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Emotional Health Is Revealed in Defeat Not in Victory

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Your Life Your Health

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The lesson Cam Newton needs to learn is that he will be remembered more by how he responds to failure than victory. His talent is showcased by his wins; his character is revealed in defeat.

I cannot remember writing a post about an athletic event. Most of them just seem to be extremely forgettable. But...then Peyton Manning is special, at least to me. I suspect his specialness is related to his reminding me of my childhood hero, Johnny Unitas. And, it has to do with the grace with which he faces his celebrity and his disappointments.

I really expected Cam Newton to win Super Bowl 50. I was surprised when he didn't. The following comment from *Sports Illustrated* sums up the events well:

“And then, the Broncos’ defense, fresh off its annihilation of Tom Brady in the AFC Championship Game, did precisely what the Seahawks did to the Broncos’ offense two years ago in Super Bowl XLIX—they took the NFL’s best offense and summarily ripped page after page out of the playbook. Broncos EVP John Elway responded to that 43–8 beatdown by building the league’s best defense, and when it was time for the tables to be turned, the story was very much the same. No, Denver didn’t put the same number of points, primarily because Peyton Manning played like Clint Eastwood might have in *The Unforgiven*—a reluctant hero who knows his time is just about up, and wants to go out with a cause.”

I remember Peyton’s humiliation in Super Bowl XLIX and I remember the grace and dignity with which he faced it. I suspect that the moment in Super Bowl history which may be the most humiliating to an athlete was the “super bowl drop.” For NFL Football fans the name Jackie Smith is that of a NFL Hall of Fame legend. He changed the way his position was played and he was a tour de force in his era of play. The following story was recently published about Jackie Smith: <http://www.si.com/nfl/2016/01/19/jackie-smith-super-bowl-drop>.

If you read this *SI* story, you will see that after his dropping of the pass in the end zone which would have won the super bowl for Dallas, Jackie responded with the character, dignity and

grace which has marked his entire life and which makes him today, at 75 years of age, a man of honor, decency and nobility. Too much about an athlete and an athletic event; I don't think so.

Jackie Smith and I went to college together and we played paddle ball together. I remember him personally and professionally. In truth, our athletic competition was almost a spectator sport for me. He was fast; he was strong; he was very, very good. And, he was a gentleman.

Cam Newton will probably rewrite the record books in his career. He is an incredible athlete. He reacted badly to yesterday's defeat but if he learns from it, in 37 years, no one will remember yesterday, they will remember the character, grace and talent of an incredible athlete. It is my hope and expectation that he will be remembered like Jackie Smith and Peyton Manning.

From what I know of Cam Newton, he is a fine young man. The lesson he needs to learn is that he will be remembered more by how he responds to failure than how he responds to victory. His talent is showcased by his wins; his character is revealed in defeat. This is an irony of life which every young person must learn, sooner than later, hopefully. Best wishes, Cam. You've got the tools; live the life.

Why write a health column about this event?

Life is made up of lessons. Most of the time, we experience events, like or dislike them, and then we move on, never having "learned" from them. Everyone's life is a collage of stories. Our benefit or lack thereof from our stories will be determined by whether we stop to learn from them. "To make no mistakes is not in the power of man; but from their errors and mistakes the wise and good learn wisdom for the future – Plutarch." But, for us to grow and learn, we must be encouraged to "make mistakes."

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge said, "But to encourage risk taking is to practice forgiveness... Learning organizations practice forgiveness because... 'Making the mistake is punishment enough.'" Children, family, employees, colleagues – all human relationships are not defined by our poorest performance or our most disappointing behavior; it is defined by whether those around us, allow us the privilege of failing or of behaving badly, while they encourage us to and expect us to learn and to do better.

The worst stereotype – the worst prejudice – is when we think of and react to others as if their current behavior defines who they "really" are, and/or who or what they will always be. Cam Newton acted badly, but I am confident that he will learn from his current behavior and that his future behavior will be better. Redemptive thinking is expecting such learning and expecting improvement, not being surprised when transformation takes place. Therefore, I will not be surprised when Cam grows and learns from this disappointment; I will smile and nod as one who expected the positive result from a momentary failure.

Redemption comes when we react as is spoken of by the Psalmist when he said, "For his anger *endureth but* a moment; in his favor *is* life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning." (Psalm 30:5) When we give events a "moment" or a night; the unbearable is

borne and the light brings truth as the shadows of disappointment leave and we discover the truth that even in failure there is the opportunity for joy.

Mental and emotional health is developed as we allow ourselves, and others, to fail and to be forgiven; as we expect that we and others will learn from our failures. Mental and emotional health is the result of change and growth. It is not, never making mistakes; it is found in learning from those mistakes. Mental and emotional health blossoms from our expectation that a mistake or a disappointing behavior gives us opportunity to grow and to develop. It is almost as we empower others to succeed by our expectation that they will.

Mental and emotional health is nurtured in an environment which is not quick to condemn and which does not take pleasure in the failures of others. Love is often thought of as a positive emotion with “good feelings” toward others; but in reality “true love” is a discipline.

Listen to how J. B. Phillips paraphrased I Corinthians 13:4-8:

“This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience — it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance. Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it shares the joy of those who live by the truth. Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope: it can outlast anything. It never fails.”
(Phillips)

The building of character requires us to fail so that in failure we learn how to succeed.