

Winning Isn't Everything

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An uncontrolled spirit of competitiveness has given rise to a “winning is everything” mentality in this country. Especially is this true in Alabama, where the flames of alumni loyalty burn hot. But winning isn’t everything; in fact, some of the greatest defeats in history likely accomplished more good than victory.

Consider the Alamo:

“Unsheathing his sword during a lull in the virtually incessant bombardment, Colonel William Barret Travis drew a line on the ground before his battle-weary men. In a voice trembling with emotion he described the hopelessness of their plight and said, “Those prepared to give their lives in freedom’s cause, come over to me.”

“Without hesitation, every man, save one, crossed the line. Colonel James Bowie, stricken with pneumonia, asked that his cot be carried over. Committed to death inside the Alamo were 189 known patriots who valued freedom more than life itself ...

“On April 21, forty-six days after the fall of the Alamo, less than 800 angered Texans and American volunteers led by General Sam Houston launched a furious attack on the Mexican army of 1,500 at San Jacinto. Shouting “Remember the Alamo!” they completely routed the Mexican army ... killing 630 while losing nine. Santa Anna was captured. Texas was free.” (Daughters of the Republic of Texas pamphlet)

Winning is measured by the goal one is trying to obtain. If we define winning merely as scoring more points than the other guy, and winning is everything, then we just might cheat to get those points. Or we might resort to intimidation or psychological abuse in order to gain an advantage over our opponent. How do people live with themselves when they know they have “won” through dishonor?

We sometimes learn things in defeat that we can learn in no other way. Greg Norman, who recently squandered an apparently insurmountable lead to lose the Masters golf tournament, said the loss has changed his life for the better. His collapse was so excruciating to watch that friends and foes alike sent thousands of faxes and cards of sympathy. Norman confessed that he had become cynical and suspicious of people, especially the press, but the outpouring of support has restored his faith in humanity. He said, “I would have never experienced this changed outlook if I had won the Masters.”

The defeats in life reveal character more than the victories. When we lose the game, the match, the tournament or the election, we are reminded of our priorities, our attitudes toward others, our limitations. We can often be a greater influence on others by showing them how to lose with grace, dignity and confidence in our beliefs. If we are defeated while defending what is right, we have truly won.