

**PLAY LIKE
A CHAMPION
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

Champion Coach Note

Educating and Forming Champion Coaches

Coaching is Being “Good Tired”

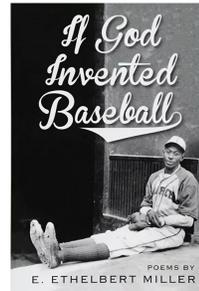
Sometimes the grind of a long season can sap our energy and wear down our enthusiasm. Today's note is meant as an inspirational reflection for coaches to help you focus your priorities and refresh your perspective. Written by Coach Tim Welsh, close friend of Play Like a Champion and Legendary Notre Dame men's swim coach, Tim remind us that coaches have a powerful role. You can truly make a difference in your student-athletes' total development, starting with this season but impacting their whole life as well.

For Christmas, I received a small book of poems from my friend Professor Clark Power (Founder of Play Like a Champion Today): *If God Invented Baseball* by E. Ethelbert Miller. “Oh Good,” I thought, “Just in time for Spring Training.” What a surprise when I looked inside. These short poems do, indeed, begin as meditations about baseball, but they quickly, and sometimes with only one line, become meditations about life.

For me, these poems also include brief meditations about coaching. Take this one, for example, on page 5, called “Playing Until Dark:”

*When we could no longer see
the ball we walked home sadly
dragging our bats and sometimes
wearing our gloves on our heads.
Exhausted but happy.*

*The light in our eyes
even stars could see.*



We did that when we were young, didn't we? It didn't have to be just baseball. It could be any sport that we played. Whatever we were doing, we did it with our whole heart and soul until it was too dark, or it was time to go home. And home we went, “exhausted but happy,” a little sad, perhaps, that we were done for the day...but still, there was that “light in our eyes” that “even stars could see.” We were tired, but we were “good tired.”

***Do your athletes leave practice with this feeling?
What can you do in your practices/games to give
athletes this “light in their eyes”?***

We should relate to that childhood scene now because coaching is like that. Coaching is being both “exhausted” and “happy.” Coaching is being “Good Tired.” Especially at this time of year, when the winter sport season might feel as if it is dragging. In the words of the poem, **coaches at their best should head home each day “exhausted but happy” because they spent their day helping young people become better athletes, better students, and better human beings.** The “light in our eyes [that] even stars could see” comes from knowing that the students on our teams are good people, and that the mission of our lives is to help and to serve them. We do that through our sport, which is our teaching tool and their lab manual.

***Do you go home from practices “exhausted but happy”?
What more can you do as a coach to be “Good Tired”?***

Coaches always think their teams and their athletes can improve. So there is always more that we can do. But, as coaches, we know and live a simple truth that guides and shapes our lives. It is this: **Coaching is Leadership; Leadership is Serving; and Serving takes everything we've got – often, especially in-season, leaving us “exhausted but happy.”** We are tired, but it is a “good tired.” Coaching is being “good tired.” Coaches know one other thing too: this feeling of being “good tired,” of being “exhausted but happy” is worth it. It is why we keep doing what we do.

Coaching is worth it.

Give coaching everything you've got making the most out of the rest of the season.

Teams have seasons, just like baseball. E. Ethelbert Miller puts it this way on page 57 in his poem “Seasons:”

*Spring Training again
Young players replace the old
The game is too short*

Coaching is like that. As we approach one Championship Season, we know that this current season is ending. We also know that it will not be long until next season begins. The freshmen come in; the seniors are gone. We start over again, marveling at how fast the years go by. We hope the seniors have learned something while they were with us. We hope they learned about teamwork and how to be good teammates, and good team players, and good people. “Bunting and The Art of Non-Violence” is how E. Ethelbert Miller”a describes it, on page 12:

*All your life you played small ball.
In elementary school you held the door
open for your teacher. This taught you
the art of bunting and kind manners.*

*You sacrificed being first so someone
could reach second. Once returning to
the dugout Gandhi slapped your butt*

and said "good job."

Coaching is like that too. The game is always more than the X's and O's it is played with. There are always teamwork and team bonding and team spirit and team identity and the indescribable whatever-it-is that turns good teams into great ones. It's the same magic that allows a swim relay team to become more than the sum of its parts. We've all seen something like this happen. A relay team comes together when everyone on the team, even those who wanted to be on the relay but aren't, pours their heart and soul and energy into the four teammates who are on the relay...and then the magic happens. The relay out performs itself and does something special. They finish the relay "exhausted but happy," and every one, starting with their coaches, has "a light in [their] eyes" that "even stars could see."



**Celebrate every "magic" moment with your team.
How can you build your team's bond and your team's spirit?**

Can you coach this stuff? Yes, No, Maybe. All coaches try. And there are steps we can take, but there is no specific formula that works for every team, or for every coach, or in every year. **The only thing that has a chance of working is the love and commitment and energy and self-sacrifice of the coach with each member of the team**, and then out through each member of the team to all the other members of the team. And because this year's team is different than last year's team (even if only by one person), the process starts over again each season. **It always starts with love, and with calling on the goodness of each team member to bring out the goodness in each of the other team members so that together their work and their love for one another will create a great team.** It takes work to do this, and the work must always be genuine, and must always come from the heart.

**Do you love your team?
Do your teammates love each other?
How can you show more love?**

Coaching is caring; coaching is listening; coaching is paying attention; coaching is communicating; coaching is teaching; coaching is leading; coaching is serving... Coaching is exhausting but happy work. Coaching is being "good tired." Coaching is having a "light in [your] eyes [that] even stars could see."



So what would happen if God had invented baseball? E. Etherbert Miller explains it this way (page 2):

*He would not rest on the seventh day.
Instead he would turn to us and say
"let's play two." He would let us bat
first while his angels danced
in the outfield.*

And my guess is that there would be a "light" in his eyes and ours that "even stars could see."

How can I help my team "Play for the Glory of God" the rest of this season?

Symposium on Sports, Education, and Pastoral Care

Did you know the Vatican believes in the power of sport to transform hearts and lives? They released a document in June 2018: "*Giving the Best of Yourself*" on the value of sport in our society. Play Like a Champion is a co-host for a [Symposium](#) on Thursday, March 7 held at the University of Notre Dame discussing the academic and pastoral applications of the document for us as sport leaders. It's not too late to [register](#) to attend in person!



If travel is not possible for you early this spring, you can still be a part of the experience by [registering to live stream](#) the event online. Featured speakers include Bishop Donald Hying, Fr. Pat Kelly, Dr. Clark Power and others. Click here for a full [Agenda](#) for the day.

To see a preview of one of the Symposium speakers, watch the video above with Fr. Pat Kelly, SJ sharing a philosophical understanding of the value of "Play" for all.

Reflection on Sport by Pope Francis



"We need to deepen the close connection that exists between sport and life, which can enlighten one another, so that the effort to surpass oneself in an athletic discipline also serves as a stimulus to always improve as a person, in all of life's aspects. This pursuit puts us on the path that, with the help of God's grace, can lead us to the fullness of life that we call holiness. Sport is a very rich source of values and virtues that help us to become better people. Like the athlete during training, practicing sport helps us to give our

best, to discover our limits without fear, and to struggle daily to improve. In this way, "to the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world" (ibid., 33). For the Christian athlete, holiness will, therefore, consist in living sports as a means of encounter, personality formation, witnessing, and proclaiming the joy of being Christian with the people around oneself."

~Conclusion to Pope Francis' letter on the Vatican Document on Sport