Athletes offer varied actions

Athletics—on all levels of competition—offer many varied personalities. There are some you have to admire simply because they are so naturally gifted.

"There are others who catch your attention and respect because they give you 100 per cent effort on every play in practice and in game competition.

Then there are others you put in a special classification because they are much more than athletes. They are the young men and women who put competitive sports in their proper perspective. They are the ones who contribute much more than simply scoring a touchdown, hitting a home run or scoring the winning field goal.

I have been fortunate enough to meet many such athletes from the Roanoke area and I feel it an honor to call them friends of mine.

One of my favorite athlete-gentlemen is Carey Casey of Salem, who must spend this football season with a cast on his leg as his North Carolina teammates try to make amends from last year’s disappointing record.

But Carey had nothing to do with past Carolina misfortunes. He spent two years at Northeast Oklahoma and attracted many college scouts. He could have gone many places, but decided to cast his lot with the Tar Heels. There were many who thought he should have returned to the state to compete his college career.

Carey worked extra hard to make a spot for himself at Carolina. He was being billed as a tailback who would share the ball-carrying duties with Mike Voight, who has gained more than 1,000 yards in each of the past two years.

Despite his competition with Voight, the two are friends. Casey said Voight had given him many tips on running the football.

But Casey also was quick to let you know that he thought he and Voight were two different runners.

"Mike is tough," Casey said. "He likes to run over people. I think it just makes him feel good. But me, man, I'm different. I don't like to run at people. I try to stay out of their way."

Casey also is a deeply religious young man. And he shows it in the way he lives and the way he conducts himself. His religion isn't pushed at people. But it's the kind that hits its mark and does the job.

Although he was new to Carolina last winter, he quickly was called on to talk at various Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings at area high schools and colleges. He was a man who showed the world he could do more than run the football.

Casey comes from a very close family. He and his younger brother, Corwin, are as close as brothers can be. Corwin is now a senior defensive end at Northeast Oklahoma and promises to have more than a few top college scouts competing for his services.

When Corwin heard that Carey’s injury would sideline him for the season, he didn't hesitate to admit he went into his room and cried. "I knew how much playing this season meant to Carey," Corwin said. "He had worked so hard and so long. I couldn’t have felt worse if it had been me."

It will be a difficult fall for Carey. But he will hobble around on his crutches, rub his cast and give a lot of encouragement to his healthy teammates. He will not ask "why me", but will just become more determined and dedicated to still do his thing in football—only one year later.

But Casey is not alone in a mass of injured warriors who have either been sidelined for a season or an entire career.

Virginia Tech lost two Roanokers before the season started and both were slated for important roles. Ricky Harman, who probably has as much pure "guts" as any athlete I have met, lost a battle with head injuries and had to give up being a top defensive back.

Last spring, it was Mike Brammer, an offensive guard, who was told he could no longer operate with one wing. Brammer had a chronic shoulder injury and after several operations there was nothing left to mend.

Injuries are something athletes have to expect. But I honestly think there are just as many injuries to young men outside of football.

Quarterback Eddie Snell had his career at Tech delayed because of a summer injury suffered in softball. Many other football players have received their most serious injuries in basketball and other so-called non-contact sports.

Yes, athletics are interesting for many reasons. But two of the biggest are the opportunity to observe the many personalities involved and also to see just how those mighty warriors react to adversity.