 38 and 39, which are outside run plays. The way this goes, you have holes on the offense. Your even numbers are to the right, your odd numbers are to the left. As your numbers get higher, that's the more outside the run turns into. Your eight and nine plays, 38, 39, those are going to be outside runs. The ball will be going to the running back behind the quarterback and they'll be running to the outside.

There's no plays on this page but if there was a play ... 40 and 41, those are plays that'll be going more up the middle. Okay, so 40 we go up the middle to the right, 41 will go up the middle to the left, if that makes sense.

Bill Walton: Yeah, it does.

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, so 9s will get you outside, 1s will get you inside, if that makes any sense.

Bill Walton: You played for Peyton Manning.

Lamaar Thomas: I did.

Bill Walton: He is amazing, and he also runs a complicated offense. Want to talk about that?

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, Peyton Manning's offense is ... we have, like I was just telling you, about the plays, we have our 200 plays and maybe he will call ... in the huddle you might get the play for dig, that might be the play, but you get to the line of scrimmage and the defense might be doing something that wasn't expected. You now need to know the play's no longer dig because the defense lined up in something different.

Now you need to know what the play is ... audible. You hear Peyton Manning a lot of times, he has his famous Omaha.

Maureen OD: Omaha.

Lamaar Thomas: That's his famous quote, that's the famous thing. Omaha, that was the trim for his last season, they heard Omaha and Omaha ... it has its meaning, but that just means it was the last time he comes to the line of scrimmage and he can just change the play and now it's not dig or it's not dag.

Maureen OD: There's a lot of moving parts.

Lamaar Thomas: There's a lot of moving parts, there's a lot going on. The play is never really concrete. There's a route that you would run against a particular coverage and then there's a route that you would run against another.

Bill Walton: In a given game, how many times would you have a busted play, where people don't remember exactly what it is they're supposed to do?

Lamar Thomas: I think that-

Bill Walton: We're talking professional now.

Lamar Thomas: Yeah.

Bill Walton: Not your peewee league.

Lamar Thomas: You get a lot of extended plays, which looks like busted plays but a lot of the times, people actually know what they're doing. There isn't too many times where people are running around and they don't know what they're doing and things get hectic. There are times where the quarterback will get this map and he's looking and maybe his guy isn't open so then he runs around and then it looks as if it's a busted play but a lot of the plays are scripted and they go to a way that they-

Bill Walton: You're also building on the fact that by the time you're 22 years old, 23 years old, that you made it to the pros, how many thousands of hours of practice do you think you've had?

Lamar Thomas: I wouldn't even be able to put a number on it, and the amounts of plays that I've learned just from college to the pros, different minds have different ideas on how they want to run their offense and how they want to do things and how they want to execute.

Bill Walton: How much carryover is there from college playbooks to pro playbooks? Are they similar, are they vastly different?

Lamar Thomas: They're similar. The most unique playbook is the one that you're looking at right now, which is Peyton Manning's playbook. Of course, you can imagine that being quite complicated, but pretty much a lot of the players are the same but they have different terminology. There are slightly different details that go into the play, maybe you're two yards wider on this play but it might be the same exact play that you ran in college, for Ohio State, that you would run for the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Maybe there's two yard of a difference here or maybe this person lining up standing up instead of being down, it could be slightly different but a lot of the plays, a lot of the concepts are very similar, offensively and defensively.

Bill Walton: You're in the huddle, does anybody ever say to Peyton, "Peyton, that play's okay, but I've got a better idea"?

Lamar Thomas: They wish they could do that. That would never happen. I could never see that happening, with Peyton Manning calling a play and somebody like, "Wait, wait, I think I have a better idea." If that did happen, that might be that guy's last time in that huddle.

Maureen OD: On a Peyton Manning basis, how was it to play with a man such as he?

Lamar Thomas: Yeah, Peyton Manning, I tell people all the time, he's the guy that you think he is. A lot of times you see some people on TV and you're like, "Oh, there's no way he can really be acting like that. There's no way he's that chill," and Peyton Manning is really that chill, that down-to-earth and that cool of a guy. I told Bill this one time, but the first time I met Peyton Manning, he just walked up to me, I'm standing in the waiting room, this was my rookie year, it's my third day in Denver.

He just walked up to me, and he's like, "Hey, I'm Peyton Manning," as if I didn't know who he was and he shakes my hand and he asks me, "How are things going? You just got here, I know you had camp this weekend, how'd it go?" For a guy like Peyton Manning to do something like that, it says a lot about him and his character. Another story I like to tell, I've seen Peyton Manning ... we've had camps and fans come to practice and you get an opportunity to interact with Peyton Manning, that's something that you'll cherish.

Peyton Manning, a lot of times, he takes a bottle of water, he'll drink the bottle of water, he'll find somebody in the stands and he just loosens the top. Okay? He loosens the top and he acts like he's drinking the water, like, "Hey, you want some water?" If Peyton Manning offers you water, of course I want water from Peyton Manning, yeah. They take the bottle and they go to drink it and the water comes out.

If it's anybody but Peyton Manning, you are [crosstalk 18:40]. This is my Peyton Manning jersey, now it's wet-

Maureen OD: I got spoofed by Peyton Manning.

Lamar Thomas: Right, it's Peyton Manning, so it's cool and it's fun, but that's the type of guy he is. This is in the middle of practice sometimes. He takes his job seriously, as you can tell, from an X and O standpoint, but the guy, he has fun. He's the comedian that you see in the commercials. That's the guy he is.

Bill Walton: You were a dual sport athlete. You're a track athlete and you ran track in high school, you also did it in college. Is that unusual

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, it's unusual and actually it's frowned upon because you get the track ... as similar in track as football really seems, it's actually a lot different as far as the way you take care of your body and the way that you train and the way that you use your muscles. Football is a power sport.

Bill Walton: What's the difference in training, track on the one hand? You were a short distance guy, right?

Lamaar Thomas: Yes.

Bill Walton: 60 meters, 100 meters, 400 meter relay.

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah.

Bill Walton: How do you train differently for that ... to do that versus being a wide receiver?

Lamaar Thomas: As a wide receiver, the training, it's not so different because you do a lot of running. With wide receiver training, you do a lot of cutting and it's a lot of foot work, things that go into it. Whereas track is, for me, mostly straight line running. You build up to your speed and you get going, and you run as fast as you can. In that aspect, track and football training's a little different.

Bill Walton: The lateral moves are the big-

Lamaar Thomas: The lateral movement is the biggest difference, yeah. In football, you have to worry about ...sometimes you have to make a guy miss. You have to run and you could run at full speed, you might have to stop at a dime to make somebody miss. Track, once you get up to that speed-

Bill Walton: You're going.

Lamaar Thomas: You're going. [crosstalk 20:28] You can't change your mind now.

Bill Walton: We were talking before we got on about the difference in your life as a college football player/pro football player and you described a life that's really full in college. What was that like?

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, in college, like you said, I was a dual sport athlete so there were times in the spring and in the summer where I'm competing in track and I'm having football practice. We've got spring ball and the coaches, they were really strict on spring ball, "Hey, we have to get ready for the season. We only have 20 days to practice with pads, so hey, this is what's going on," and then I had my track

team, was like, "Hey, we have conference championship coming up, we need you ready for that, we need you to be here for that."

Maureen OD: You also have school.

Lamaar Thomas: I have school, I have mandatory study hall, I have mandatory classes, I have my social life, I'm in college, I'm 21, I'm 22, I want to have fun

Bill Walton: 21-year-olds have a social life. I remember that.

Lamaar Thomas: Some of them do.

Bill Walton: You did pretty good in the study hall, though.

Lamaar Thomas: I did pretty good in the study hall, yes. My freshman year when I was at Ohio State, I made all Big 10 academic, which was big for me, it was a big deal for me, my mom was proud of me. Once my mom gets happy, that's what I want to keep and I want to keep making my mom happy.

Bill Walton: I think we've established your mother as a force of nature.

Lamaar Thomas: After that happened, I'm like, "Hey, I want to do this all the time," so I took my academics serious. I made sure that I was at my study halls and I got all of my things done and I was able to have time to study for this test, although I had practice and I had football workouts and I had to lift here and I had to do weights.

Bill Walton: You kept it up in New Mexico State. You were all academic in the Mount West division, weren't you?

Lamaar Thomas: I was also academic at Mount West. Now, I must correct you because I know there's going to be a lot of people watching this, a lot of low blow fans will be watching this, and I went to University of New Mexico-

Bill Walton: Oh my god, okay. [crosstalk 22:18] All the superior subject matter knowledge here.

Lamaar Thomas: You're giving those New Mexico State guys way too much credit. They don't deserve that kind of credit down there.

Bill Walton: I stand corrected. You go from the full life in college and then you go to the pros. How's that different?

Lamaar Thomas: Surprisingly, it was much different. I didn't have to worry about going to study hall. You come to practice, you're lifting weights just for football, you study just your plays, I don't have to worry about studying my plays and then also studying

for my chemistry exam or for my communications test. It's just football. For a lot of people, that's living the life, like, "All I have to study is my football plays, I don't have to worry about studying for my math or my stats exam."

My life in college was, "Hey, I'm going to run here, I've got to hurry up because I've got a class, I need to hurry up because I've got to work out, I've got hurry up and get some lunch," whereas in the pros it's like, "Hey, you come to practice, you take care of what you need to do here at the facility, you don't have to worry about going back and forth. We're feeding you, you have the ability to take advantage of whatever workouts you need to do."

Bill Walton: We talked about the diet. The diet, I guess, in the pros, it's all very well-designed and fed and all that sort of thing. In college, though, it sounds like you ate like a college kid.

Lamaar Thomas: Exactly. There were times in college where I'm like, "All right, I have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and I have my protein shake and this is going to have to at least make it until-

Maureen OD: Until you can get your big meal.

Lamaar Thomas: Until I get my big meal a little later, but this protein shake is going to be my life for me right now. It's going to get me through the day.

Bill Walton: What's the dynamic on a pro team versus a college team in terms of the success orientation? We talked about this a bit, but I've heard there's a fair amount of faith and prayer that goes on in locker rooms. Is that true for both the pros and college?

Lamaar Thomas: Yes, and I've seen it being done in a way where it's not forced upon you and it's all optional. You have guys that don't really want to get into their faith and their beliefs in the locker room, but then you have guys that openly show it. I don't know if you ever pay attention to guys run out of the tunnel before games and they'll run all the way down to the opposite end zone and they'll take a knee and they'll say their prayer.

There might be a prayer that goes on in the locker room, some teams pray before they leave the locker room but a lot of guys, it's routine for a lot of guys to run out of the tunnel and the first thing they do once they get on the field is to say a prayer. They pray to whoever they feel they need to pray to, but that shows how powerful that is to where guys that are playing a sport, the game that they love, they're coming to work, but the first thing they want to do is thank whoever they see as their higher ...

Bill Walton: Yeah. Well, your family is very important in that regard, and I think your flag football team also prays before each game.

Lamaar Thomas: We do. Before every game, we say the prayer together as a team. Like I said, there's nothing forced upon them, but everybody participates and it's one of our pregame rituals that we do. There's been a time where I have had to take a timeout because the referees are ready to play, but my team's like, "Hey, we didn't say a prayer yet, we've got to make sure we say a prayer." I remember particularly a time this past season when I had to call a timeout to say, "Hey ref, we're just going to take a timeout before the kickoff because we haven't said our prayer yet."

Maureen OD: Right.

Lamaar Thomas: It's important even in flag football, the prayer is important.

Bill Walton: You're the coach of the team.

Lamaar Thomas: I'm the coach of the team.

Bill Walton: You're the best athlete except for your mom.

Lamaar Thomas: Besides my mom. If I take my mom off the team, I'm the best athlete-

Maureen OD: How does your brother and your dad feel about that?

Lamaar Thomas: It's a hard-knock life for them. It's a hard-knock life for my dad and my brother now. On the one hand, you have my mom who's known as the best athlete in the family, and then on the other hand, you have me who has these trophies hanging up in the house and then my dad and my brother are like, "Well, where do we fit in?"

Maureen OD: I understand your flag football team is ... where are they going soon?

Lamaar Thomas: We have national championships coming up for my flag football team. It's in Sarasota, Florida. It takes place every year in January, so we'll be there. I'll get there January 12th through the 14th, we'll compete against over 200 teams.

Maureen OD: Wow.

Lamaar Thomas: In different type of ... they have co-ed football, you have men's and four-on-four and eight-on-eight. The flag football world down there, it's insane. You wouldn't imagine.

Bill Walton: Are these a lot of former college and high school players that are in flag football, or is it just from everywhere?

Lamaar Thomas: I think it's just from everywhere. Like I said, my mom, my dad and my brother all play on my flag football team and none of them have any college football experience at all.

Bill Walton: I've been racing in triathlons last few years and we have something called age groups.

Lamaar Thomas: Okay.

Bill Walton: Do you have age group flag football?

Lamaar Thomas: There is some age group flag football. There's youth divisions and then you have 18 and up divisions, but in Florida they have a masters division, what they call a 35 and older. There's a division where-

Bill Walton: I'm so much older than the master's division.

Lamaar Thomas: They have a division where everybody's at least 35 and they have 35 and older and you don't have to worry about chasing the guy that's 18, 25-year-old down the field, you're playing against guys that are 35 and 40.

Bill Walton: You've been successful in athletics and you've been successful in academics. You've been quite an achiever. Do you have any philosophy or simple way to describe what gets you up in the morning and how you approach the day?

Lamaar Thomas: A lot that comes out of me is my competitive edge and I cherish that a lot. My competitive edge, it takes over me to where sometimes ... I could see somebody walking down the street and I'm like, "Are they trying to walk faster than me?"

Bill Walton: Competitive edge means you're competitive.

Lamaar Thomas: I'm competitive

Maureen OD: He was telling me all about his FitBit and how he-

Bill Walton: The fact that you're competitive becomes an edge.

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah, exactly.

Bill Walton: It clicks.

Lamaar Thomas: Yes, so I'm always striving to be the best. We just talked about the FitBit, I have a FitBit on and there's no reason I need to be worried about how many steps I get in a day because I'm pretty active, but I'm constantly aware of how many steps I have in a day only because I'm so competitive and I'm like, "Hey, I can't ... my mom can't get more steps than me. My friend, I can't have him getting more steps than me."

Now, throughout my day I'm making sure that, hey, I'm getting steps in. There's been times it's 11:00 at night. I remember one time my girlfriend got mad at me because she's talking to me about something and I look over at my watch and she's like, "Is that more important right now?" I'm like, "It's almost midnight and I have to get 200 more steps, I'm sorry babe. I'm listening."

Bill Walton: You and I got to know each other, you're my personal trainer and I now know why when we're boxing it feels like you may be starting to punch back.

Lamaar Thomas: Exactly.

Bill Walton: Is that what's going on?

Lamaar Thomas: Sometimes I'm holding a pad, I'm like, "Bill's punching pretty hard, so I need to come back a little harder this time."

Bill Walton: You have a lot of kids that you're working with in flag football, what do you teach them about the competitive edge?

Lamaar Thomas: My two things, I have two things that was taught to me when I was in college that I hold onto. You have two things you control, and that's your attitude and your effort. Everything else is ... anything can happen. The weather is unpredictable. What's going to be said next is unpredictable, but I can always control my attitude, I can always control my effort going into whatever situation I'm going into.

There can be something that I'm not so happy about doing, but if I show up there with a positive attitude and I give great effort, then I'm going to get the best results for myself out of that situation. That's the biggest thing I try to teach the kids is not to worry so much about this and that but control what you can control. You can control your attitude, have a positive attitude when you're going into things.

You can control the effort, do the best you can do, and everything else will take care of itself in that sense.

Maureen OD: That's pretty cool.

Bill Walton: I think that's something to take away for life.

Maureen OD: I like that.

Bill Walton: With attitude, you create your own reality.

Lamaar Thomas: Yeah.

Bill Walton: You don't let somebody else do it.

Lamaar Thomas: Exactly.

Bill Walton: Yeah, love it. Football, America, so important to each other. America and football, football and America. Talk about where you think football fits into culture, and Maureen, I would also love to hear from you on this one.

Lamaar Thomas: Right now, I think that in culture we're in a place where football is becoming frowned upon just because of a lot that's going on with football. You talk about football in America, football is ... for a lot of people to escape on the weekend. You have a tough week at work and Thursday come around and you're like, "I just can't wait to get home and watch that Thursday night football game, I can't wait to just relax and watch that Thursday night game."

Like I mentioned before, my dad, when he came to me the other day, he was telling me, "Hey, I need to make sure that the Redskins win this one more game and I need the Cowboys to lose one more because I made a bet with my coworker." It created a relationship for him and his coworker where they talk about football. They're not at work, they don't have to talk about work at work.

They can talk about football, it gets them away from work or whatever problems you're having at the house or at work or wherever you are. Now I can just ... Sunday's coming around, "Oh Sunday, it's football Sunday."

Maureen OD: It brings families together.

Lamaar Thomas: That's football.

Maureen OD: Families and friends, neighbors, we have really good neighbors that-

Bill Walton: You and your sons watch football together.

Maureen OD: Yes, we sit down and we watch football and they scream and yell at the TV and sometimes get a little overemotional, I'm like, "It's only a game, guys!" It's something that brings family and friends together and we have very good friends that we've gone to a Redskins game with them and it's just so much fun. The whole thing is a really ... it's a good thing to ... it brings people together and it's a sport.

Bill Walton: I like the way football seems to be adapting to the concussions issue, changing the way the tackles are done. I think we need to be a little more aggressive on that, though. I don't think we need to go all the way to flag football. What's your point of view?

Lamaar Thomas: I agree.

Bill Walton: I agree. I think that the coaching aspect of it needs to ... I think that is getting a lot better. I remember when I was playing, there was some coaching on how to tackle, but it was like, "Hey, get the guy down whatever way you can," whereas now they have videos out showing you the proper way to tackle to make sure that your head is not in the contact. The way that you can do it now, you have guys that ... you make that split decision while you're playing.

"Hey, am I going to tackle that way? Am I going to not lead with my head?" There's some guys that still do, but I think that it's going in a better direction now with the coaching aspect of how to tackle and how to try to avoid and how you will be penalized if you don't try to avoid the contact with the head.

Maureen OD: Yeah, I think that's very important that they're doing that and they're finding guys and suspending them depending upon how severe the hit is and I think that does really help make this sport a little more safe.

Bill Walton: Yeah.

Maureen OD: It's not a safe sport, but if played with that in mind, I think it can be a lot ... you don't have as many injuries and things.

Bill Walton: Well, I hope they make a change. We talked about this in another show about how around 1900, 1910, football got so dangerous there were college players dying every week. Teddy Roosevelt, the president then, stepped in and took charge of football and made them change the rules. The question is, for those of us that don't want to be political, would you like Donald Trump to step in? I'm sure he'd like to.

Lamaar Thomas: Right, I'm sure he would.

Bill Walton: Anyway, final thoughts. If you had a chance to go back in and play pro ball, would you do it again? Would you go back now, I guess that's really the question?

Lamaar Thomas: The question, would I go back now if I had an opportunity right now, I would not go back right now. When I stopped playing, it was at a time where I was starting to feel like it wasn't as fun. Once the fun started to get taken out of football, I didn't want to do it anymore. Whereas now I'm playing flag football, it's completely fun. I'm playing with my mom and my dad. My dad's throwing me passes and I'm throwing my mom passes.

This is fun for me. Not to say that the NFL wasn't fun, because the NFL was fun, it was a great experience, but I could start to feel the drop-off of how fun it was becoming for me. I remember the fun I had when I was nine, scoring touchdowns and when I was a senior in high school, making interceptions. I just didn't feel that same feeling when I got in the pros and I was in practice.

A lot of that might've had to do with the fact that when I was a kid and when I was in high school, I was the guy on the team. I was the focal point on the team, and then when you get in the NFL, you're just one of those little dots. [crosstalk 36:27] Literally, one of those little dots is just running around. I think that had a lot to do with how I felt exiting the NFL.

Bill Walton: I see you becoming a teacher, maybe opening a sports academy or some sort of excellence academy or something like that. Do you see yourself doing something like that?

Lamaar Thomas: That's actually exactly what I want to do. One day, I want to be able to open up an academy to where ... a facility where you can play a bunch of different sports and learn how to play these sports and be active and have fun. That's the goal.

Bill Walton: You're, in a way, burying the lead but it's not just about the sports, it's about the character.

Lamaar Thomas: Exactly, it's about the character. For example, I have my flag football team, there's a lot of guys that are good. There's a lot of good players, but I build myself on, hey, I'm not going to just have anybody come play on my team. I want somebody that's going to be good around my family, that's going to have some character, that's not just like, "Hey, give me the ball because I'm open."

I want to have fun, let's throw your mom a touchdown pass, or let's throw my girlfriend-

Maureen OD: Let's put her in the end zone.

Lamar Thomas: Yeah. That's the kind of guy I want to play with on my team. In the NFL, it's a lot more, "Hey, we need to win. These are production-based leaves, if we don't win, we're losing our jobs." Whereas flag football, we don't win, I might have to hear my mom on the way home but other than that, it's all fun and games.

Bill Walton: I think next time we'll have your mom on, too. Maureen, thanks for joining us.

Maureen OD: Yeah, this was a lot of fun.

Bill Walton: We'll be promoting your academy when you start it. In the meantime, I'll see you in the gym next week and don't pull your punches. I can take it.

Lamar Thomas: I will be ready.

Bill Walton: Okay, well, thanks. Fun.

Maureen OD: Great.

Bill Walton: Next time, take care.