



How We Play the Game

The Women's World Cup Championship soccer match between the United States and Japan served up sport at its best, reflecting the uplifting attributes that make us proud to be human. It was not only a great sporting event but a great human event that was filled with positive, lasting lessons we can benefit from.

(Reading time 180 seconds).

The Women's World Cup Final was as gripping and noble an athletic competition as I have ever witnessed. I am fortunate to have been a viewer of this magnificent display of positive human character and talent. I'm not alone in this reaction. To quote but one of the international commentaries, "This World Cup final gave as much as a game can give."*

Both teams had won the hearts of their countrymen. The unheralded smaller and less experienced Japanese women had beaten the odds to get to the final. Their tenacious play had positively enthralled fellow citizens at home recovering from the effects of their country's tragic earthquake. Many Americans, like me, discovered the skill, grace, and class of the U.S. team for the first time as these young women gained winning headlines in the tournament. They created the biggest soccer audience for ESPN ever. It was hard to be against anyone in this match.

Despite twice as many quality shots on goal by the Americans, the underdog Japanese team came back to score late in regular time and again in overtime to offset American leads. Japan stayed focused and energized ultimately winning in an equal exchange of penalty kicks after the overtime ended in a tie.

The Japanese women were elated; the American team heart broken. I, like many others, was both and more...well beyond the typical thrill of victory or agony of defeat response. This heady mixture of thoughts and emotions was derived from this game delivering so much more than we expect from sports. Where we hope we will be entertained, which the match did at the highest level, this competition also touched and taught so many of us who took it in.

Persist in the Face of Adversity

Japan's athletes, in the constant shadow of looming defeat, crafted a magnificent victory by demonstrating the importance of perseverance and grit. Faced with the intense pressure of the most important challenge in their young lives, they found a way to surpass the normal limits of their endurance, remain calm and cool, and come out with a profoundly meaningful victory for their country. Such persistence, determination, and calm in the face of adversity is within each of us if we reach deeply enough for it when we need it.

Winning with Excellence and Class

Although victory eluded them, the U.S. Team's display of sheer skill, athleticism, and endurance was breathtaking. They filled the match with drama and emotions as one agonizing near miss after another hit the crossbar and goal post, literally an inch away from winning on multiple goals. The dedication, practice, and discipline required to excel at this high level was apparent.

Such excellence and resilience are inspirational and contagious. Combined with their grace and class, I was as proud to be their fan in this loss as I would have been had they won handily. As the youngest member of the U.S. team, Alex Morgan said, "I am a little heart broken. But we left it all on the field, and I am proud of this team."

And so were millions of new fans whose hearts were won by these young Americans with their class, character, and commitment. And this for me was the greatest lesson I took from the game. That you can still win even when your best efforts miss the ultimate goal you were seeking. That what you leave on the field counts, even if it is not a win. That a great loss can have a great positive impact. That when you do it right and try your best you gain respect, in this case from millions, but most importantly for yourself. And you are a teacher. How you play the game counts!

Happiness Makes You Better

My most upbeat lesson came from witnessing all the players, coaches, and referees...be happy throughout the game. They smiled...I mean really big, deep smiles. Both teams demonstrated not only the intensity and athleticism of a great championship, but a joy of the game, of the competition, and of life that was uplifting. Bearing both the hope of victory as well as the angst of defeat, they revealed a depth of positive sportsmanship that radiated through the stadium and across the world. Even when penalties were given, the ref and the player smiled...really. This is a game. Have fun.

Work-Life Balance Lessons

By Tom Hacke

Achieving the work-life balance you want is easier when you have clear priorities and goals. Mine came into focus more than a decade ago when my wife and I lost our 14-month-old son in a devastating and heartbreaking tragedy. With that kind of loss, you eventually pick yourself up and move forward, but it changes you forever. It gave me even more clarity – I love my job, and I want to do the very best I can, but my wife and three children are my passion.

Here are some of the things I do to help make sure I spend as much time as I can with my family while meeting all of my obligations:

Know what's important to you, not anyone else. My family is my motivation. I want to give Turner my best, but I also love spending time with my children, so I do what I can to make sure I have that time.

Ask for “the Reader’s Digest version.” I’m always conscious of how I’m managing my time so I waste as little of it as possible. When I can, I use e-mail instead of the telephone so I get the information I need without getting sidetracked, and I work to keep meetings focused on their purpose.

Find your rhythm. I deal with the most difficult tasks first thing in the morning. With that done, there’s less pressure on me as the day goes by. This also lets me start the day with a sense of accomplishment – it’s a good feeling. Somebody else might prefer to start with the easiest tasks first. What’s important is to know what helps you be productive.

Have a back-up plan. Not everything goes the way we want it to, so it helps to have a “Plan B” in place. I do this both at work and at home because it helps me react quickly. With a back-up plan, I can quickly go to another option without spending a lot of time problem solving.

Remember to take care of yourself. I am a sports official and enjoy officiating high school football and basketball games; I work that activity in around my children’s schedules. I also exercise for 15 minutes every morning while the coffee’s brewing. In addition, I make it a priority to attend as many of my children’s sports activities as I can and when it’s possible, I assist with the coaching. These things help me feel balanced, so I make sure I’ve got time for them.

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At the very end, the Japanese players were the happiest. And that may be why they won. Heading into the deciding penalty kicks the Japanese players wore excited grins in their huddle. Their expressions beamed out “Wow! We’ve got a chance to win the World Cup in the next 5 kicks.” The American team for the first time didn’t appear happy. Their stern looks seemed to be saying, “We didn’t put it away. We may lose the World Cup in the next 5 kicks.” The smiling but focused Japanese executed their penalty kicks to win. Most of the American penalty kicks were uncharacteristically wide of the mark.

Could smiling have been the difference? Maybe. Either way it serves as a reminder that even in our most stressful moments we should celebrate life. Connecting to your smiles and joys and positive aspirations relaxes you and lets your learned and natural abilities flow with focus.

How You Play the Game

My team’s loss to a deserving rival will be much more rewarding for me over a lifetime than the fleeting hurrah of a single victory because it reinforced these valuable life lessons:

- Persist – Don’t give up when the odds are against you
- Stay calm and focused under stress
- Excellence and class are contagious and make you a winner
- Celebrate the joy of the game & the joy of life – Doing so makes you better at everything

In life, as in sport, winning counts...but as important is how you play the game. You should engage each with intensity and commitment and play them out with civility, respect, and joy.

Let’s go do that now.

*Jim Bird,
Publisher*

*From Jason Gay of the Wall Street Journal

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Quotes by Elbert Hubbard

“A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed hopeless failure may turn to glorious success.”

Elbert Hubbard (1856 – 1915) was an American writer, publisher, philosopher, and artist. He was the founder of the Roycroft Arts and Crafts community.

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Even though your day is stressful, or especially because your day is stressful, find something around you or within you to celebrate and smile about. Doing so relieves negative tension, improves your mental sharpness, makes you more productive, and...happier.