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Four-Leaf Clover

A friend in Boston who has no ties to my alma mater sent this e-mail on Friday: "My 12-year-old daughter became a big UT fan this year and was

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As I've written before, my biggest passion is University of Texas football. There are few games I've missed seeing in person, watching on television or listening to on radio during the past 40 seasons. Like many who matriculated in Austin like to say, "My blood runs orange."

Thursday night, the possibility of a wonderful ending to a magical season turned into a painful blow to the stomach five plays into the game. Colt McCoy – an All American quarterback on the field and an All American person off it – suffered an injury from which he wouldn't return. Alabama built a big halftime lead over the shell-shocked Longhorns. Then Texas, led by an inexperienced freshman who grew up before the eyes of a national audience, mounted what looked to be an historic comeback. The Crimson Tide, though, created a huge turnover with six minutes remaining and pulled away to claim the national championship.

You may think writing this is some sort of cleansing therapy that will make me feel better. That's not it. Surprisingly, I have no pain from seeing my favorite team lose on college football's grandest stage. (And, yes, I'm wearing a burnt orange shirt today and the Texas flag still flies proudly outside my office window.) The reason I'm sharing this is because in coming up short – in sports, in business, in life – there are always lessons to learn... and the biggest loss is failing to grow when things don't turn out as expected.

Leaders sometimes suffer defeat and wallow in their disappointment, missing out on the next opportunity. Instead of pausing briefly to reflect then pursuing the next journey, they end up mired in the quicksand of misfortune... unable to charge ahead toward higher goals. If you ever suffer from setback paralysis, take out this column and consider these post-game comments spoken by Colt McCoy, whose dream since childhood was to lead Texas to a national championship:

"I worked and played my whole career to be on this stage, to be given this opportunity. I know what it would have been like had I played that game. To know that is tough. But at the same time, I am a man of faith. I stand on the rock. I'll never question God for why things happen the way they do. There's a bigger and better football day to come. I know I'll be on that championship stage one day."

Words of Wisdom – In October 2003, I was facilitating an off-site retreat in a small central Texas town. Seeing Friday night lights above the treetops, I hopped in the car, drove a mile, paid \$3 at the gate and walked into the game at halftime. The home team, Bandera, kicked off to start the second half, and a small speedster

almost in tears when Colt left the game. He and Jordan will go a long way...whether in the NFL, business or life. They are great role models."

Life is bigger than football, of course, and no one knows how your journey will change others. Take Tsutomu Yamaguchi, who died last week at age 93. After World War II, he served as a translator for American forces and then as a junior high teacher. In recent years, he wrote books and songs about a tragedy he alone experienced – and spoke at the U.N. encouraging world leaders to ensure no one again endures.

On August 6, 1945, Yamaguchi was in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb dropped. Seriously burned, he returned to his hometown the next day. On August 9th, that city – Nagasaki – was hit. Thus, he is the only person recognized as surviving both atomic bombings. Blessings appear in many ways.

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from Burnet returned it 95 yards for a touchdown. On the next series, he took a short pass and went 80 yards untouched. The man standing next to me said, "He's going to Texas next year." I immediately called home and told my family, "I've seen the future of Longhorn football."

In the BCS Championship, that little receiver caught the two second-half touchdown passes that got Texas back in the game, capping an amazing senior season of 106 receptions. He ended his career with 31 TD catches and four kick return touchdowns. After the game, he said the entire team believed until the end UT would win. Alas, such storybook endings are reserved for Hollywood.

"Any time you lose, there are things you can look back on and wonder what could have happened. But sometimes, you just have to look back and realize how you have been blessed." ~ Jordan Shipley

That perspective comes from someone who never saw the field during his first two seasons due to injuries. This is his sixth year on campus and he turned 24 last month. He could have moved on with life long ago; yet, he didn't allow a setback to get in the way of pursuing his goals. By the way, the fathers of Colt McCoy and Jordan Shipley were college teammates. Their sons are roommates who dreamed since childhood of playing together at Texas. Blessings indeed.

Two Thumbs Up – Over the holidays, our family took in a rare movie at the theatre, seeing "The Blind Side," which stars Sandra Bullock. It's the true story of a homeless young man who grows up to become a college football star and a first-round NFL draft pick. Surprisingly, there are no cliché scenes with balls flying dramatically through the air before falling into the central character's hands for the winning touchdown as time expires. Instead, it's a nice take on the importance of seeing beyond stereotypes and loving those whose path you cross.

Life is a series of opportunities to reinvent yourself – so the key to success and happiness is a willingness to accept change and adapt to the road before you. Think about Sandra Bullock. Early in her career, she was the self-described 'action girl' ("Speed"), then the 'girl next door' ("Hope Floats"), followed by 'comedy woman' ("Miss Congeniality")...and now she's a top dramatic actress who earns \$30 million per film. She made history of her own on the football field last week when "The Blind Side" became the first movie driven solely by a female star to take in more than \$200 million domestically. Clearly, Sandra Bullock learned to grow.

Note: If this *Fast:Forward* contains too much sports for your liking, stick with me. There will be a topic in February that's sure to connect with you. Although, I might decide to write '10 things you can learn from the Super Bowl' or 'Let the Olympics unleash your mojo.'

Until next time, continued success in all things.

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