

Everything I ever needed to learn, I learned from football.

By Jeff Hassemer ('88)

Some say, Football is just a game. It may be just a game to some, but it really is so much more. Personally, I hold with me so many memories and lessons from my days on the practice fields of Brinkman Field and from the stadiums that we played in together. Lessons that I still hold with me to this day; memories that are as vivid to me today as when they were when I lived them (don't worry all, this isn't a glory days diatribe you are about to read)... This essay is more about what I've learned from playing football as a Greendale Panther, and the lesson's that my teammates and coaches taught me that helped shape the person that I am today.

For those of you who played the game years ago... I hope that this brings back fond memories and that you find the lessons familiar.

For those of you who play for the Panther's today... my hope is that this helps you understand that you will get out of Panther football what you put into it. Experience this game, learn from it... above all, play hard and have fun.

I personally learned a lot from my coaches and teammates...

In 7th grade, Nellie (our fireplug, some say sawed of warthog runt, of a coach) taught us about quiet confidence. How sometimes, silence and the knowledge that you will execute better than your competition on the field speaks louder than screaming and yelling before a game. This is a lesson that the guys I played with always kept with us. We knew that the louder the other team was, the more scared they were of what we were bringing to the field. Today, I compete in the rough and tumble business world of software development. My competition sometimes gets very loud and often attempts to sway a customer by talking about what my company can or can't do. When that happens, I think about "quiet confidence", and rise above the fray... I know that if I, or my team, sticks to our game plan and executes, we will always win the day.

In 8th grade, Rodney Mattrisch told us at the beginning of the year... "Every play in the playbook is designed to score a touchdown. Your execution of that play determines whether or not that is true." That statement has stuck with me through the years. It is a message about execution. People make plans, both good and bad, in their life. Success is rarely determined by a plan... it is always determined by how well someone executes the plan. As with any team, everyone doing their job to perfection is what determines success. Whether it is the lineman making the block or the back selling a fake, execution of your job in that play (or plan) will determine the success of the team. – I've never lost this lesson.

In 9th grade, I learned the lesson of flexibility. I changed positions from fullback to tailback. I needed to learn a new role and understand the game from a different angle. There are two life lessons here. The first, learn what your teammates are doing. Understanding what they do, helps you understand and perform your role better. And... you may end up doing their job someday. The second lesson was about the ability to adapt to situations and persevere. Life is about change. How you handle that change, adapt to the situation and turn that into success will determine how far you can go in life. Don't whine about change, accept it, learn from it, adapt to your new surroundings and execute. – Denny (Dennis Gorski) and Tex (Tex Frank), that life lesson took me farther than you will ever imagine.

My sophomore year, I learned a ton. One of my most vivid memories came during two-a-days. Running gassers Coach Menzel said we could go “CoCo Beach” if the entire team made it under a certain time. I remember Craig Pittman and I dragging Louie Nick the 4 laps, throwing him across the sideline and just making it for the reward. The lesson: helping your teammates is ALWAYS rewarding. The life lesson: helping others often is more rewarding for you than it is for them. Take the time to volunteer and help your community. Every coach in the Panther organization knows this is true. Thank you for your contributions.

Junior year, I played with one of the most talented teams around. We lost a game early in the season... and we learned that you don't win on talent alone. Talent is one thing, but it is heart, and the desire to win that will determine the final outcome. Heart always trumps talent. You see this lesson all of the time in sports and in life. You cannot buy a championship; you cannot take a shortcut to becoming the best at whatever it is that you do. Success takes work, desire, concentration and a drive to win.

Coach Vince Lombardi once said, “Winning is Everything.” In a lesser-known quote from the Coach, he later recanted that statement and went on to say. “Winning isn't everything. Making the effort to win is everything... The price of success is hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand.”

My senior year, really throughout my football career, I learned a fundamental truth about life. It does not matter what other people say about you or your efforts. In fact, the more success that you have, the harder your detractors will dig in. What matters is how well you execute. Execution is a direct function of concentration of each individual of a team, performing their tasks to the best of their ability.

The class of 1988 was not the most talented football team, nor the biggest, nor the fastest, nor was the team the best of anything by a lot of football standards. The critics of the team wondered if we would even win a game in the conference that year. What we did have was an ability to execute and the will to win.

Coach Gavinski told us a story after we beat West Allis Central that year. The Central coaches told him after the game that he didn't understand how Greendale was able to run the Wing T offense so much better than they did. Coach didn't respond much, but he told us what the difference was... Execution! Truly, what made the 1987 (class of 1988) team Conference Champions was our ability to execute.

Gavo, Zellie and Loeding all hammered on the fundamentals of execution. Concepts such as staying lower than your opponent, footwork, the loop block, carrying out a fake, running precise routes and so much more were hammered into our heads so much that it became second nature for our bodies to do the work. They taught us the value of each team member doing exactly what they need to do to make the team successful. They taught us that 11 men, working together there was nothing that we could not achieve. In the process, we learned our final life lesson from Greendale Panther football... People who work together will win. Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

Coach Gavo's induction to the Wisconsin Football Coaches Hall of Fame has pushed me to reconnect with my teammates. What I have found is that we have all been able to apply our lessons on the football field to achieve great success in our lives. The members of the 1987 Conference Champion Greendale Panther football team have gone on to be Lawyers (with their own practices), Presidents and Vice Presidents of major corporations, and the youngest High School Principal in Colorado State history. Many have found tremendous success in their lives and to this day, I find happiness in the success of my teammates.

I think that I speak for all of us when I say that much of our success in life comes directly from what we've learned from our coaches at Greendale. Thank you Coach Gavinski, and thank you to all of our coaches for providing us with a foundation for our personalities to achieve so much in our lives. I hope that you know that you know that you've touched our lives deeper than we can ever really express.

For Gavo, I hope that you are looking down on us from somewhere and are proud of what we have been able to achieve. I hope that you know your efforts were a huge part of our success. I can never repay you for that; I can only honor your memory by constantly working hard to achieve my goals.

You can't stop the Green Machine!!!