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## Talking Back: On How to Win and Lose

Larry Sampier

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# TALKING BACK

# On How to Win and Lose

### **By Larry Sampier**

would like to offer some comments on "Aspiring to be Great" by Michael McFarland, S.J., in the previous issue on excellence. His five elements essential for academic excellence are fine. He closes with a comment about Dr. Mortimer Buckley. The quote from the Harvard *Gazette* says he was an intense competitor, "In cardiac surgery he had to be; his opponent was death."

As a night trauma chaplain at Creighton University Medical Center with over ten years chaplain experience, I disagree. His opponent was not death, it was illness and disease. There is a difference. Illness and death, as we continue to learn more about them, are lessened, reduced and diminished in their devastating effect on human lives. Death, on the other hand, is nothing more or less than the natural culmina-

tion of a human life. To some it comes early, to some late, to some suddenly, to some it lingers but it comes. Death is as holy and sacred a time as birth. I suggest Fr. Michael read (he may have already done so) *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker.

Fr. Michael concludes by saying, "We too must play only to win." Again, I disagree. I play to succeed, not to win. There is a difference. This calls for a sports analogy: a team with a history of losing starts to turn things around and barely wins more than they lose succeeds; a team with a winning record, actually a no loss record, may be thought to "win," but often they have a holier than thou attitude, trash talk themselves hoarse and let their good fortune go to their heads.

Success is humble. Winning (not always but often) is filled with pride. I also play just to play. Again, the sports

analogy: how often does the second best team, because it lost in the final competition, feel worse than the team that barely won more than they lost. They should feel great. This, if you don't win and you have a loser attitude, is harmful to our culture. I play tennis just to play tennis. If I win, fine. If I lose, fine. I have played the game and enjoyed the process.

In cardiac care if you do your best job and the patient dies do you succeed? Certainly. You have learned from the experience. However, if your paradigm is winning, then you have lost because your patient died. Live in the paradigm of success, not of winning. Stay in the process; let go of the outcome.

Larry Sampier is the staff chaplain at Creighton University Medical Center.