

Deep Routes

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Introduction

I've often said that I've learned the essential things in life on the football field. I think it may be because football mimics life with incredible accuracy. In football and in life, we are given a finite amount of time to fulfill our purpose. In both arenas, we quickly learn that we need others to accomplish our goals, and that which we do with those closest to us brings the most satisfaction.

Both football and life require a distinct relationship between the player and the Head Coach. The player must demonstrate unwavering trust and commitment. He must have the constant knowledge that the Head Coach has a genuine desire to see the player succeed.

In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, the ultimate Head Coach, our Heavenly Father, says, "*I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, 'plans to bless you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'*" (Jer. 29.11). The Head Coach is reminding us that He has crafted a specific and personal game plan for each of us, and if we follow it, we will win!

We all want to win, but anyone remotely familiar with athletics knows that winning, especially winning consistently, is not easy. It's not supposed to be easy, but it is the goal, both on the football field and in the Christian life. To strive for anything else is just wrong. The Apostle Paul writes, "*We run to win the race!*"

In Corinthians 15:57, Paul also reminds us that *Victory* is

the gift to every Christian. It was a hard-fought win with a tremendous price but is ours. We do not win because of our own talents and abilities, but because Jesus secured eternal victory with His death and resurrection.

Well, if that's the case, why is victory so hard to find, and, if we do happen to stumble across it, why is it so difficult to grasp? Why do so many born-again believers live like the other team just ran up the score on them rather than the champions which Jesus worked so hard for us to become?

One reason might be that the concept of winning is often misunderstood. Some equate winning with always getting what we want, having a stress-free existence, or being comfortable. As a football coach, I can assure you those are not elements associated with a championship-caliber football team. Football is seldom stress-free and hardly ever comfortable. Football can be painful, disappointing, and exhausting – but for those of us who really love it, it's worth every minute.

The life of the Christian is no different. It can be riddled with heartache, disappointment, and pain, but for those of us who love Jesus, it's worth every minute. Why? Because our Head Coach loves us more than his own life, and He wants us to win!

He wants us to have real victory, not some temporary emotional rush that fades once the moment has passed. He wants us to live a championship life.

How we do that? That's what *Deep Routes* is all about. In the next few pages, we will look at a few football situations and how they relate to real life. The way we handle each of them can determine if we have authentic victory or if we are merely trying to exist on the unreliable emotion of situational happiness.

Whether you are a coach, an athlete, a fan, or a friend or relative of someone who is, this book is for you.

In football and in life, there comes a time when we are no longer content with short gains. At some point, you have to

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stretch the defense and go deep. This book is designed to help you stretch and grow as a Christian.

Get ready. Let's go deep!



Day 1

Self-Acceptance

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken before God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.

(Isaiah 53:2b-5)

We're Not All Quarterbacks

I've been coaching public school football for a long time now. A lot has changed over the years, but there's one aspect of coaching at this level that will probably never change. Most kids begin their public school football career in the seventh grade. It's so funny because most of them know little, if anything, about organized football. Still, I've seldom met an incoming seventh-grader who didn't want to be the quarterback. Better still, I've rarely met a seventh grader's mom who didn't think her son should *get* to be the quarterback.

In reality, very few athletes want to play quarterback once they realize the demands of the position. Initially, the QB ap-

pears to be the glamorous one on the team. He gets all the attention. He's in the spotlight. He's usually the good-looking one on the team, and if we're honest, that all sounds pretty good.

I have come to a stark realization. I don't look like me anymore. I remember *the me* of a couple of decades ago, and I look nothing like him. The former *me* was not a bad looking guy, as looks go. He was tall, thin, tan, and toned. And, oh man, did he have hair!

The old me was a product of the 1980s. Big hair was an absolute requirement. The old me wore only the latest, most popular clothes, and he very seldom wore them twice. The old me was exactly what society said he should be. I was the guy who wanted to be the quarterback, not because I should be, but because it looked cool.

Now when I look in the mirror, my former self is nowhere to be found. And I realize that is a good thing. Along with my big hair came big problems. Arrogance, vanity, and selfishness were some of my better qualities. I was extremely unapproachable. After all, if I allowed someone to get too close, they might mess up my hair! I wish I were joking, but sadly that was the truth. The most troubling aspect of this time in my life was the constant stress and fear of trying to maintain this false image and keeping anyone from finding out how insecure I was.

Not being comfortable in your own skin will absolutely rob you of your joy. In a futile effort to be something we are not, the façade we construct becomes a wall that prevents others from experiencing who we really are. This is a game we can never win.

It is not only our appearance to which we apply makeup and hairspray. We try to dress up our marriages, jobs, relationships, and just about everything else in our lives that we think doesn't look just right. We sure don't get this play from our Head Coach.

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The book of Isaiah describes what Jesus looked like as an adult man. *“He had no beauty or majesty. Nothing about Him was attractive. Nothing in His appearance was desirable”* (53:2).

Unlike us, Jesus could look any way He wanted. He could have had movie-star looks, but He knew there was no victory in that. He knew that winning takes place much deeper within us, and it’s only when we remove the outer layers that we find the end zone.



Day 2

Perspective

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

(1 Corinthians 13:12)

Painting the Football Field

There are two types of people in the world. That's it. It seems like there should be dozens, if not hundreds, of types, but when we remove all the tags and labels of society, it becomes evident that everyone fits in one of only two categories: those who can't believe just how bad their lives are, and those who can't believe just how great their lives are. Ironically, the circumstances in both cases are often similar if not identical.

In my initial year as a high school football coach, I first experienced the extra duties associated with this profession. To this day, I remember vividly walking behind a paint machine on a hot August afternoon in Haskell, Texas. I recall saying to myself, "I can't believe I *get* to do this." I was a very happy twenty-one year old because painting the field was a part of coaching football.

A few years ago, I was marking and painting the football field in Apple Springs, Texas, where I currently serve as the superintendent and head football coach. We were getting ready for the start of two-a-days.¹ I remember vividly saying to my-

¹ When a team goes through two trainings on the same day.

self (and probably anyone else within earshot), “I can’t believe I *have* to do this.” I was a very unhappy fifty-one-year-old because painting the field was a part of coaching football.

There was little or no difference between the details in those two scenarios. August is hot and painting is painting. In reality, painting the field did not make me happy or unhappy. Aerosol paint cans can’t do that. It was me and the two distinctly different ways I chose to view the very same task that determined my attitude.

Here’s the crazy thing about perspective. The default setting is always on negative. We don’t have to work to see bad in people or in circumstances. If we do nothing, we get an automatic and constant flow of negativity. But, if we want to live a life of genuine victory and contentment, effort is required. We must make the conscious decision to override the default setting and literally flip the switch. We must determine to play the game of life from a position of blessing.



Day 3

Forget the Past

He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

(Psalm 103:12 NLT)

Glory Days

I've noticed a trend lately. The older I get, the better athlete I used to be! I remembered being a decent player in my 20s and 30s. By my 40s, I was downright awesome. Now I look back at my playing days and wonder how anyone could have been as good as I was. By the time I am 65 or 70, I am sure that I will be telling people that I won the Super Bowl as a senior in high school.

The same thing happens to me when I go fishing. The farther I get from the lake, the bigger that fish becomes. The past has a wonderful ability that allows us to remember things the way we want to and not always the way they actually were. That's not altogether bad as long as we know we are just having fun. The danger comes when we romanticize the past so much that we can't enjoy the present.

If we long for the good old days to the point where we can't live in the moment, it will rob us of the victory that was meant especially for today.

The opposite side of the coin can be more dangerous and destructive. All of us have had hurts in our past. It may be loss,

pain inflicted by someone else, or even a critical error in judgment that we made ourselves and still causes us shame and embarrassment.

Regardless of the source, it was not a pleasant time, and we just can't seem to get over it. The clinical term for this feeling is 'arrested development.' The pain of the past literally stops us from moving forward, and it completely kills our joy. It will keep us from winning!

Arrested development does not have to continue. There is a cure. The Psalmist wrote, "*God's mercies are new every morning!*" This means that every day, our Maker gives us a brand-new, clean slate. God does not want us to play yesterday's game over again.

Today is a brand-new kick-off!

