

The BIG Game of Life

According to Forrest Gump's mama, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get."

This evening, there is going to be a special on FOX television featuring never-before seen, very expensive, highly anticipated programming that will be discussed and debated nationwide around water coolers tomorrow. Of course I'm talking about the nationwide of brand new television commercials. In between commercials, a football game will be played.

- Southern humorist Lewis Grizzard said, "The game of life is a lot like football. You have to tackle your problems, block your fears, and score your points when you get the opportunity."
- The legendary coach, Vince Lombardi, said: "Football is like life, it requires perseverance, self-denial, hard work sacrifice, dedication and respect for authority."
- Coach Duffy Daugherty said, "Football is not a contact sport, it's a collision sport. Dancing is a contact sport."
- Ladies, you might prefer the late Erma Bombeck's observation on football. She said, "If a man watches three football games in a row, he should be declared legally dead."
- Phyllis Diller said: "The reason women don't play football is because 11 of them would never wear the same outfit in public."

American style football didn't come into its own until about the time of the Civil War. It began as a variation on rugby and its cousin soccer among the Ivy League schools. If football had existed in bible times, Paul would probably have been a fan because his letters contain many sports analogies. The primary sports of his day were running, boxing, and wrestling.

Listen to these illustrations from Paul:

1 Corinthians 9:24-26 ²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. ²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. ²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Paul's goal

Philippians 3:12-16 ¹² Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Let's tackle the message of Philippians by translating Paul's ancient picture into our more familiar football analogy.

Life is like football in at least three ways.

1. It's not over 'til it's over.
2. You gotta know which way you're headed.
3. You gotta remember which team you're on.

First, life is like football. It's not over til it's over. A good team doesn't start celebrating until the game ends. Victory comes to the team who wants it the most and is willing to work the hardest all the way to the final buzzer. In fact, winning work begins long before the game, even before the season starts. Coach Joe Paterno said, "The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital."

Perseverance

Hebrews 10:36 For ye have need of patience [endurance, persevere], that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Complacency and self-satisfaction are often the biggest obstacles to progress in sports and in the spiritual life. Coaches know that early success can do more harm than good for a team or a player.

Remember, the Eagles started out 3-0 this past season and didn't even make the playoffs.

Coaches talk about a **team peaking too early** meaning stopping to improve before the end of season. Someone has said, "**the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement.**"

Philippians 3:12 ¹² Not as though I had already attained, either were already **perfect**: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

The word "**perfect**" deserves a special note. We tend to define perfect as faultless or problem free. **The Bible word carries more the idea of complete or mature.** Paul says he knows he's not perfect. God isn't finished with him yet.

Philippians 3:15 ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as be **perfect**, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Sarcasm? Everyone who thinks they have arrived, that they have no room left for improvement, should take a second look.

A follower of Jesus knows that as long as he or she has breath **there's room for improvement.** No one can say, I am everything I can be or want to be. **We are all a work in progress.**

By the grace of God we are not what we used to be.

The first rule of life and football: it ain't over til it's over. There's always room for improvement.

Second, winning football requires remembering which way you're headed.

Roy Riegles learned that the hard way. His is one of the legendary stories of collegiate football. Riegles was the center and captain of the 1929 University of California Rose Bowl team. Riegles' Golden Bears went up against a great Georgia Tech team. In the second quarter, the game was scoreless when California drove the ball to Tech's 25 yard line. Tech held. Cal gave up the ball on downs. The next play would go down in football history.

Georgia Tech called a running play. Their fullback barreled through the California line. A Cal defensive back hit him hard. He fumbled. Roy Riegels scooped up the ball on the Tech 30 and took off--in the wrong direction. Defensive linemen don't carry the ball very often. He became disoriented when he bounced off a couple of tacklers and spun free. With Tech tacklers and his own teammates in hot pursuit, Riegles headed down field for what he thought would be his very first touchdown ever. He was so caught up in the excitement he didn't hear the shouts of fans and coaches.

Thinking he had it made, Riegles slowed as he neared the end zone. One of his own players who had been chasing him the length of the field managed to reach him at the last second. He spun Riegel around, shouting at him. He stopped him short on the one yard line. But they were both immediately buried by Georgia Tech tacklers. A couple of plays later, Tech blocked a Cal punt attempt, scoring a safety. Those two points would be the difference in a California's loss. According to the press reports, Riegels played a brilliant second half. But nobody remembered. He was forever known as Wrong-Way Riegel.

Speed, talent, and effort in the pursuit of the wrong goal never accomplish anything.

Listen to the text.

Philippians 13b-14 ...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

At least three phrases in the passage came from the world of sports.

"forgetting those things which are behind," pictures the temptation every runner faces. How many football players have been tackled just short of the goal because they slowed to look over their shoulder?

"reaching forth," translates a phrase used of runners leaning into the finish line. Picture a ball carrier stretching for the final inches needed for a first down.

Even the word "mark" came from ancient sports. The word meant to watch or see. Here it describes a marker or post at the end of a race course. A good runner never took his eyes off that marker. A good football player always knows the location of the first down marker or the goal

line.

Note the two directions of this appeal. “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before”

Both are important. The past can be the future's worst enemy.

- That's true individually.
- It can also be true of churches.

No one lives in the past. We miss life when trying to live in the past.

Former Cincinnati Reds and Detroit Tigers manager who won three world series, Sparky Anderson said: “People who live in the past generally are afraid to compete in the present. I've got my faults, but living in the past is not one of them. There's no future in it.”

Some of us continue to live in the shadow of our past mistakes.

- We can't believe God will forgive us so we refuse to forgive ourselves.
- Others live imprisoned in bitterness and anger because they won't let go of wrongs done to them in the past.
- Others can't quit looking back at past successes and glories.

That too only slows the progress of the future.

David Livingstone, pioneer medical missionary to Africa after returning to Great Britain was asked, "Where do you want to go now?" Without hesitation Livingstone replied, "I am ready to go anywhere provided it is forward."

Finally, the secret of success in life and football is knowing which team you are on.

That's why players wear uniforms. No quarterback wants to intentionally pass to the other team. No one tries to tackle his own runner unless he's Wrong-Way Reigle. You block the other team, not your own. A winning team is just that--a team.

Players more concerned about their own stats than the team's victory seldom win championships. There is no I in team!

This is the big theme of the entire book of Philippians. Every passage in the book points back the theme of unity and harmony among fellow Christians. Apparently, Paul believed his friends in Philippi had some work to do in this area.

Listen to how he makes this point over and over again.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Philippians 2:1-4 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, ²Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³Let nothing be done through strife or

vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

That was true then. It is still true today. In life and football, teamwork is the key to victory.

There's more at stake in life than a win or a loss or championship trophy. Eternity hangs in the balance. The sooner we learn that the better prepared we are for whatever life brings our way.

That begins when we make Jesus Christ our leader and coach for life.

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