

ADVERSITY

By Tony Johnson

It's May, and to many students that means graduation. As such, I would like to dedicate this article to the graduating high school Seniors of the area. Congratulations on your achievement!

The skills, lessons and experiences you have gained will live with you the rest of your life. Be sure to take the time to celebrate your accomplishments Because life gets a lot tougher from now on!

A thing called adversity starts to enter your life. Adversity is defined as "a state of hardship or affliction; misfortune".

My first major brush with adversity occurred within three months of high school graduation. Up until that time everything had pretty much gone my way. Academic and athletic efforts had paid off in a scholarship to play football at the University of Illinois.

In mid August 1984, a group of rookie Illini football players arrived on the Champaign-Urbana campus. According to the Sporting News, we were the 2nd best recruiting class in the nation (second only to Notre Dame). All of us had great high school careers and lived the "hometown" football hero life.

We were pretty good or so we thought.

Three days after reporting to rookie camp, "they" showed up the upper classmen. And it's there that the adversity started.

I got by butt kicked on a pretty regular basis. I was no longer the "star" player that others feared. I was the rookie and I was playing on what was known as the "hamburger squad". We were basically the blocking and tackling dummies for the varsity team.

One day, a senior offensive guard named Rick Schulte hit me so hard I had snot bubbles coming out of places that snot bubbles aren't supposed to come out of.

And the challenges weren't just on the field, but also in the classroom. Used to straight A's, I was devastated when my first mid term report card showed nothing better than a C.

Tired, confused and morally defeated, I called home one evening to inform my parents that I was leaving the team. I was giving up the scholarship, the education, the football. My plan was to go back to Farmington and startup a business bailing hay.

(Note: there were two other rookies standing next to me at the pay phones that night having similar conversations with their parents.)

Mom and dad jumped in the old blue Chevy Impala and headed south. We talked a lot that night, and they made me understand that I needed to try to look at the future and how my decision now would have an impact. I also talked with my coaches, who gave me similar insights.

Needless to say, I elected stay. Yes, there were additional times of adversity in the coming years And there is adversity almost every week of my adult life.

But I learned two valuable lessons from that experience that I pass on to kids through the Treasure Life message.

In times of adversity:

1. Look beyond the moment – this glimpse will often yield a more optimistic view
2. Consult with those closest to you -- they have probably dealt with adversity and can offer perspectives you may not see

The ability to deal with adversity and learn from it's lessons makes us all better people

Remember, "Treasure Life ... Everyday!"



Quote to remember:

"The ability to deal with adversity and learn from it's lessons makes us all better people."

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"Treasure Life" is a positive life message created by Caterpillar manager and Peoria Pirates coach, Tony Johnson. The program encourages students to be "pirates" by filling their "treasure" chests each day with some of life's most valuable traits, values and experiences. The "Treasure Life" program has been recognized as one of the Arena Football League's best community relations program.