

Spring Sports Awards
Seton School
May 22, 2011

A. EXCELLENCE COMES AT 212 DEGREES

- Several years, ago, my son Kevin sent me a book that hit me.
 - I think he knew I'd like it
 - Maybe because it had big words and lots of pictures and I could read it in one trip to the bathroom
- **212 degrees – the extra degree**
 - **At 211 degrees, water is hot**
 - **At 212 degrees, water boils**
 - **And with boiling water, comes steam**
 - **And steam can power a locomotive**
- Wow! What a great metaphor for a life of excellence
- Seemingly small things can make all the difference
 - Just **one more degree** of
 - Effort
 - Commitment
 - Responsibility
 - Kindness
 - Sacrifice
 - Exponential results
- Countless examples where small things made a difference:
 - In sports
 - Indy 500
 - 500 miles
 - Average margin of victory over past 10 years? 1.54 seconds
 - 1st place prize: \$1.2 mil.
 - 2nd place price: \$600K
 - Imagine driving from Washington to Boston and losing \$600K for being 1.54 seconds late!
 - Seton Swimming
 - Girls 200 Medley – 2011
 - Seed: 1:54.43
 - Prelims: 1:51.92, 2nd behind St. Cats
 - Finals: 1:50.25
 - Broke State record

- 2nd behind St. Cats
 - More than 1 second drop per kid
 - Machine split 23.99 with a broken wrist
- State Champs – Girls 2010
 - The Machine passed Alina Hall of BI in last 10 yards
 - Team record 54.08
 - Took silver
 - 2 point swing – 17 vs. 16 points
 - Beat BI by 2 points
- Girls Beat Brentsville in 2008 by only 4 points
 - **Bridget Wunderly** cut over 7 seconds from her 200 Free, and, rather than placing 7th with her old time, she placed 5th.
 - **Carolyn Claybrooks** cut 8 seconds from her PR in 200 IM and placed 4th rather than 8th.
 - **Lucy Bennett** lowered her PR in 500 Free by 15 seconds and jumped up to 7th place, personally giving us half of our margin of victory.
 - **Mary-Kate Kenna**, swimming backstroke instead of her normal events, lowered her PR by 5 seconds and placed 4th rather than 6th.
- **Noland Butler Story**
 - Striking how little effort that took
 - And the results were exponential
- **212 degrees – it's a commitment to action**
 - Because very often, the difference between excellence and mediocrity is very little
 - You have to keep the heat up on yourself every day
 - Showing up isn't enough

B. OBSTACLES to EXCELLENCE

- **Obstacles to that extra degree**
 - **Looking for the quick fix**
 - Listen to the radio
 - Sensa
 - Nutri-Systems
 - Ever-cleanse
 - Trump – How to get rich
 - Laurel Langmeier – Extreme Money Makeover
 - Suddenly Slender Body Wrap
 - Buy Foreclosures
 - Lottery Tickets
 - 6 minute meals for 6 pack abs
 - 6 pack abs in 2 minutes a day without pain
 - Or at school
 - Cliff notes
 - Using other people's review sheets
 - SAT Prep classes
 - Red Bull
 - No quick fixes
 - Lose weight – run and control eating
 - Get wealthy – work hard, be excellent and take risks
 - 6 pack abs? – Hard work every day and no body fat – and pain
 - High SAT Score – read a lot and do your math homework reliably for many years
 - **Rod Rakosi, Morgantown Plant Manager: Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die**
 - So the message here is that there are no quick fixes
 - We all need to stop pretending that we are going to lose weight without eating less, running more, and doing a lot of sit-ups.

○ **Playing the Victim**

- **Never act like a victim, even if you are**
- Control what you can control – yourself
- Kids in my math classes that struggle
 - I had a bad teacher last year
 - Did you do your homework?
 - I didn't learn anything from your sub, he doesn't teach it like you
 - Did you do your homework?
- If you start making excuses now
 - Bad teacher
 - Bad coach
 - Project partner didn't do his part
 - The ref made a bad call
- You'll continue later years later
 - I haven't been trained on that
 - Management is bad
 - Sales underbid the job
 - Superintendent messed up the job
 - My budget was unreasonable
- Or worse,
 - I got fired from my sales job because I was old, fat, disabled, minority, etc
 - How about the fact that you didn't sell anything
- In the **secular sense**, we still live in a meritocracy where excellence and risk are the keys to success
 - We all have obstacles to overcome
 - Some of us more than others
 - Concentrate on the things you can control and quit using the things you can't control as an **excuse for your own mediocrity**
 - If you don't, you'll never get to 212 degrees
- In the **Catholic sense**
 - In the Catholic sense – adversity can bring us closer to God
 - Lonestar Song – “the good Lord gave us mountains, so we can learn how to climb”

○ Selective Excellence

- Growing up, 2 inch lift on my dress shoe
 - Already a bad athlete
 - Played football, baseball, basketball poorly
 - Probably how I got into swimming
- One question I always got from my Dad
 - “Did you do your best?”
 - Didn’t matter if that was good, as long as it was my best
- As I got older, he’d tell me “Bloom where You’re Planted”
 - Picture in the “Man Room”
- That’s why I push my swimmers for PRs
 - Personal best effort every time you hit the water
- Think of the accomplished athletes in this school (find a good kid to use instead of Shannon)
 - Tell you a secret
 - You don’t score 100 goals by playing hard in the games
 - You score 100 goals by playing hard every practice
 - The same is true of her AP Stats grades
 - Not earned just by participating in class
 - Earned at the desk in her bedroom
 - And I bet she got good letters of recommendations from her teachers
 - Because she sucked at for a couple weeks during her senior year?
 - No, because she was excellent all of the time and her teacher’s saw that
- Key to being “Average”
 - On a continuum from abject failure to massively successful, what’s the middle called?
 - Average? Mediocre?
 - Here’s the formula for being average: **Only do the things you like to do**
 - If you want to be good at something, there’s going to be some sacrifice involved
- Extends to your whole life
 - Math grade doesn’t matter – I’m going to Christendom
 - Are you kidding?
- Anyone know God’s plan for you when you are my age?

- If you don't know, how do you know what you're going to have to be good at?
- Trust me when I tell you that Math Teacher and Swimming coach were not big goals in my life when I was sitting in Algebra and going to swim practice
- We all have God-given gifts, and we got them for a reason
 - You have an obligation to use those gifts to serve others
 - Ever here that expression: **Luck is when opportunity meets preparation?**
 - Make sure you are prepared – don't know what opportunities God is going to put before you
- **Catholicism isn't merely compatible with excellence – it requires excellence.**

○ **Lack the Confidence to try**

- Man, I hate the words, “I can’t” – just ask my kids
- Frequently asked question of Sean: “What, are you helpless?”
- Dad, can you make this phone call – you can do it better
 - Son, I’m SURE that is true, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to do it for you
 - I think he’s getting it now though
 - E-Mail asking for his zip code
 - “What, are you helpless?”
- Every year, I see the same thing play out with my swim team in the 500 FR
 - Remington girls – mom said they want to quit the team because I might put them in the 500
 - Highlight of their season
- Even happens to me
 - Struggling to run
 - Convinced I'd have to run/walk
 - Started training with a heart rate monitor
 - Gave blood, really set back
 - breakthrough after Philmont
 - high altitude?
 - Maybe
 - heart rate monitor broke!
- What is your first thought when you look at a hard math problem?
 - I’ll never figure it out?
 - I’m sure I can eventually figure this out?
 - Your first thought makes all the difference
 - Probably an indication of how you are likely to think whenever you encounter an obstacle
- Think of it this way: **How can you expect others to bet on you if you aren’t even willing to bet on yourself!**
- I know this is natural for even the most confident people
 - That’s why I don’t tell my students that the homework assignments I put in my syllabus are the suggested assignments out of the book for “Advanced” students
 - Then I demand they do all of their homework 100% correctly
- A Favorite Quote: **“If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves” – Thomas Edison**

- **INTERIM CONCLUSION IF RUNNING OVERTIME**

- Unique time in your life – your entire vocation is to improve yourself
 - This will never happen again
 - Next time you skip American Idol to study Calc – you’re boiling
 - Next time you draft a paper a week early so that teacher who is dying to see you do well can comment on it in advance, you’re boiling
 - Next time you don’t breath out of the turn at swim practice even though you know the coach is not looking – you’re boiling
 - Or the next time you wake up early to do P90X with your daughter even though you were up late with your brother-in-law – you’re boiling
- Excellence is not one big act
 - It is a collection of many, daily and small acts of the will
 - It is a near infinite collection of good choices that are not always the easy choices
 - Excellence is habit nurtured by taking advantage of countless opportunities every day
- **Choose excellence in the many small things and you’ll get exponential results in the few big things!**
- **Act this way in all areas of your life**
 - **Excellence is not about being objectively good**
 - **It is about doing your best and being better than you were yesterday**
- And remember, don’t ever
 - **Look for the quick fix**
 - **Play the victim**
 - **Be selectively excellent**
 - **Say “I can’t”**
- That’s a formula that will only put you in hot water
- It’s YOUR life
 - YOU are responsible for your results
 - You have greatness in you or you wouldn’t be here
 - **It’s time to turn up the heat**

C. Luck is the Result of Good Choices

I had a good friend tell me:

- It's easy for you to think this way, you are successful
- No Julie,
 - I don't think this way because I'm successful
 - I've been successful because I think this way
- And then she told me that I was lucky

A lot of people tell me that I'm lucky

- In a lot of ways I am
 - Parked a 15 passenger van in front of Madison Square Garden 15 minutes before "A Christmas Carol" was scheduled to start during the week after Christmas
 - Scalped 50 yard line seats for face value right before kickoff of a Jets-Packers game that determined a playoff spot
- I was also lucky enough to
 - Be born in the U.S. or
 - grow up with two married parents
 - met Colleen
- But was I lucky to get into Wal*Mart?
 - Was it luck when I did a great job servicing them while I was in the corporate world?
 - Was it luck when I quit my VP job with a wife who was 8 months pregnant with our 10th child to take a run at it?
 - Was it luck when I sat outside Wal*Mart restrooms for weeks watching 5,000 people go in and out and then hand counting 8,000 used paper towels just to prove I had a better solution?

Sure luck plays a role, but I don't think that luck is the key to success in this world

- Sure, some people have a head start over other people, but
- Successful people are not successful just because they are lucky

Life is the product of the choices we make.

- The lucky people aren't just lucky and unlucky people aren't just unlucky.
- I've noticed that lucky people make good choices and unlucky people seem to be living with their bad choices.

In this country, neither biology nor environment will dictate your destiny. It's the choices you make:

- You can choose to serve others or serve yourself.
- You can choose to take a risk for a great opportunity or you can choose security.
- When you encounter adversity, you can choose to play the victim or you can persevere
- You can choose to accept the responsibility that comes with leadership or you can chose to go with the flow.
- You can choose a lifetime of love from your family or seek solace in others whose love for you is conditional.

Of course, all these choices are better made if you do a good job with the most important choice most of you will probably make in your lives:

- the choice of a life mate

Do that right and a lot of things will start to fall in line for you.

When you have the right person and you've finished college, commit with 212 degrees

- Marry them
- Adore them
- Help them achieve their dreams
- Help them get to heaven
- Put their needs ahead of your own
- And stick by their side until you die

If you do that, I promise you, you will never be poor – even if you have no money

D. CONCLUSION

- Unique time in your life – your entire vocation is to improve yourself
 - This will never happen again
 - Next time you skip American Idol to study Calc – you're boiling
 - Next time you draft a paper a week early so that teacher who is dying to see you do well can comment on it in advance, you're boiling
 - Next time you don't breath out of the turn at swim practice even though you know the coach is not looking – you're boiling
 - Or the next time you wake up early to do P90X with your daughter even though you were up late with your brother-in-law – you're boiling
- Excellence is not one big act
 - It is a collection of many, daily and small acts of the will

- It is a near infinite collection of good choices that are not always the easy choices
- Excellence is habit nurtured by taking advantage of countless opportunities every day
- a. **Choose excellence in the many small things and you'll get exponential results in the few big things!**
 - i. **Excellence is not about being objectively good**
 - ii. **It is about doing your best and being better than you were yesterday**
- b. And remember, don't ever
 - i. **Look for the quick fix**
 - ii. **Play the victim**
 - iii. **Be selectively excellent**
 - iv. **Say "I can't"**
- c. That's a formula that will only put you in hot water
- d. It's YOUR life
 - i. YOU are responsible for your results – and those results are not a matter of luck
 - ii. You have greatness in you or you wouldn't be here
 - iii. **It's time to turn up the heat**