

SHINING GOD'S LIGHT WHEN ON THE LOSING END

I found myself in a situation for the second time after my daughter's basketball team lost in the bronze medal game at the Ontario Basketball championships. The first time was back in 2019 when my daughter was just 13 years old. I was not her coach at the time, and it was her first season of competitive basketball. The bronze medal game that year was a close contest and our team ended up losing by two points. After the game both teams were asked to line up so the bronze medals could be awarded to the winning team. The convenor at that championship said, "Unfortunately there has to be a winner and a loser in these games." He was right in what he said, but as a parent sitting in the stands at the time and seeing the disappointment on the faces of the players on my daughter's team it was hard to hear. I wish he could have used some other way to acknowledge my daughter's team had not won.

Four years later I was the coach of my daughter's team when we played in the bronze medal game at the Ontario Basketball championships. My players gave it their all but unfortunately fell just short at the end. Once again, we were asked to line up for the medal ceremony. Standing there I was hoping the convenor would use some other expression to convey we did not win. Once again, I heard those words, "There has to be a winner and a loser." I took the words with grace and dignity even though it was hard to hear and experience. What I did not know at the time was how God would soon use my reactions to our loss to shine His light into another coach's behaviour to losing.

Thirty minutes after we lost in the bronze medal game I was still at the gym when it was half time in the gold medal game. One team was losing by 15 points at that time. When the players got to the bench the assistant coach of the team that was losing slammed things on the ground and shouted at the girls in a loud voice telling them how disappointed he was in them. Next, the female head coach began swearing at her players loud enough for everyone to hear in the gym. She kept swearing constantly at her players for the next two minutes. I could not believe what I was seeing taking place.

I happened to be standing beside the stands where the parents from that team were sitting. After seeing how this coach was responding to her team

losing, I felt God nudging me to say something. I turned to one of the parents in the stands and asked if they were okay with the language being used by the coach. The parent shook his head indicating no. I then pointed at my team jersey and said, "You saw me on the court 30 minutes ago after my team lost. Did you see me act in that way toward my players?" Then I said to him, "I was a goalie when I was 16 years old, and I had a coach who used this same kind of abusive language toward me whenever we lost. Let me tell you from personal experience how damaging it is emotionally to be treated that way after a loss or any time." He looked at me and said, "You are right. You did not act that way. I am going to have the other parents join me after the game and express our displeasure to the coach."

I realized afterward I would not have been able to say that to this parent if I had acted in the same manner as this other coach did after our loss. God watched how I responded to our loss with grace, integrity, and compassion. He knew what would transpire 30 minutes later. I am glad He put me in that position at half time to be able to witness to the parents of the other team how to handle loss with dignity, respect, and compassion. That team ended up losing in the gold medal game. I did not stay to see how those coaches reacted at the end of the game. I do hope the parents followed through afterward and expressed their displeasure with the coaches' behaviours. If they did, then even though we lost, God turned it into a win by using my reactions to losing to provide a positive example to the parents of that other team to speak to the coaches about their negative behaviour.

In the Beatitudes Jesus calls us to be the "Salt of the earth and the light of the world." His words are a reminder to us how we are to be witnesses for Him in this world. Sometimes as we saw in my situation this weekend, He wants to use our response to a setback or loss to be an example to somebody else of how we can respond in these situations in a more Christ-like way. Going through losses is not the easiest time for us to be thinking about this. The losses we may have to endure are not just in sports. We can experience loss through a change of health, a loved one's death, a broken relationship, a loss of a job, and so on. There are so many feelings and emotions we go through when we experience loss. Anger, disappointment, frustration, shock are just a few feelings we may struggle with. These emotions may take over as shown by the actions of the two coaches.

It is so important for us in situations of loss to be conscious of our calling as Christians to respond with dignity, respect, compassion, and integrity. If we find ourselves in these moments of loss wanting to express our anger, or act out of character, let's stop for a moment and remember others are watching, and so too, is God. With this awareness we can ask God to help us deal with the loss in a more positive way.

This is what I was doing after our team's loss this weekend. God helped me to be an example to my players and parents how to handle loss with dignity, respect, and compassion. Pleased by this, He used me 30 minutes later to be the "Salt of the Earth" and to shine His light to show the other team's parents the harm that was being done to their daughters' emotional well-being. Do not be surprised if God will have each one of us do the same after experiencing a loss by using our reactions to be a positive witness to others.

I would have preferred to have been on the winning side of that bronze medal game, but thanks to God, a win still happened that day. A lesson for us all on losing and winning.

God bless,

Pastor Dean.