

The tough lessons of sports

Written by Scott Unash

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There are some people in our society who believe that sports has little or no purpose in our daily lives.

I contend, and have for many years, that those people are wrong.

Sports is a great teacher. All the life lessons you need can be experienced in a single sports season. Sometimes even during a single week. There are the highs of winning, and the lows of losing. But beyond that there are smaller lessons to be learned. Teamwork, camaraderie and learning along side others come to mind.

Another life lesson in sports is dealing with disappointment. Sometimes utter disappointment. I was reminded of that on Monday night after the Linn-Mar vs. Washington 4A playoff game at Linn-Mar. Washington won the game with a touchdown with nine seconds remaining to upset the previously unbeaten Lions, 28-26. In an instant, all of the great feelings, the ultimate highs experienced for the last several months was replaced by despair, and defeat.

A life lesson taught by sports. A powerful, bitter lesson taught.

I know the Lions were hurting Tuesday. I know they will be hurting for a long time. But they eventually will recover and rally behind the fact that they won 10 games, a division championship, and had an incredible year. I also know they will get together in subsequent years at games, events and reunions and recall how much fun they had competing together and winning for three great months in the fall of 2011.

This Linn-Mar football squad is certainly not the first and will not be the last championship caliber team to suffer a bitter defeat.

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There have been many teams over the years that have fallen short of their ultimate goal with a painful defeat at the wrong time. Washington's 2002 football team that featured Adrian Arrington, Rob Bruggemann and others watched as Iowa City West scored three late touchdowns to beat the Warriors. A year later, the Warriors finished as state runners-up. The 1997 Prairie boys basketball team, a favorite to win the 3A title, was upset by a Waukon team that was under .500 coming into the tournament. Prairie went on to win state the next year. And the 1992 Jefferson boys basketball squad that seemingly had a first-round win at state in the bag until a Clinton shot thrown up, by a player falling out of bounds, inexplicably found the bottom of the net sending the game into overtime where the J-Hawks eventually lost.

There are countless more examples, far too many to list. I will include one more though. The 1984 Kennedy baseball team. I was a member of the Cougar team that finished in the final four the previous year in Marshalltown and was rated in the top five all summer in 1984. We entered the playoffs looking for a state title. In the second game of the tournament series, we ran into a Washington team that we had never lost to in three years of high school competition. The Warriors threw a sophomore pitcher we had never faced before and they prevailed, 2-1.

In an instant the dream was over. The loss stung for a long time. But, we learned how to deal with disappointment in life and how to overcome that pain and I know the rest of the members of those teams I discussed earlier did the same thing. And when we get together at reunions and other events, we discuss what a great time we had and all the goals that were accomplished.

The Lions will rebound. It will take some time, but they will look back fondly at this 2011 football team and remember the glorious run they had. And that goes for teams in the future that will also have to overcome some heart-wrenching defeats.

In the meantime, best of luck to Washington in the next round as it hosts Cedar Falls on Friday night in a 4A quarterfinal at Kingston Stadium.

Another life lesson from sports awaits around the corner.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. He is a six-time winner of the Iowa Broadcast News Association play-by-play Announcer of the Year Award. Scott and Mark Dukes co-host the Gym Class weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM)