

In life, as in sport, when hope runs out, so do your chances of succeeding

SPORT

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According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Christian hope is ‘the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.’

In real life, hope is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes. Hope has a goal-it works out a strategy to achieve it and is sustained by a motivation: ‘God is with me, wants to help me so, open in prayer, I will keep on keeping on until I get there.’

Given our dodgy government performance with inflation, immigration and so many negative fallouts from Brexit, NHS and prison service understaffing, fruit and veg rotting with inadequate numbers of pickers available, long waiting times for operations – and outside London, ambulances, raw sewage pouring into rivers and on beaches, police prosecuting a mere tiny proportion of rape cases and burglaries – and The Met in serious trouble – hope is currently in short supply.

However, Usain Bolt – remember him? – put it rather well: “Worrying gets you nowhere. If you turn up worrying about how you’re going to perform, you’ve already lost. Train hard, turn up, run your best and the rest will take care of itself.”

In sport – as in life, of which it is a metaphor – without hope, successes are unlikely. Hope has moved people out of untenable situations into better lives, and has helped humans stay alive long enough to figure out how to thrive. Hope is huge. It’s necessary. It’s motivating and, in some cases, life-saving.

Performers who have a hopeful mentality – PMA, positive mental attitude – are more likely to believe they will succeed in the future. There have been various studies that show the benefits of being optimistic such as “better performance and less variability” (football; Gordan & Kane, 2001)

Among athletes, hope is associated with approach-oriented coping, mental toughness, persistence following failure, and reduced burnout risk. “It’s hard to beat a person who never gives up,” admitted George Herman ‘Babe’ Ruth, an American professional



‘All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. ‘This was said so tenderly, without blame of any kind toward me or anybody else.’

A statue of Julian of Norwich is seen on the facade of the Anglican Cathedral in Norwich. Photo: Cindy Wooden

baseball player whose career in Major League Baseball spanned 22 seasons, from 1914 until 1935.

“Never let your head hang down. Never give up and sit down and grieve. Find another way,” said Legendary Negro League pitcher Satchel Paige, who was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1971. By many judged to have been one of the greatest pitchers ever to have lived, Paige would never quit, and never let his emotions take over.

When in October 2015, Jurgen Klopp arrived at Anfield, he asked for supporter optimism. He said: “This would be a really good moment for a restart ... If someone wants to help Liverpool, they have to change from doubters to believers.”

Other Lopp gems: “It is

important we let the players feel the confidence and the trust of the people ... they have to think they can reach the expectations of all the people, of all the fans, of the press.”

When asked about Jose Mourinho’s ‘Special One’ quip when he arrived in England for his first spell with Chelsea in 2004, the self-deprecating Klopp referred to himself as ‘the Normal One’.

Under Klopp, Liverpool have – so far – won the UEFA Champions League (2018/19), UEFA Super Cup (2019), FIFA Club World Cup (2019), Premier League (2019/20), Carabao Cup (2021/22), FA Cup (2021/22) and the Community Shield (2022.)

Once optimism, even in a great club like Man United evaporates, performance and results – as Ole

Gunnar Solskjaer learned so painfully-take a dive.

As in so much in life, if you really want something you can acquire the virtue of hope. Create some positive mantras, such as “Falling down is not as important as getting up” or “The past is but a rehearsal for the present.” As Churchill put it: ‘if you are going through hell, keep moving.’ Focus on your past successes – no matter how trivial. Get a role model.

How about that great optimist Michael Jordan, who made it clear that “I’ve failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” His biography on the official National Basketball Association website states: “By acclamation, Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player of all

time. Born 1963, he is now worth \$1.6 billion.”

Arsene Wenger, manager of Arsenal from 1996 to 2018, the longest-serving and most successful in the club’s history, explained why his optimistic nature is so important in the role of a footballer manager. He said it’s his job to pick up everybody at the club when things don’t go well.

In 2016, speaking to Roger Bennett in the USA, the former Arsenal manager talked at length about his career, his life at Highbury and the Emirates – all the ups, downs, trials and tribulations of spending 20 years at one club.

“Honestly, in my job the main quality is to be an optimist. If you see the future in a negative way you commit suicide in my job. You are responsible for the motivation of all the people around you,” Wenger said. “You have to pick up everybody inside the club. You should see what the club is like after a big defeat, it’s like a lost war and everybody is on the floor.

“You have to be an optimist to say, ‘Come on my friends, we are good enough to pick up and win our next game. We can do this together. Remember how good you are.’

“Everybody forgets quickly in life how good he is and how good he can be when things go wrong. I believe my job is to be an optimist.”

Don’t try to predict the future. Surround yourself with positivity – people who bring light into a room rather than dampen down any passion. Focus on solutions, not problems. Hope releases the handbrake and enables you to move out of gloom.

Rather than going with your natural instinct, try smiling and laughing more and speaking in a more positive tone. Acting how you want to feel will help you on your way to becoming a beacon of hope.

Don’t dwell on the past. If bad things have happened, look at tomorrow as exactly what it is – a new day – in which good things you hope can happen.

Julian of Norwich (see picture), in her *Revelations of Divine Love*, wrote that Jesus had told her: ‘All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. ‘This was said so tenderly, without blame of any kind toward me or anybody else.’

As I thank friends – which happily include my family – for a present before opening it, on my birthday I thank God – and wish my friends on their birthdays well for the brand-new year of life ahead.

With age, I have grown in hope. I hope that, while I still have time, I will continue as long as time draws me ever closer at my death – to my birth into eternity.