

October Think

A Winning Team

Jack Wilkie

It's finally October. It's hard to find any month on the sports calendar that has as much tradition and history as October, all thanks to the World Series. Throughout the years, teams have made their impression on sports history by completing one of the most difficult tasks in sports. There has not been a back-to-back champion since the 1998-2000 New York Yankees, so it's clear just how great a team must be to make it to the top. In the "Game Plan" article for this month and November, I'd like to take a look at what winning teams have in common and see how those concepts apply to the church.

Winning teams have good coaching. During each game, managers have numerous decisions to make with regard to matchups and giving his players a chance to succeed. However, not only does the coaching staff have to make decisions and work with the players during the game, they also have to constantly go over film and scouting reports in between games. In the church, we have to remember that we don't just encourage and teach each other on Sundays and Wednesdays—we need to be there for each other throughout the week. The Hebrew writer reminded his audience to help each other by saying, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13, NASB). Every single day we will each face decisions that can carry us away from the faith. We all have an obligation to our brethren to encourage and instruct each other in order to reach our goals of glorifying God and getting to Heaven. To do this, we need to be a family both inside the church building and when we are away from it. Consider how close you are with your church family. Do you share your struggles with brothers and sisters, or do you hide those problems because of your pride? Are you there to listen to and pray for your brother who is in sin or the sister who is facing personal trials? Are you willing to go to an erring brother according to the rules of Matthew 18, or do you talk about his missteps behind his back or let it go completely? Families are supposed to love each other,

and when we love each other, we will have no problem pushing each other toward Heaven and picking each other up when we fall. A winning church coaches each other to live for God.

Winning teams have chemistry. Teams that struggle with internal feuds, ego battles, and personality troubles don't succeed. Every sports fan has seen the veteran who takes less pay or reduced playing time in order to help his team win a championship. These players understand what the goal is and they know what it takes to achieve it. What it takes is for each player to step into the role they need to fill instead of pursuing personal glory or stats. It's no coincidence that players on championship teams often refer to their teammates as their "brothers" and "family." Where have we heard those terms before? There is no group on earth that should be closer than the church family, because the church family has the greatest factor in common among its members—the sacrifice of Christ and the salvation in His blood. Paul commanded the church in Philippi to be of the same mind, maintain the same love, remain united in spirit, and be intent on one purpose (Philippians 2:2). We have all been called to emulate the selflessness of Christ to maintain unity. When we stop thinking of ourselves and consider each other, we all grow closer together. Romans 12:3-5 tells us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to and that we should keep in mind that we are all members of the same body (Christ's). So, not only do we need to coach each other towards Heaven, we need to build this "chemistry" through unity in God's Word and not our own personal preferences. The church is not a "have it your way" organization. Either you're in step with God's plan, or you're driven by your own motives. Which will it be? Will you sacrifice what you want for church unity? A winning church has members who defer to each other out of love and selflessness.

In the November issue of *Think*, we'll take a look at two more attributes of winning teams: Winning teams have mastered the fundamentals, and winning teams know their opponents.