

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column Volume 139 The Heart of a Champion

Every so often, one gets to witness an athletic event where one player/participant really shines in your eyes. If you are in the bleachers or the stands and don't personally know that individual, the connection may be based simply on how they play the game. Maybe they are really good at their sport; perhaps even a professional and you admire their athleticism.

Or perhaps they aren't that good at all, but they are out there trying their best, refusing to give up when most others would. We have all seen that example. Or perhaps, you may admire the fact they show sportsmanship whether they win or lose.

Or perhaps they have a big heart like those baseball players who hand off the foul ball to the little kids in the front row; or that football player who tracked down his orphaned nephews making sure they got the game ball after he scored the winning TD.

Or it could be that certain driver that angrily pitches his helmet at the car who just took him out of the race. Whatever the format, there is something that causes the player to catch your eye. And, usually there is one particular characteristic that causes you to be attracted to that player. In that instance, you are being entertained. You become a fan. You like their "spirit".

Perhaps you begin to follow their "career"; and even more probable, you widen your vision to include "their team". Maybe you begin a lifelong journey of supporting their organization/team despite their win/loss record. You Cubs fans know what I am talking about it. Heck, anyone who has ever painted their face to support their favorite team knows what I am talking about. If you have a bumper sticker on your car with a number on it, you know what I am talking about. You become loyal, maybe fiercely loyal.

Somewhere in your being, you connect to that player. And you want to support them. You are drawn in. Applause, autographs, fan mail, cowbells, displaying the colors, (and let me tell you there are a lot of merchandise companies COUNTING on your loyalty to spend dough on fan attire) becomes the norm. This is America by God and we have earned the right to be Bears/Packers/Colts/Tony Stewart fans. We will dress up on game day ---maybe even for church. (And yes, I do jersey up on some certain Sundays).

You become a loyal fan. You may even recruit others to become fans. And, a lot of times this enthusiastic "fannery" creates opportunities for loud discussions within the domicile, local tavern, track or stadium. The antics are endless. And, Yes, I have personally witnessed a fist fight between an Earnhardt fan and someone obviously devoid of a number 3 hat. Funny to watch, but very serious to a dedicated fan.

We have all been entertained by watching professional sports. But how did that particular athlete get there? And, what if you personally know the athlete? Would you look at things through a different lens? They are no longer this one dimensional figure that you are counting on to win your game/race because you bet your buddy a beer. They mean something to you. You are emotionally invested. What if that person is YOUR father, mother, son, daughter or friend?

Do the stakes change? Yes, I think they do.

In this situation, you have probably participated and made sacrifices in assisting that player. You have watched them work very hard and play through bumps and bruises. You have encouraged them to keep going when it was easy to give up. You might have picked them up when they fell. You may have even argued with a coach here and there on their behalf.

Perhaps you have read letters of intent, you have met with attorneys and agents, you have prayed, changed family outings because of practices or perhaps mortgaged your house to keep their dream alive.

Perhaps you have nervously sat through a draft. Maybe you even dreaded a graduation that brought them to them to the next level. You have spent money, and probably lots of it. Camps, Clubs, Try-outs, consulting, equipment, you name it. This has been a long journey for both you and them. But because you recognized something very special early on, you got behind them. You saw the heart of a champion.

No one gets to the collegiate or professional level by themselves. But once they arrive, there is the pay off. That sweet, sweet pay off when the tide turns and everything begins to flow the other direction. Colleges offer full ride scholarships to pay for education. Yes, it happens, but it's rare.

So, where does the rubber hit the road? How does one go from t-ball to Lamborghinis? What makes the difference between who makes it and who doesn't? And when does that happen?

Well, for the first benchmark, Think High School Athletics. For many, senior year is the end of the competitive organized sports experience. Very few go on to play at the collegiate level, even less "go pro." But for those special few that carry on, the critical time happens during the transition from high school to college.

College coaches in Illinois can begin the "recruiting process" during the sophomore year of high school. And there are cut and dried rules regarding this process. By the time senior year rolls around, "recruited" athletes consider several colleges, pick one and sign an NCAA letter of Intent (for Division I). They commit their futures to a specific school and they play on.

In our area, this happens so rarely, we can count our past and present Division I collegiate athletes in double digits. And for those who have turned pro? Golly, drawing a blank here. Less than 5, I would guess.

So, what's my point? Moving on from High School Athletics to Collegiate Athletics (any division) is a BIG DEAL and should be celebrated. It's a tribute to not only that athlete, but the parents, families, coaches, supporters, friends and high school.

As of this writing, I have just returned from the Boys State Track Qualifications at Charleston. I was privileged to watch several athletes vying for their chance to become finalists and potentially win a State Championship. Congratulations to all of them, especially the ones from Northwest Illinois.

But, one of these athletes is near and dear, as I have gotten to know him and watch his work ethic over the last year. He is now a State Qualifier in Two Events.

This fine young man is not only mastering his sport, but excelling in the classroom and dedicating himself to community service and Scouts. He is now one of a very few elite that has a chance to participate in his sport at a collegiate level. Why? Because he gives it his all. He doesn't leave anything on the table, whether it's a workout, a practice, a meet or life.

See, this kid has the biggest heart of everyone out there. He holds absolutely nothing back. That's what it takes now, especially in the Class 1A schools, to even get on the radar to make it to the next level.

So, whatever happens tomorrow, whether he finishes 12th or takes home the gold medal, he has proven to be a champion and someone worthy of continuing to pursue his dream at the next level-- Both academically and athletically.

Shouldn't we all be as happy about this and support him as much as we would our favorite driver or team? This is someone you may know or at least know of. Word has gotten around because this is his third trip to the State Finals.

But next time, it could be the kid next door, so speak some words of grace over our future champs as much as you can. Is it so hard to pay some attention to them like we do our pro athletes? Remember, this is where it starts.

If you are from another school district, maybe you can't quite force yourself to wear a Black and Gold Le-Win hat quite yet. But, I know you can be happy that someone from your area; your region, has their stuff together enough to make it this far. He is a State Finalist. (That includes Chicago, people)

He's one of 12 in the 800m and one of 9 in the 400m. I believe the only one in both races. Pretty Special. Can't you be a fan for a while? Maybe he'll even land at your alma mater, and you can wear those colors.

So, here's to you Mr. Tristan Fox, for you have made us all proud. You have worked so hard. You are making great memories in addition to bringing back some fond memories for others. I hope life gives you everything you dream of. You got it in spades, kid. You have the heart of a champion.

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

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