

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 40 *Re-creating Jesuit Higher Education: The General's Challenge*

Article 37

9-1-2011

Talking Back: Developing the Athlete for Academic Excellence

Rose Ann Fleming

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Fleming, Rose Ann (2011) "Talking Back: Developing the Athlete for Academic Excellence," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 40, Article 37.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol40/iss1/37>

TALKING BACK

On How to Win and Lose

By Larry Sampier

I 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.

Editor's Note. Lacking from our recent issue on excellence was an article on the relationship between athletics and academic advising. Here is a response.

Developing the Athlete for Academic Excellence

By Rose Ann Fleming



Ann Schmidt, academic and career advisor for the Williams College of Business, speaking with Kevin Feeney, basketball player and marketing major. Xavier University.

Excellence for student athletes at Jesuit universities must be developed in the inner core of their being. Their experience at our institutions must be holistic; they are trained and practiced on a daily basis to perform at the highest standard in competitive athletics. This means totally committing their human energy to perfect execution in practice for achievement of their goals – a win over their opponents. These same student athletes can respond to a call to excellence in the academic area of their lives if we build a program which gives them an opportunity to approach scholarship with a recipe for success, much as their game-day plan points them confidently to strategies to overcome their opponents. What is this recipe? It is largely developmental advising which helps the student athlete toward maximizing his learning experiences through relationships with faculty and professional programs like mentoring.

There are several components to this

Sister Rose Ann Fleming is coordinator of academic athletic advising at Xavier University.