

AUGSBURG COLLEGE CHURCH YOUTH LEAGUE DEVOTIONS 2010

**Collected thoughts for athletes on THE BEST OF SPORT AND THE BEST OF LIFE
by Augsburg College Pastor Dave Wold**

January 3-9

Week One: Thoughts on 'Being a Team'

The farmer was taken to court by the village baker based on the baker's suspicion that he was being cheated on the purchase of a pound of butter. When the judge asked the farmer how he weighed the butter, he answered, "Because the baker is so kind as to buy butter from me, I buy bread from him. For my scale, I use the baker's one pound of bread to weigh my one pound of butter on the balance scale. If the butter is less than a pound, the bread must be less than a pound also."

The lesson from this story is that we cannot expect more from someone than we are willing to give. In playing on a team, we can also say that we cannot expect someone's trust more than we are willing to trust our teammates.

A familiar saying is that 'You may be only one person in the world. But you may also be the world to one person.' The legendary former coach at UCLA who won 10 NCAA Basketball Championships said, "A game not played for others is not a game. A life not lived for others is not a life."

In Romans 12: 4, 9-13, the Apostle Paul writes: "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer".

Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us the opportunity and the gifts to play today. Allow us to remember that we are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. May we play this game not just for ourselves but recognizing that we are a team and we can play this game for others as well. In your Holy Name we pray. AMEN

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January 10-16

Week two: More thoughts on 'Being a Team'

In the days when ice cream sundaes cost much less than today, a 10 year-old boy entered a restaurant and sat at a table. "How much is an ice cream sundae?" he asked. "Fifty cents", the waitress answered sharply. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it. "Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?" he inquired. By now, more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient. "Thirty five cents", she rudely replied. The little boy again counted his coins. "I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put his bill on the table and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and left. When the waitress came back, she began to cry as she wiped down the table. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies. He chose to not order the sundae so he could have enough money left over to leave a tip for the waitress.

When you can see the best in others, you treat them with God's grace and you can often change their world. As we play as a team, we might recognize that it is not about being better than other teammates and treating them rudely, it is about each one trying to be a better player and person than we used to be. This allows us to treat our teammates recognizing the unconditional love and grace God has given to each one of us. As we play in this love and grace, we might try to look for the best in each other.

Let us run with endurance (and grace) the race that is set before us. Hebrews 12: 1

Prayer: Thank you, God, for another opportunity to play on a team today. Allow us to look for the best in each other and to treat each other with the grace that we have experienced from you. In Your Holy Name we pray. AMEN

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January 17-23

Week three: Thoughts for athletes on Opportunities

A classic story involves a king who placed a boulder on a roadway. He then hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the wealthiest merchants came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the king for not keeping the roads clear, but none did anything about getting the stone out of the way.

A very poor peasant then came along carrying a load of vegetables. As he approached the boulder, the peasant laid down his vegetables and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded. After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the king indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The peasant learned what many of us never understand. Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our life.

Former Green Bay Packer All Pro (and minister) Reggie White once said, “God places the heaviest burden on those who can carry its weight.” We often find opportunities with the heaviest burdens.

I often think of the saying, ‘Don’t pray for lighter burdens, but for a stronger back’.

In I Chronicles 28:20, we are reminded to ‘Be strong and of good courage. Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God will be with you.’ May all participants be blessed today with Godly strength and courage.

Prayer: We thank you, O God, for the opportunities to learn when obstacles are placed in our way and when we have to carry heavy burdens. Give us strong backs and the strength and courage that can only come from you. In Your Holy Name we pray. AMEN

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January 24-30

Week Four: Thoughts for athletes on OPPORTUNITY IS NOWHERE

The sign that reads OPPORTUNITY IS NOWHERE can be read in two different ways. The first is: OPPORTUNITY IS NO WHERE. The second is: OPPORTUNITY IS NOW HERE. Thomas Edison is said to have had hundreds of failures before he finally figured out how to illuminate a light bulb. He then said, "Opportunity is missed by most because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. If we did the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves!"

Heisman Trophy winner and Florida quarterback Tim Tebow has 'Philippians 4:13' printed in white on his black eye patches, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". In an article in the St. Petersburg Times about him, it stated that it is not for show but it is a way to show what he's about, what he believes, how he lives. It is how Tebow can walk the very fine line of always publicly professing his faith, yet somehow never offending. His coach, Urban Meyer, said, "Tim doesn't fear anything".

The Apostle Paul has written earlier Philippians 4:6 -7, "Do not be anxious...but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

May you astound yourselves with opportunities and strength as God gives you a peace that transcends all understanding!

Prayer: Thank you, Gracious God, for the OPPORTUNITY THAT IS NOW HERE as we play together today. Allow us to dedicate our game and our lives to you as we ask for your peace that transcends all understanding and that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN

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January 31-February 6

Week five: Thoughts on playing a game and on living with ‘no regrets’

Mike Flynt returned to play college football at the age of 59. He said that his greatest regret in life was getting kicked off the team. He said that even though he had worked so many years trying to put it behind him, he could never forget it. As he shared this at a college reunion, he was encouraged to go back and give it another try by his former teammates. That then led to him walking back on and making the team as a linebacker.

He said, “I think that people need to believe in themselves and not be afraid of failure. I think many young people are taught to be normal and not to step out and try things. They need to understand that failure is not who you are. Failure is something that happens to you. You have to step out and try. You have to believe in yourself. You have to try and you have to trust God.”

It is often said that “one cannot measure the heart of a champion”. James Michener said, “Character consists of what you do on the third and fourth try”. One cannot burn out unless they are on fire in the first place.

Jesus reminds us that ‘For God all things are possible’. Mark 10:27

May we all play today with character with a strong trust in God. May we discover things about ourselves and others as we ‘step out and try’ to be better players and better citizens.

Prayer: O God of possibilities, allow us today to place our trust more and more in You. Allow us to step out and try things as team members and citizens that would give glory and honor to you. In Your Holy Name we pray. AMEN

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February 7-13

**Week six: Thoughts on playing a game as a child of God with others who are also
children of God**

A conscientious student had breezed through the questions on a pop quiz until the last one: ‘What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?’ The student thought this must be a joke, even though he had seen the cleaning woman many times. He certainly could describe her as tall, dark haired and in her 50’s, but how could he be expected to know her name. For this reason, he handed in his paper leaving the last answer blank. Just before the class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward the quiz grade.

“Absolutely”, said the professor. “In your careers, you will meet many people. For most people, a name is their most important possession. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say ‘hello’.”

Whether in sports or in life, it can be said that ‘quitting is only a short cut to losing’. If someone says, “I just don’t remember names”, they have decided to quit remembering names. Maya Angelou has said, “I am sobered to realize that I am a child of God. I am even more sobered to realize that everyone else is also!”

May you play today recognizing that you are a child of God. May you also play today recognizing that everyone else is also!”

Prayer: O Loving God, help us to look at each other in different ways today as we discover the best of sport and the best of life. May we understand how you have gifted each of us individually as your special children. In Your Holy Name we pray. AMEN

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February 14-20

Week Seven: Thoughts on playing a game 'with class' in the Spirit of God

When watching one of the top high school teams in the United States playing on television, the announcers were hesitant about giving unconditional praise to the team and the coaches. Out of curiosity, I searched the internet to find in newspaper articles that this football program operated with 'some questions of ethics'. They had achieved a great deal in terms of wins and losses, but they had lost the respect of opponents, fans and community members.

A quote by legendary, ten time NCAA champion coach John Wooden was mentioned in another devotion this year, "A game not played for others is not a game. A life not lived for others is not a life." He also has said, "You cannot live a perfect day without doing something for someone who will never be able to repay you."

The Apostle Paul wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22-25)

Prayer: O God, may we play today in the Spirit of God remembering that this game as well as life is not meant only for ourselves but for others. In your Holy Name we pray. AMEN

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February 21-27

Week eight: Thoughts on playing a game ‘with class, endurance, character and hope’

In a game after an auto accident where one player was killed and others were injured, an opposing team’s running back was on his way to a touchdown late in the game. With his team holding a comfortable lead, this player ran to the 2 yard line and then came back to kneel on the 5 yard line rather than add to the score. He said, “Before the game, we as a team talked about being classy. I just want to thank my teammates for not only being classy all night, but pushing me to be classy as well”.

The legendary University of Texas football coach, Darrell Royal said, “Football doesn’t build character. It eliminates the weak ones”. A familiar saying is that ‘people are like stained glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within’.

The Apostle Paul writes, “Suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”. Romans 5:3-5

Prayer: O God, may we discover the best in sport in today’s game. May we play with Godly class, endurance, character and a hope that does not disappoint. In Your Holy Name we play. AMEN