

Pk's Perspectives... Watching the Scoreboard

Rolling across the gym like distant thunder, I heard – quite literally felt – the intensity of the coach's voice as he cupped his hands around his mouth in a makeshift megaphone, directed his words toward his players on the court, and bellowed above the noise of the crowd, "QUIT LOOKING AT THE SCOREBOARD! JUST PLAY THE GAME!" Hey, he got everyone's attention: players, referees, and fans. Such was the fierceness of the coach's words that I'm almost certain the entire gym obeyed until the game was over.

It might interest you to know that the coach's team was ahead by a considerable margin at the time of his thunderous decree. The coach understood the dangers of "scoreboard fixation." The effects of "scoreboard fixation" are noteworthy. Fixating on the scoreboard for a team that is comfortably ahead can lead to loss of concentration, loss of aggression, and sloppy play. For a team that is losing terribly, scoreboard fixation can lead to discouragement, despondency, and induce the team to quit before the game actually ends. And if the game is a nail-biter, especially in the final few minutes of the contest, scoreboard fixation can trigger extreme nervousness or even athletic paralysis (better known as choking in the clutch!). I'm telling you, staring at the scoreboard instead of focusing on the game can really lead a team into an irrevocable mess! That's why coaches constantly articulate to their teams, "Don't watch the scoreboard...just play the game...execute...the scoreboard will take care of itself."

Now check this out. I've discovered that what is true in athletic competition is also true in ministry. A church can very easily fall prey to the menace of scoreboard fixation. For instance, the first items some church members look at in the church newsletter are the attendance and offering information. If the attendance and offering numbers are robust, members might consider the church to be comfortably ahead on the scoreboard. If the attendance and offering numbers are weak, members might consider the church to be losing the game. Be honest – you've probably done this very thing. Positive numbers in attendance and offerings make us feel comfortable; paltry numbers make us uneasy. This would be a classic example of scoreboard fixation.

You're smart enough to know the scoreboard doesn't always accurately reflect what is going on in the game. A stirring come-from-behind victory can be in the works even though the scoreboard shows a deficit; the makings of a gut-wrenching loss begin to surface even while the eventual loser is still leading on the scoreboard. That is why it's best to just play the game, full throttle, until the final buzzer sounds.

Let's safeguard against "scoreboard fixation" at Cochran FBC. We could say we're ahead right now: attendance is solid, offerings are outpacing last year's giving, and new members are being added regularly. We should ask ourselves, "Are we still focused on the Great Commission...aggressively reaching out to our community...attentive to ministry details?" Coach Paul (aka The Apostle Paul) shouts to us from the pages of Scripture, "forget what is behind, reach forward to what is ahead...pursue as your goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus." In other words, play hard until the final trumpet sounds. Cya in Sunday School & Worship, Pk.