

[00:00:00]      <Music>

**Annie:**      Hi friends, welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host, Annie F Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you. We've got a great show in store. Happy Friday. Happy football week. You know, we kicked it off with Coach Mark Richt and we continue it today. Oh y'all, I'm so stoked.

But before we jump into today's conversation, I want to take a moment and tell you about one of our amazing partners, BetterHelp. Are there things in your life that are interfering with your health and your happiness, or are keeping you from reaching your goals. If we've been friends for a while you know this, but I have found counseling to be so helpful in those seasons, I think you will too. BetterHelp is here for you.

BetterHelp will assess your needs, and match you with your own licensed professional therapist. Who you can connect with in a convenient, safe and private online environment. You can send your therapist a message anytime and you'll receive timely and thoughtful responses. Plus, you can start communicating within 24 hours. You can schedule weekly video or phone sessions, it's so convenient, y'all, I love that. BetterHelp prioritizes facilitating great therapeutic matches. So they make it easy and free to change counselors if you need to. And the testimonials on their website are so helpful, if you feel unsure about how it all works.

BetterHelp offers services for clients all over the world, and they have licensed professional therapists, that specialize in a wide variety of disciplines. Like depression or stress, grief, self-esteem, anxiety, family issues and more. Which means that the right help is available for whatever you're walking through.

This is not self-help, and it's not a crisis hotline. It's convenient, professional, affordable, confidential counseling. I want you to start living a healthier life today. So as one of my friends you'll get 10% off your first month, by visiting [betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](https://www.betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun). Join over a million people and so many of our friends, who've taken charge of their mental health. Again, that's [betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](https://www.betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun).

And just a reminder that tickets are on sale right now for the That Sounds Fun Podcast Tour. That kicks off at the end of this month, I

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can't wait. If you haven't gotten yours yet, what are you waiting for? I can't wait to see you in Philly, in Baltimore and, and, and the West Coast. Listen, we're going Gulf Coast, East Coast, West Coast, I can't wait. Go to [anniefdowns.com/events](http://anniefdowns.com/events) for all the details and to grab your tickets today.

Today on the show, as I said, we continue in what I call my Mount Rushmore of college football conversations, talking with Kirk Herbstreit. Kirk Herbstreit a football commentator for ESPN and pretty well established as one of the faces and voices of college football, both as a member of the critically acclaimed College GameDay Show as well as the lead analyst for ESPN and ABC Sports' primetime game broadcast.

He is the most-honored ESPN commentator in the network's history. And we won't hold it against him, but he did play and graduate from the Ohio State University. I've heard and watched him for so much of my football love and in life. So it's especially fun to get to spend time with him today and hear about his new book *Out of the Pocket: Football, Fatherhood, and College GameDay Saturdays*. I can't wait for y'all to get to know him too. So we start with a big conversation about the Georgia game on Saturday. So here's my conversation with our friend Kirk Herbstreit.

**[00:03:20]**      <Music>

**Annie:**      Well, I read your book, and it's great. So I'm really stoked to get to talk about it.

**Kirk:**      Awesome. Thank you.

**Annie:**      I think so many people are going to love it.

**Kirk:**      Oh, good.

**Annie:**      Okay, we're starting with the Georgia conversation though, Kirk Herbstreit. Talk to me about why every time you bring Game Day to a Georgia game we lose?

**Kirk:**      Oh my gosh. It's so true.

**Annie:**      It's so true.

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**Kirk:**            Remember when one time they did a blackout and they wore black jerseys or something like that, and they got killed.

**Annie:**           Yes.

**Kirk:**            By, I think it was Alabama maybe? I'm talking about.

**Annie:**           Yes.

**Kirk:**            Man. I'll have the bear to look that up to see what George's record is when we come to Athens. I love the town-

**Annie:**           Don't worry, I already did the research for you. We're O/And, we are O/And, when y'all come to town or when you're at the SEC Championship, we're O.

**Kirk:**            No way!

**Annie:**           Yes, yes. I looked it up last night, because I was at the game, the first time you came, I was at the game, October 10th 1998, I was a freshman at Georgia. We were playing Tennessee and I remember when they announced GameDay was coming to Athens.

**Kirk:**            Wow. Yeah, that's crazy.

**Annie:**           It was huge. It was all anyone talked about that week, because I think Tennessee was, we were both top 10 at the time, and then they destroyed us.

**Kirk:**            Oh my gosh! I remember that Champ Bailey was on that team.

**Annie:**           Yeah.

**Kirk:**            I remember that.

**Annie:**           Yeah.

**Kirk:**            That was Tennessee's run to a national championship.

**Annie:**           Yes.

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**Kirk:** Jim Donnan was the head coach, I remember that well. We were in the end zone, if you're looking from the home side, we're in the end zone to the left for GameDay. It's very different now that they have stands now, it's like a whole different stadium. But back then that side of the stadium was open.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** So we had our GameDay set right there, but I didn't realize you guys were over.

**Annie:** Over.

**Kirk:** You know week one we'll be in Charlotte, it's a neutral site. Does that count as a-

**Annie:** Listen, if you think that's neutral that's like calling Jacksonville neutral. There's no world where Jacksonville is neutral for Georgia, Florida.

**Kirk:** Yeah. You're right.

**Annie:** It's like a 19-minute drive for them and a five-hour drive for us.

**Kirk:** Right. Exactly.

**Annie:** It is not neutral and I so, wait, so y'all are at Clemson, Georgia?

**Kirk:** Oh, yeah.

**Annie:** Shoot, Kirk!

**Kirk:** And I'm calling that game that night too.

**Annie:** Oh, no.

**Kirk:** Yeah. Now, have we ever done Georgia when Georgia was on the road, and they went on a GameDay?

**Annie:** No.

**Kirk:** Has that ever happened?

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**Annie:**        Only SEC Championship when we didn't win.

**Kirk:**        My gosh!

**Annie:**        Just bringing the stats to you.

**Kirk:**        I feel like a jinx now, this is unbelievable.

**Annie:**        Unfortunately, this is what I needed to tell you, because I think you are the jinx.

**Kirk:**        Oh man. This is going to be-

**Annie:**        I'm really discouraged about you being at Clemson, Georgia.

**Kirk:**        I feel a lot of pressure now going to Charlotte, like we need to break the jinx, this is unacceptable.

**Annie:**        Is this going to be the new thing with Georgia, Clemson? Is this neutral or is this the start of the season neutral?

**Kirk:**        Yeah. I think it's just these neutral site games, that as you were a kid, when I was younger, I mean, Georgia and Clemson they're so close to one another. People don't realize that they aren't, maybe in that region. But that is a great old rivalry that they used to play all the time and gotten away from it. So I think for those fans of those two teams, as you know, this will be a fun game. But I don't think it's going to be an every-year type of thing.

**Annie:**        Okay. Good. Little Annie story for you. I got the worst sunburn of my life at Death Valley, because I sat up way high and just sunburned my face worse. That place-

**Kirk:**        Oh yeah.

**Annie:**        Because it's those early August, September games and they're brutally hot.

**Kirk:**        If you're talking about the game, Todd Gurley lived there-

**Annie:**        Yes.

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**Kirk:** ...I called that game too. I don't remember, did Clemson, probably won that one too?

**Annie:** They did, actually.

**Kirk:** Yeah. I'm curious to know the times we've done GameDay, when George has been on not at a neutral site, on the road. Have they ever won on GameDay, like have we ever done a Georgia game when they won?

**Annie:** I don't think so. I didn't go that deep, I just googled it twice. And so I gave you everything I learned twice.

**Kirk:** Okay.

**Annie:** Only because I remember it, because the year they-

**Kirk:** I'm going to have our guy research it to find out if they've ever won when we've done a GameDay. Because I feel like our show is responsible for this, now. Now, I'm nervous about this game now. I feel like I've got a duty to try to break this jinx.

**Annie:** Thank you, I need you to carry this weight with me. Because I've been feeling it for 24 hours thinking about talking to you. Tell me how you feel about Georgia for this year?

**Kirk:** I mean, how can you not like 'em. Kirby is, it's crazy to think Kirby's in his sixth year now.

**Annie:** That's Wild, ain't it? I cannot believe it's been that long.

**Kirk:** I know. I know. And every year there's Alabama, there's Clemson, there's Ohio State, and then I would say there's Georgia and Oklahoma.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:** It's like those teams seem to, through recruiting, kind of elevated themselves over everybody else. And with some remarkable, and this is when you know you have a great program. Look what Georgia has lost over the last few years, especially in the defensive side of the ball. They lost almost their whole secondary.

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**Annie:**        Yes.

**Kirk:**        Lost great linebacker play. And here they are expected to have one of the best defenses in the SEC. And they've had some injuries out of wide receiver with George Pickens. You got a quarterback in JT Daniels, who looks to be the part, looks like he finished last year very, very well. And we're excited to see him, hopefully healthy all year and see what he can do. Got great running backs the way they recruit.

So I mean, there's everything seems to be in place on paper. Now you just got to go out and you know how it is. You've got to gel together and go through some adversity and hope they come through it, and what better way than to play Clemson. There's a lot at stake because the loser of this game, chances are Georgia and Clemson are going to have great year-

**Annie:**        Win out. Yeah.

**Kirk:**        And the last thing you want to do is lose this game and then get into a tiebreaker situation, where it's an either or.

**Annie:**        Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:**        Like one of these teams is going to advance into the playoffs and one of them's not. And whoever wins the head-to-head matchup is obviously going to get the nod. So I don't want to say it's a deal breaker to lose this game, but you want to win this one.

**Annie:**        That's why I'm going to ask you to not go please. I'm going to ask you to get reassigned.

**Kirk:**        I'm cancelling, I'm cancelling after this.

**Annie:**        I know I can't pay you what they pay you to be there but I can ask some people. I can ask around-

**Kirk:**        Yeah, I love it.

**Annie:**        ...some of the fancier Georgia fans, I can call Lady A and get them to maybe invest in you not being there.

**Kirk:**        Whatever it takes, man, whatever it takes.

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**Annie:** Man, whatever it takes. Because, listen, I was born in 1980, so in my life, there has not been a national championship for Georgia. And it's painful.

**Kirk:** How about, how about the national championship a couple years ago? You guys were so close.

**Annie:** So close.

**Kirk:** I mean, they're dominating the game and then Tua becomes Tua on a national stage.

**Annie:** In front of everyone.

**Kirk:** Yeah, that was quite a... I mean, and even when he came in there, I mean, Georgia still had their chances there late in the game to win it.

**Annie:** Okay, do you know a place outside of Nashville called On-Site? Do you know On-Site, the counseling center?

**Kirk:** No, I feel like I've heard of that, but I have never been there.

**Annie:** A bunch of our mutual friends have all, because I'm in Nashville, too. So a bunch of our mutual friends have all been. So I was there for like, a week-long counseling intensive for that week. The week that Georgia was in the national championship, and they let us watch it that night. And I was like, "You know what it's probably good I'm in therapy. This way-

**Kirk:** Oh so you didn't get a chance to go to the actual game?

**Annie:** No, no I watched it at On-Site.

**Kirk:** Oh, my gosh. That's a good place to be for you.

**Annie:** That's right. The next morning, I was like, "I've got some new stuff to talk about in our small group, because of what I watched last night."

**Kirk:** That's about as close as you can come to climbing that mountain and then sliding down. You know what I mean? They were right there.



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**Annie:**        They were right there.

**Kirk:**        And I called the Rose Bowl, there you go. I called the Georgia/Oklahoma game a week earlier, that looked like Oklahoma and Baker Mayfield were going to have their way.

**Annie:**        Yeah.

**Kirk:**        I mean young Jake Fromm, Sony Michel, and Nick Chub, that was a great game, one of my favorite games that maybe I've ever called, that was tremendous.

**Annie:**        And that's a win for you. So let's do that again, let's do that again in Clemson, Georgia.

**Kirk:**        See, see, there you go. We can win games for you.

**Annie:**        We can do this Kirk, we're gonna be all right.

**Kirk:**        Yeah.

**Annie:**        When you look across the SEC, I mean, we're going to talk about your book, by the way. But this is like, so fun for me to talk sports. When you look across the SEC with Texas and Oklahoma coming. Let me tell you what I predict and you tell me why I'm wrong? I think they'll come in, in a couple, they'll come in 23?

**Kirk:**        Yeah, and it's debatable at this point. Let's just say 23.

**Annie:**        So if they come in at 23 are you predicting an East/West split by 26?

**Kirk:**        East/West, as in?

**Annie:**        Like two SECs. We're going to have to split at some point. It's going to be too big, right?

**Kirk:**        I don't know. I feel like those are the first two big dominoes to fall in college football. Notre Dame is still out there.

**Annie:**        Right.

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**Kirk:**            What's left for the big 12, there's some pretty good brands that are left there wondering, "Are we still the big 12?" Texas Tech, and TCU, and West Virginia, and Iowa State, and Kansas State. So what's going to happen to the PAC-12, the big 10, the ACC-

**Annie:**            Oh I loved you writing about the PAC-12 in the book, about how different it is now compared to two decades ago. I've never thought about that, because I've always lived down here. But, man, the way you write about the PAC-12, who it used to be versus who it is now is so interesting.

**Kirk:**            Yeah. And I feel like right now that everybody's terrified of what the SEC has already become, and what it might still become even more. Like, how they're going to continue to grow. I feel like we might be headed to like four super conferences, like 16 teams, like everybody's going to have 16 teams. And I wouldn't be surprised if they pull away from the NCAA, kind of create their own governing body. And then are finally fine, like, instead of having five conference commissioners, have just one commissioner like the NFL has a commissioner.

**Annie:**            Yeah.

**Kirk:**            And then you can kind of create your own rules and kind of be in your own world. It feels like we're headed down that path. But it'd be weird, it's just the whole thing is kind of strange. I just hope we're able to hold on to tradition some of these rivalries that we all love. College football, to me, is about community, it's about pageantry, it's about tradition, and we can't lose that stuff. We can't let go of that stuff just for money, creating as much money as we can. So that's my hope for the sport.

Because that's how I fell in love with it. I fell in love with the marching bands, and the tailgating, and just the community, how it comes together. And whether you're in Athens or Columbus or Austin, Texas, or wherever you are, there's guys and girls out there that have the same tailgate spot since 1978. My Dad had it, now we have it, and it's just so different from the NFL or MLB or the NBA. And we need to cherish that aspect of the sport and I feel like sometimes it gets lost.

**Annie:**            Yeah.

**Kirk:**            Because, we're kind of raising a generation, a different kind of fan today than I think what it used to be.

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**Annie:** Will, you talk about, I didn't know this tradition at Ohio State, will you talk about dotting the 'I' and the marching band? I've never heard about that until I read it in your book.

**Kirk:** Yo, really?

**Annie:** Yeah, I don't know how I missed that somehow. I guess I've never been to an Ohio State game. But I didn't know that was, but it's a huge deal to dot the 'I'?

**Kirk:** Yeah. So for Ohio State fans, the Script Ohio itself is big as the team playing.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:** Like, it's a huge deal. From the time you're four years old, you go to the games, like everybody loves to see that. But first of all the band, like here's the team ranking and then I would say the band is like right there. Like most places you go the band is down here.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** Like, no one leaves, at halftime, to go get a hot dog, because nobody wants to miss the band.

**Annie:** Huh!

**Kirk:** Now the band is like sacred.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm. Okay.

**Kirk:** So when they do Script Ohio everybody is up and cheering. So three, four, five times in the history of the band. Somebody has been brought out to dot the 'I'. Other than what is it, it's the tuba that they come out and they dot the 'I'. But they brought, like I told you, I think is John Glenn, Jack Nicklaus, just a handful of people that have ever done it. So pretty sacred, pretty big deal for anybody that ever... And I got to do it in practice.

**Annie:** Uh-huh.

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**Kirk:** The band, I think in the book I say, "The band came as..." kind of we respect them, they respect us, we're a team. They came over near the end of our two-day practices in the camp. And they all gave everybody a different instrument. And so that was a fun memory to think back to those days.

**Annie:** Those are the things when people talk about sports, and talk about the love of college football. People who don't feel what you and I feel about college football go, "It's just like a game. It's these college kids playing." And it's like, "No, y'all don't know about tailgating at Georgia, or dotting the 'I', or all these things that are so connected."

**Kirk:** Like, for example, for people that are listening to this and they've never been to Athens or whatever. Like to me, we can always get to wherever we're going on a Thursday.

**Annie:** Uh-huh.

**Kirk:** So like, for me, the best part of my job is a guy who grew up in the Big 10, really grew up, my dad played at Ohio State, he was a captain there. I played at Ohio State, I was a captain. I knew Ohio State, I knew the big 10. Back in 1996, I started traveling around and seeing the SEC and seeing the PAC-12, and seeing the big 12 in the ACC. And with an open mind I fell in love with all these places.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** Going to into Neyland Stadium and going to Athens. And what's cool is we go in on Thursday, and we'll find out talking to different people, a lot of times it's the coaches, word of mouth, "Hey, where do we need to go to eat?"

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** [Inaudible 00:18:09] They got a crew and that, to me, is so much fun. When you go to Baton Rouge, and you're not from Baton Rouge.

**Annie:** Right.

**Kirk:** And we get to go down there and eat some really good Cajun food it's just a tremendous experience, and it just kind of plays to the whole weekend. The tailgating, the people, and the game, of course is a big

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part of it, but there's so much more to college football than just the four quarters or 60 minutes of the football game. And if you're not, if you're listening and you've never been, just take it from Annie and I, go out and watch and go in for a weekend somewhere and enjoy it. It's a great time.

**Annie:** I got to go to Notre Dame, Georgia at Notre Dame a couple of years ago. And to this day, that's probably my favorite football game I ever went to. Because I've never been, even the environment at Notre Dame is so much grander than any of the SEC games. I mean, the way everybody does push-ups on top of each other, and the crowd is nuts from start to finish. You just went like, "Man this is special."

**Kirk:** Yeah, yeah. And I love going there because growing up, it's different from Nashville to Ohio. The Catholic high schools in Ohio are intense, when it comes to high school football. And a lot of those kids go off, and if they're good with the academic side of it, they'll go over to South Bend and do their academics.

**Annie:** Oh sure.

**Kirk:** If you go to a high school football game in Ohio, on a Friday night, there's a real sense of community with high school football. It's a huge deal, you had big crowds. When you go to Notre Dame it feels like a high school football game. Because grandma and grandpa are here and mom and dad are here and they all probably either went to Notre Dame or they've been lifelong Notre Dame fans. Now it's my turn to go to Notre Dame, like it's just such a family atmosphere.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:** And then they love their team. Like you said, there's a lot of traditions that are really cool and that's just one example. You go all over the country and you see these different ways that people celebrate this sport and have fun with it.

**Annie:** What did you learn about like, humanity after 2020, when football continued on, and we still like... How was last year inspiring to you or interesting to you watching football happen during 2020?

**Kirk:** Well, it was heroic. I was out there on the road every week. I felt the same stuff to a lesser degree, I had to perform only in a broadcast

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booth and call the game in front of, many times, empty stadiums. Which was a very bizarre situation when you're used to 80,000, 100,000 people going crazy and just nothing. There was just very, very small crowds, if any at all.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:** And to be a player, and I don't know if fans understood during the COVID football season last year. These players often to avoid contact tracing and to avoid catching the virus, they would stay in their apartment, a lot of times in their own apartment. They would go to the football facility, they would be isolated for the most part at the facility. Because you don't want to get somebody tested positive, you don't want to get dinged for contact tracing. They would practice and then they would come back in their apartment.

And it got to the point where we got through the season, somehow miraculously. And I was preparing for the Ohio State/Alabama National Championship, which is in early January. Season starts in August, so August, September, October, November, December, five months. And I was talking to the Ohio State Captain, me and Chris Fowler, as we were getting ready for the call, and we were on a Zoom like you and I are. And he and I have spent a lot of time with this player, because every time we do an Ohio State game, he's one of the guys that we talk to, and his name was Josh Meyers.

And he took his phone about halfway through and he's like, "I'm just ready for this game to be over. I mean, I want to win, it's my last game." But he's like, and he pulled his phone and he kind of went around, it was just four white walls. And he goes, "I'm just tired of being in this room." He's like, "I want to see my family. I want to just go hug my mom and dad."

And I was just like, "Wow, that was so powerful." For him to just... and it's almost like he's been in isolation, for those five months. So it took much more of a toll on players playing college football, and coaches, than I think your average person probably would imagine.

**Annie:** Yeah. It was, and I mean, the upheaval racially last year.

**Kirk:** Oh, yeah.

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**Annie:** I mean, listen, I need to tell you friend to friend, that moment of you on TV after that long segment. Where you kind of express your emotions around what had been going on. I mean, I'm sure you know this, but like, people texted each other about that. Everybody said, "Did you just see Kirk Herbstreit, and what he said?" And it just mattered a lot. So I wanted you to know that that conversation mattered a ton.

**Kirk:** I appreciate that. You know, it's one of those things when you don't even, I'm not talented enough, I sound like the vocal 10 percenters out there on social media, like, "Yeah, yeah." Just coming out and I'm like, "Well, why?" That's where we are though, right?

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:** I mean, I was just expressing empathy.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Kirk:** I was just expressing, "We got to do better." Right? Let's be kind to each other no matter what. And it's amazing how volatile some people are right now. And we've never been more divided as a country in my lifetime. I can't remember, there might be certain issues that divide people, but I'm talking about you turn on the TV. I never really watch the news, and of course, during the global pandemic, you had to tune into the news.

It was almost like we lived in different countries. Like you watch CNN and it's like, "Whoa!" And then you turn over to Fox, "Whoa!" And I'm just like, "I grew up with Walter Cronkite and Peter Jennings." And I'm like, "Where's the person, where they just tell you the news."

**Annie:** Right.

**Kirk:** Like if you, by the way, if you know who that person is, can you shoot me a text? Like I just cannot find, without strong opinions or smart-alec takes or, how about just let me know what's going on and be in the middle. Instead of like, way over here or way over there, and all that's doing is continuing to divide the country. So I didn't think I was going to do what I did.

As a white male at that time, I thought the best thing is to be quiet and just observe and listen, and just maybe offer support if you can. But I

just didn't feel like it was my time to talk. And then when I watched that feature, and I watched Maria Taylor, who was involved with it, interviewing these guys. And I talked with David Shaw, who's an African American head coach at Stanford the day before, and told him about our segment.

And he's like, "Don't be afraid to be brave. You got to perch here in college football, and don't be afraid to use your voice." And I was like, "Man, I just don't know, I just don't know if that's the right thing to do."

And when I started my comment, I was just going to play it safe. And then I read a quote which he gave me. And then I was just like, "Oh, no," I could feel my emotions bubbling, I was like, "Oh, no, here I go." And I just said, whatever I said, from my heart.

And I never thought I'd be on TV being emotional like that. But I think it just kind of speaks volumes for where we were at that time, in society, and not just in sport, but the country. I just hate to see us so divided, it's terrible.

**Annie:** How does sports help bring communities together? Where do you see plugging your boys into sports, yourself into sports, kind of helping you understand other families, and other races, other socio-economic classes? How does sports help with that?

**Kirk:** I think it helps because we don't see color. We see scarlet and gray or red and black, or whatever your colors are is what we see. And we are out at tailgates, and we're high-fiving people we don't know about the game.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** We're walking out of a stadium and we're hugging a person we don't even know.

**Annie:** I mean, I yell, "Go Dawgs," any chance I get to yell "Go Dawgs" at someone who has one of our things on.

**Kirk:** But that's what I'm saying. Like you can be in South Bend, Notre Dame, and you're walking with your friends. And all of a sudden you see somebody come in who's a Georgia fan. Whether it's a man or a



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woman or Black fan or a White fan or Hispanic or Asian, you're just like you see black and red, and you're just like, "Whats up! Where do we go, Bulldogs?" That's what sports bring right there. A common bond, where we're all excited, and we're all fired up, and we love our team and then we win together or we lose together. And it's just so much fun to be a part of it. And I think that's what sports do in general, and all those walls are knocked down.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** All those walls are knocked down, and we all have one goal in mind, and that's to cheer on our team and have fun doing it.

**Annie:** It's beautiful. It was, and I think the other thing you taught me last fall in that segment, was the power of earning trust for a long time. Because many of us have been friends with you through our TV for 15 years, 20 years, right?

**Kirk:** And 25.

**Annie:** Yeah, 25, there you go. And so, because I already believed you, I could hear you last fall.

**Kirk:** Oh, that's cool.

**Annie:** Do you know what I mean?

**Kirk:** Yeah, I appreciate that.

**Annie:** I think that mattered a lot. I think the amount of time you've put in to telling us the truth about sports made me believe you when you told me the truth about your experience and your response to the racial inequity, and problems in the country.

**Kirk:** Yeah, I appreciate you saying that, that's cool to hear. Because you just never know when you, it's like this book. When you get vulnerable you don't know how it's going to be received because it's not common.

**Annie:** Right.

**Kirk:** It's not common for people to open up their heart.

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**Annie:**        Yeah.

**Kirk:**        And so how people respond to that it's going to be different. Like I told you, I had some people on social media calling me a Marxist, and I'm like, I haven't been to a high school history class. I'm like I had to look up, I googled is that a bad thing or is that a compliment? I don't know what it is. And I'm like, "Man, really? Because I said what I said?" That just blew me away that people... But again, I've learned you don't take things personally. This is the world that we live in and it is a cynical world. There are people that are just mad to be mad.

**Annie:**        Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:**        And I think it's very safe, if you live in the public eye just not to take things personally. And when you open up like that, you're going to have that lunatic friend who is going to tap on your shoulder a little bit, and you've got to be ready to endure that.

**Annie:**        So even thinking about your book *Out of The Pocket*, I mean, it's been out for a week now. What has it been like hearing people respond to your vulnerability? Because I was very impressed with how deeply you told stories in this book.

**Kirk:**        Honestly, I've been like pleasantly blown away. Marty Smith wrote a book about his dad, and just growing up and he did that a year or two ago. And he warned me in a good way, he said, "You're going to be blown away by how many people you don't know reach out to you, and thank you, and tell you, 'Man I can relate to this story' or 'I can relate to that story.'"

He's like "You're going to help so many people with their own emotions and their own feelings." And I didn't really understand what he was saying. And here we are five or six days since the book came out, and I kind of am feeling that. I've never really done something like this and you even wonder how it'll be received.

And every single message that I've gotten up to this point has been encouraging and appreciative. And really, at the end of the day, the reason I decided to be vulnerable and open up and talk about my story, and the dysfunction and stuff that I was around as a kid. Is because maybe there are other people that went through that or maybe as an adult someone's going through that story right now.

**Annie:**        Yeah.

**Kirk:**        And they're going through a divorce, and they're worried about how their kids are going to respond or whatever it might be. Maybe somebody has a kid who's like me, painfully shy, and to a point where you're worried about them, they're so shy, that was me, and so things like that.

I went and saw a sports psychologist when it wasn't cool. Back in 1990, '91, to see a psychologist, it's still not really cool to tell people you see a psychologist. And here I was looking over my shoulder, trying to cope with being quote-unquote, "Bust my first two or three years at Ohio State and letting my dream of playing at Ohio State evaporate and I needed that person to talk to."

So there's a lot of stuff that you open up about, and then when you get these messages from people. Like I said, it's just the whole reason I decided to do it. And the whole reason I wanted to show this other side of me.

People see me sitting next to Lee Corso, for as long as however you can remember. In a tie, in a sport coat or a suit. And it's like, "Oh, man, look at that guy, he's got it all figured out." And it's like, "No, no, no, I've been through some stuff, and here's what I've been through." So it just, hopefully people can relate, that's all.

**Annie:**        Will you tell the story about deciding between the medical sales job and taking the, was it the ESPN job or was that the... no it was the radio?

**Kirk:**        Yeah.

**Annie:**        Yeah. Will, you tell that because I think so many of our friends listening think what you said, that we see you in a suit, and we see you successful. And no one knows that you made this one choice to do something that you love that shaped your whole life?

**Kirk:**        Yeah, for sure. I feel like people get forks in the road in life, and we don't really know the answer until we go make a left or a right.

**Annie:**        That's right.

**Kirk:** And in my case, I was a business major at Ohio State, a marketing major and I got out of school in June. Well, before June, in like April, May, and June, I was doing some interviews with pharmaceutical sales, medical sales, a company called Worthington Industries.

I was kind of fine following the conventional path. This is what you're supposed to do, I wasn't going to go play in the NFL, I was a business major. Ohio State helped me out with some interviews, I was doing pretty well. Got a second, and a third interview to the point where a couple of the companies offered me a job.

While in the middle of that, I floated the idea to a local AM radio station. "I'd love to help you out if you ever needed a guy to be on the radio." And they got back to me around like July, and I had already graduated, I was ready to accept one of these other jobs.

And I told the radio station they said "Hey, we would love to bring you in. But you can't do another job and do this job. We're going to pay you \$12,000 no benefits, really no future. But we'd like to give it a try and do it for a year and see how it goes." Well, then I told the business opportunities, they said you can't do radio. So basically, I had to make a choice, one or the other. Every person I talked to parents, friends, everybody told me to take the business opportunity.

**Annie:** Sure.

**Kirk:** And stability and a future. Nobody told me to take that radio and I was ready to do that. And then I just kept thinking over and over, and over, and I said, "You know what, I just, I want to follow my passion. I want to follow something I love to do."

I wasn't really worried I didn't come from any money. \$12,000 sounded like plenty of money to me. So I just decided I'm going to go do this radio show having no idea what it might lead to. And I passed on the more lucrative business opportunities and I took a chance in doing this radio show and I did it for about a year.

And I was making \$12,000, living in an apartment with two of my buddies, and that was kind of how I got my foot in the door, and things changed drastically for me. Another door opened up, and then another

door opened up, and a couple years later, which is moving pretty quickly, I was at ESPN and I've been there now for 26 years.

**[00:35:03]**    <Music>

**Annie:**        Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, Chime. We are real careful about how we use the word should around here, you know this. But here is the thing that we can all agree should not happen, your online checking account should not cost you money.

So luckily Chime is here for us. Chime is an award-winning app and debit card that has no overdraft fees, foreign transaction fees, monthly service fees or transfer fees. They have over 60,000 fee-free, in-network ATMs, that's more than the top-three national banks combined, y'all.

And they are at locations we're all popping into all the time like Walgreens, 7-Eleven, they have Coke slushies, a CVS and more everywhere, they're very convenient. You can also send money to anyone even if they aren't on Chime, no fees for you or cash out fees for them. It's time to say goodbye to hidden fees. Join the millions of Americans already loving Chime.

Sign up takes only two minutes and doesn't affect your credit score at all. So get started today at [chime.com/thatsoundsfun](https://chime.com/thatsoundsfun). That's [chime.com/thatsoundsfun](https://chime.com/thatsoundsfun). Banking services provided by and debit card issued by the Bancorp Bank or Stride Bank, N.A. members FDIC. Out of network ATM withdrawal fees apply except at MoneyPass ATM, and at 7-Eleven location, and any Allpoint or Visa Plus Alliance ATM. Other fees such as third-party and cash deposit fees may apply. And now back to our conversations with Kirk Herbstreit.

**[00:36:33]**    <Music>

**Annie:**        Throughout the book, you kind of tell these stories of leaps of faith, of that kind of moment. And even with Allie, you talk about that. Like she called you and said, "Come to this bar," and you don't ever do that kind of stuff.

**Kirk:**         No.

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**Annie:** And so I just thought it was so interesting, as I was reading it, Kirk. I was thinking, "He just like repeatedly does the leap of faith." Like is it harder than it seems?

**Kirk:** Yeah, well, I talk to a lot of people at this stage in my life. A lot of people will call me and ask for advice on different things.

**Annie:** Sure.

**Kirk:** These are coaches, these are just people that are they got a decision; "Do I take this job? What do you think? I just wanted to talk to you about it." And my thing is with that, what I've learned is I love to weigh the pros and the cons. Even get a piece of paper and write down the pros and the cons of a big decision that you have to make.

And I like to sit there and really like live in it for a week and or however much time you might have, few days. And look at it on this side and look at it this side, and then at the end of the day, I'm very big on my gut. Like, "What does my gut say?"

And so after I weigh all the options, even pray on it, you think about it, what's inside your gut? And I follow my gut. So I'm just, and once I follow my gut I never look back.

**Annie:** That's right. Once you do, it's like, "We're going."

**Kirk:** Yep, I'm doing it. I'm not going, "Well, I could have done." Nope, I'm just, I'm going and I trust my gut. And I don't know, I've done that and I've had a lot of success doing that. And that's why I want to try to encourage people to try to follow that instinct, so that inner voice that sometimes is talking to you.

**Annie:** We send an email on Fridays to a bunch of people. It's called the AFD Week in Review. And we tell them who we're interviewing the next week so they can ask questions. And so in our set of questions that came in for you, I mean, there's probably four of them that I would love for you to talk about that kind of like you said you pray about decisions. Where does your faith line up with your job?" Like how have you seen your faith intersect with being a sports broadcaster, with being a dad, with being a husband? Like, how does that play in?

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**Kirk:** It's huge, I mean, I think it's everything you do. It's every aspect of your life. I think there are better seasons than others. Like I find when I'm praying and meeting with my men's group on Zoom these days, on Thursday mornings. And we're going over Scripture together and we're pouring out what's going on in our lives.

Like when I'm doing that, I don't know, I just feel like I'm at peace with every aspect of my life, whether it's being a dad, being a husband, being a friend, doing my job.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:** And I'm just really big on trying to be a light in a really kind of fallen world. You've ever meet these people that when you talk to them, it's almost like there's something coming out of their eyes. Like it's just a peace that they have, that it's like they have the answers to things. And they're not trying to brag about it, it's just a joy. You know what I mean?

And I've always been so impressed when I meet people like that, that are genuine. They're not trying to impress anybody, they're not wearing certain clothes to impress people or driving a certain car. It's just like it's coming out of their aura, it's just them.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** And I've just always tried to pattern myself off of that. And like I said, there are moments that are better days than others. But I feel like just walking by strangers and trying to be upbeat, and joyful and happy, can have an impact. And so why not, I don't know, why not try to be that guy or girl? As opposed to been cynical or negative or letting this world we live in, which again, it hits us all sometimes, but just overcome you.

So I think by having faith it allows you to endure some of the moments that we're in, and try to be a light in other people's life. And I always have tried to do that. And I'll always try to continue to be that and just try to be a positive example.

**Annie:** I feel like, the longer I know God, the more I feel like I can trust my gut too. I feel like the older I get, I kind of go like, "Hey, you've

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checked into this for a while now. You're a little more reliable than you were at 20."

**Kirk:** Yeah. Not a question, yeah.

**Annie:** One of the things you do beautifully in the book, Kirk, is you give so much space to other people who've mattered to you. Like Coach Corso, your dad, I mean, your teammates. I mean, you just go through listing all these teammates. Tell me why? Tell me why you spent so much of your book talking about other people?

**Kirk:** Just because I don't think any of us are where we are without them. I mean, and I feel like, for me, I don't know how you feel? But the older generation, I feel like I love to listen to what they have to say, because they've been through more than we have, they have wisdom.

And I feel like we live in a generation of this internet era of phones, and things are moving fast. And if it doesn't come within 15 seconds I'm on to the next thing. And I don't know, I think sometimes I just like to be a little bit slower. And I like to sit down and have a conversation.

I like to listen to what people have to say and whether it's your dad or a guy like Lee Corso, who has had a big impact on me or my uncle Rick, I don't know, I just find that there's real value in that. And so I'm not standing where I'm standing today, my career, without all these people that helped me. And I think that writing this book, it was a nice way for me to kind of recognize a lot of people that helped me along the way, and some people I had to overcome. There were coaches in my life-

**Annie:** Oh my gosh! Those coaches from Ohio State, you like said their real names and everything, Kirk Herbstreit, I couldn't believe it. I wrote the guy's name down because I was like, "He is ripping this guy."

**Kirk:** I did, and I haven't spoken with him, I'm sure he's going to hear it. And even-

**Annie:** Yeah, he's going to hear.

**Kirk:** Yeah. Yeah. And I even talk about Brent Musburger, I was really honest about Brent. I mean, I grew up watching Brent. Brent was, my gosh, when they told me I was going to work with him in 2006 I was



just flabbergasted that I was going to work with him, and then it became kind of challenging as I went.

And it was interesting to work with one guy in Lee Corso at that same age, and another guy in Brent Musburger. And one of them was hugging me from day one, and another one was like, some days he was okay and other days he wasn't. And I was trying, I mean, I had my hat in my hand. I was very respectful. I was very like, "You're Brent Musburger, oh my gosh, I can't believe..." It wasn't like I was cocky or it wasn't like I was like, "There's a new sheriff in town." I was nothing like that, I was the opposite. And yet it's just, I don't know, it just wasn't there.

So we worked together fine on the air. I think if anybody ever listened to us call a game it was fine, but there wasn't that, just there wasn't that. And so in life, all of us go through relationships and some, man, it's just a game changer in a positive way. And then there's others that you got to try to kind of navigate, and endure, and hold on, and figure out, and make the best of it. And the people that I recognize that they just made a huge difference in my life like a guy named Paul Spaniak, called "The Moose."

He was a guy at Channel 10, that was teaching me how to do TV when I didn't have any TV experience. And I'd still to this day, really have never read teleprompter in my life, except on that Sunday Night Weekend Wrap Show, I had to learn how to read teleprompter. And I was reading it like that when I first started and he just kept encouraging me and helping me.

Terry Smith was the voice of the Buckeyes, he was my first mentor in the business. So, I don't know, I just felt that it was really cool to be able to like, "Hey, guys, look, I'm here now but I didn't forget you. Thanks for helping me out along the way." I thought that was the important thing to do.

**Annie:** Yeah, it's so fun. We share Samantha Ponder. And so I texted Sam last night, and I was like, "Tell me what I don't know about Kirk Herbstreit?" And she sent back four paragraphs about how good you have been to her, and you holding scout and how much you mean to her family. She's like, "He'll always be a brother to me." I mean, it was like-

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**Kirk:**            Yeah, that's cool.

**Annie:**            ...it was really cool.

**Kirk:**            I loved working with Sam, Sam was awesome. She's so talented, so natural as far as on camera. And when she left, I mean, it was a given in her role that she was going to go on to bigger and better things. But she was like, funny you'd say big brother, to me, she was like a little sister. She reminded me of that character, Denzel Washington movie.

**Annie:**            Oh, *Remember the Titans*?

**Kirk:**            Not the Titans, *The Daughter*.

**Annie:**            Yeah. Yeah.

**Kirk:**            That is Sam Ponder, like that is-

**Annie:**            Totally. You're exactly right. That's exactly right.

**Kirk:**            We're all like, she is like, "What are we doing? Why are we going forward all this stuff, I mean what's going on?" Like she's all about it and she knows what's going on she's not faking it.

**Annie:**            Yeah.

**Kirk:**            She is all in. She is all in.

**Annie:**            Here's the other person I'd love for you to talk about, will you talk about Coach Richt? Because our crowd just heard him, he just came on the show. Will you talk about what you've seen in him as a coach?

**Kirk:**            How can you not love him? I knew him as an offensive coordinator when I first was in the business at Florida State and watched them. When I first came into the national TV on GameDay, Florida State was Alabama. I mean, that Bobby Bowden had them rolling every year.

I was there in '96, '97, '98, '99, and they either were in the national championship winning it or they were just losing in the championship. So they were an elite program, and he was the offensive coordinator. And just from day one, another guy that has strong faith. I don't know, I just always really enjoyed my time being around him and his

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personality. He was always very encouraging to me, even when I was really young. And then he became the Georgia Head Coach and obviously had a great run in Athens.

**Annie:**        Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:**        And then he went to Miami, and I've just always loved being around him. Love listening to him talk football. David Pollock, who's a buddy and a former Georgia Bulldog, talks about he's like, "You don't realize Coach Richt's got a competitive side to him. We used to play racquetball or whatever." He seems like an all-shucks kind of guy. He was like, "But, man, you don't want to get sideways with him." And I was like, "Wow, really? I think I'd never seen that side of him, I'm glad to hear it." Obviously, with all the success he's had, he has to have that kind of competitive spirit.

**Annie:**        Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:**        But, couple of weeks ago, when Bobby Bowden passed, I went down to Tallahassee for the ceremony. They had two or three ceremonies but on Saturday, it was more of a celebration.

**Annie:**        Mh-hmm.

**Kirk:**        And I just went down to pay my respects because I was so fond of him. And the speakers that day were Charlie Ward, who won a Heisman Forum. Warrick Dunn, who was a superstar-

**Annie:**        Oh, yeah, I remember him from Falcons days. Loved him.

**Kirk:**        Yeah, and Derrick Brooks, who was a Hall of Fame player. And to hear them all speak, none of them talked about football. They all talked about how he was there for them as a father figure, Coach Bowden, and how he brought them all to God.

And then Mark Richt got up to speak, and he was so impressive. And he's speaking so softly, and you're on the edge of your seat listening to every word that he said. And he told some incredible stories about how he was kind of lost. He was caught up in the coaching profession and he said, being around Bobby Bowden, watching how he acted every day, he's like, "Whatever he has, I want that."

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And he said, he walked into his office one day, and he's like, "I need Christ. I'm falling, I'm broken, and I need what you're talking about." And he said, Bobby Bowden literally brought him to that relationship and changed his life. From that day he walked in and knocked on his door, as an assistant coach, he said, changed his life from that day moving forward. And he was very emotional talking about Bobby Bowden, and how he impacted him in such a positive way. But, yeah, Mark Richt's one of the all-timers, great man.

**Annie:** Yeah, I feel like, not to make you feel weird, but between you and him, I feel like this fall I'm kind of getting my Mount Rushmore of college football on the podcast. I don't know what else to ask for. I feel like I've done it, I've done it. Is there anything we didn't say about the book that you want to make sure we say?

**Kirk:** No, no. Like I said, I think you touched on all of it. It's more, it's not just a football book or a story about broadcasting. It's really more about people who go through some tough times in life. And just how you evolve and learn to kind of get knocked down and get back up.

I really feel as parents, sometimes we're guilty, myself included, with four boys, of being a snowplow parent, meaning you're trying to prevent your kids from going through failures.

**Annie:** Sure.

**Kirk:** You're trying to prevent your kids from having that bad teacher in third grade. It's not your kid's fault there's a bad teacher. We got to get them out of there and get them over this teacher or he's on a team where he's not playing as much as you'd hoped. So we're going to get them off of that team and go get him on that team.

I just feel like, as hard as it is, and it's been hard for me to watch our kids fail, they need to fail. They need to go through tough times. And it's hard today, with social media, there's these apps and kids can pull it up. And Snapchat, and they can see "Oh, gosh, 10 of my friends are over at my friend's house and I didn't get invited." Now that messed up-

**Annie:** It still happens to me, Kirk. Does it happen to you too? I'm like, I'll see pictures and be like, "Oh, man."

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**Kirk:**            Yeah, yeah. But when-

**Annie:**            When you're a kid, yeah.

**Kirk:**            ... you're nine, 10, 11, 12-years old I mean, it's painful. And so these parents are proactively trying to not let kids be left out. And my point is, it's okay to let them fail. It's okay to let them not come through the way you had hoped or they had hoped, and then have a conversation about it.

Again, I'm not acting like I have all the answers at all. I'm just saying for a guy that failed a lot, went through a lot. I look back at those failures, I look back at those tough times, and I have gratitude and I'm thankful that I went through those times. And I worry about our kids, mine included, are we letting them fall down enough? Are we letting them make mistakes enough?

Because they need those moments to really grow and develop into becoming, having core values of perseverance and work ethic, and what it takes to be successful. And sometimes I think we miss the mark on that.

**Annie:**            Yeah, I mean, the only way you grow resilience is by failing.

**Kirk:**            Yeah.

**Annie:**            And so we want everybody to be resilient but we don't want them to hurt. I want to be resilient but I don't want to hurt.

**Kirk:**            Right. It's a catch 22, because there's nothing worse than watching your kid hurt.

**Annie:**            Oh, I would imagine.

**Kirk:**            That's really tough, but sometimes it's required. But that's it. Now, I appreciate you having me and we will try our best on September 4th in Charlotte, try and get it done-

**Annie:**            We're going to really have a conversation afterwards if this doesn't go well, Kirk Herbstreit. We're going to have a deep conversation.

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**Kirk:** I will call you for; a "Congratulations," "you're welcome" or I'll be like, "I'm sorry. I apologize."

**Annie:** That's right. Let me ask you our final question, we always ask everybody, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you?

**Kirk:** Anytime I go on a, my one vice for a guy that didn't grow up with money and now has a little bit of money. My one vice is vacationing with my family.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** And probably my most fun is snow-skiing, whether it's Deer Valley or Telluride or Beaver Creek. I love to be out in the mountains, I love to be, whether it's the summer or the winter. I could see me, maybe my next chapter in life, being somewhere out there, because there's something about being out West I just love, so that sounds fun to me.

**Annie:** Y'all can't leave Nashville yet, we just got Julio Jones.

**Kirk:** I know.

**Annie:** Things are just turning right for us...Titans fans.

**Kirk:** I know, y'all are about to get serious-

**Annie:** I know you got to stick around long enough to see what Julio does for us. Our pastor a couple weeks ago was saying, "Thanks to God for this, thanks God for this." And he just said, "And thanks to Julio for coming." I was like, "You cannot say that, Kevin Queen."

**Kirk:** That's hilarious. That's hilarious. When they got a chance-

**Annie:** I know.

**Kirk:** They got a chance to have a great, the Dawgs, and the Titans, you got a chance to have a fun year.

**Annie:** I'm a Falcons girl at heart but I'm working on trying to be a Titans girl. Because I've been here for 13 years, I should transition over at some point. Thanks again for doing this. I'm really grateful. You've been a

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good voice in my life and it's great to meet you, so thanks for doing this.

**Kirk:** All right. Thanks very much. Have a great week. Thanks for having me.

**Annie:** Thanks.

**[00:54:32]** <Music>

**Annie:** Oh you guys, isn't he so cool? I just like this week. Y'all know, do you hear it in my voice? This week is so cool to me, to get to talk to Coach Mark Richt and Kirk Herbstreit in the same week, oh, I love this conversation, what a good dude.

Hey, be sure to pick up a copy of *Out of the Pocket*, Kirk's new book, I think you're really going to love it. I read the whole thing and really enjoyed it. And make sure you're following him on social media, tell him thanks so much for being on the show. And for all my Clemson fans out there, I mean, I hope he is not lucky for you. I hope he's lucky for my Georgia Bulldogs this weekend.

If you need anything else for me you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find, Annie F. Downs on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), all the places you may need me, that is how you can find me, wearing my red and black. And I think that's it from me today, friends go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, I will do the same. Cheer for my Dawgs this weekend. Have a great holiday weekend if you are in the U.S., and we'll see you back here on Monday, on Labor Day, with the show with my friend Lisa Whittle. We'll see y'all then. "Go Dawg, Sic 'Em."

**[00:55:42]** <Music>