

Hope springs eternal – and is what we need to drive us on to success

SPORT

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To negotiate our way through life – and make others feel better – we need to believe and desire positive outcomes. Thanks to the Paschal Mystery, with its Resurrection, this sustains my hope. In sport, as in life, ambitious hearts resonate with these words: “Hope springs eternal in the human breast; Man – and now also woman – never is, but always to be blest.”

Written in 1734 by Alexander Pope, born 1688 in London; died, 1744 in Twickenham – where there is an avenue, a grotto and a hotel bearing his name.

Bear in mind that hope is a virtue; not the same as optimism, a mental attitude. Trained as a civil engineer before studying theology and being ordained, for me, Hope = faith in God + action. Given our political leaders and economic predicaments, it is not always easy to feel hope. However, as the great Brazilian footballer Pele said: “The more difficult the victory, the greater the happiness in winning.”

Does your Christian life-team include not only friends, allies-in-life but God? When lost in a desert devoid of landmarks – or confusing messages from the government – individuals tend to walk in circles.

Though global news is negative – think climate warming, Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan, as well as so many francophone African countries – what keeps my hope alive and fresh are the many wonderful families I know.

“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships,” stated Michael Jordan, born 1963, widely considered to be the greatest basketball player in the history of the game. He was known for his all-around ability; including scoring, passing, and defence.

A handy – less mathematical – definition of hope is “faith in action”; consistent action. If you believe something is worthwhile, you will keep working on it no matter what. “Win if you can, lose if you must – but NEVER QUIT!” said Cameron Trammell, a star of American Football.

Hope changes the “If we win” to “When we win”. Hope is a motivational life-skill. As you know, in sport the mind is crucial. Have you seen how, at the weigh in, boxing opponents try to stare each other out and sow a seed of doubt?



Lebron James. ‘Don’t be afraid of failure. This is the way to succeed.’

Photo: Lucy Nicholson, Reuters

“If something stands between you and your success, move it. Never be denied,” stated Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson, an American actor, businessman, and professional wrestler.

LeBron James Sr. an American professional basketball player for the Los Angeles Lakers of the National Basketball Association – and according to Forbes worth one billion US dollars – reminded us: “Don’t be afraid of failure. This is the way to succeed.”

“You dream. You plan. You reach. There will be obstacles. There will be doubters. There will be mistakes. But with hard work, with belief, with confidence and trust in yourself and those around you, there are no limits,” spoke Michael Fred Phelps II, an American former competitive swimmer. He is the most successful and most decorated Olympian of all time with a total of 28 medals.

How about this from Michael Jordan: “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

In case you wonder who Michael is, he is an American businessman and former professional basketball player. He played fifteen seasons in the National Basketball Association between 1984 and 2003, winning six NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls. Currently, according to Forbes, he is worth 3 billion US dollars.

“The only person who can stop you from reaching your goals is you,” admitted Jackie Joyner-Kersey, born 1962, now a retired American track and field athlete, ranked among the all-time greats in the heptathlon as well as long jump. She won three gold, one silver, and two bronze Olympic medals in those two events at four different Olympic Games.

Hope knows that it’s never too late to win. On 6th February, I read how three goals in extra time fired Leeds United to the fifth round of the Emirates FA Cup with a 4-1 replay win over Plymouth Argyle at Home Park.

So, dear reader, keep on keeping on hope.

If a boxer slips into the ring with just a tiny doubt in his mind, he is as good as beaten before a punch is thrown.

So, keep right on to the end of the road and keep right on to the end. Though the road be long, may your heart be strong. Keep right on round the bend. [After Sir Harry Lauder, 1924. No, Sir Harry was not a sportsperson, However, he had a great take on life: a metaphor for sport].

In the 2019 Champions League semi-finals, Liverpool was trounced 3-0 by Barcelona on the road. They headed home without two of their best players, Mohamed Salah and Roberto Firmino, for a second leg that many thought was just an afterthought. Instead, the Reds stunned Barcelona, winning 4-0 at home and winning the tie.

The Reds were facing AC Milan in the Championship League Final taking place in Istanbul, Turkey. Milan dominated the first half of this 2005 matchup, going up 3-0. Somehow Liverpool regrouped and scored three goals in the second half. Then they took home the title with a victory in the penalty

shootout.

The future will be different, but it’s not over until it’s over. “Push yourself again and again. Don’t give an inch until the final buzzer sounds,” said Larry Bird, widely regarded as one of the greatest basketball players of all time.

Though I will be 85 on my birthday in May this year, I refuse to retire – and start falling apart at speed. As Winston Churchill put it: “I keep bugging on (KBO).”

His view is backed up by Joe Namath, nicknamed ‘Broadway Joe’, an American former professional football player who was a quarterback in the American Football League and National Football League during the 1960s and 1970s: “If you aren’t going all the way, why go at all?”

“Never let your head hang down. Never give up and sit down and grieve. Find another way,” encouraged Satchel Paige, an American Major League Baseball (MLB) pitcher notable for his longevity in the game, and for attracting record crowds wherever he pitched.

Beware of possible dangers to the

health of your hope – across your PIES, of course.

On the Physical: exhaustion – perhaps a lack of sleep? – and choking (doubts numbing instincts). How well I remember Jana Novotna’s heart-rending 1993 meltdown at the Wimbledon final against Steffi Graf.

The Intellectual: taking on board too much negative news, sticking with unrealistic dreams [Like me at 5’ 7” dreaming of being an elite basketball star].

The Emotional: lack of social contact, self-pity, inadequate support.

The Spiritual: neglecting prayer, despair, presumption, sloth.

Hope – in S – improves the nervous system in your P as your breathing slows, muscles relax and your blood pressure drops; in the I, it clears the mind as the limbic, “reptilian” part of your brain, the amygdala, ceases to be in control.

Laughter – a contagious disease – releases tensions, builds community, sustaining hope. So does gratitude. By boosting the E, it improves the I, enabling the P to perform far better.