

Are you in or are you out?

Living in a society obsessed with athletics it is easy to miss the forest for the trees as it relates to what is meaningful for a life to be well lived. In a winning-is-everything sports culture, the media seeks to turn coaches into iconic figures whose legacies set the standards for generations to come. Problem is such legacy is a fabrication of the world of sports more than the character of its coaches.

Case in point: Joe Paterno. Finally laid to rest after 85 years and 409 victories for the Nittany Lions of Penn State that eclipsed 46 years, it is important for the powers and programs that are to overcome his vilification and turn it into vindication as it concerns the scandal he faced at the end of his career. Wall Street Journal, Friday, January 27, 2012, captured a memorial moment in the eulogizing of Joe Pa that illustrates this.

Thousands Say Goodbye to Joe Paterno as Speakers Defend His Legacy. Memorial Moment: Sue Paterno, the widow of Joe Paterno, with her son David, attends a campus gathering to honor the legendary Penn State football coach, who died Sunday of lung cancer at 85. About 12,000 people inside the school's basketball arena heard speakers defend major-college football's most successful coach, who was forced out over his handling of child-sex allegations against a former assistant. Nike chief Phil Knight said: 'This much is clear to me: If there is a villain in this tragedy, it lies in that investigation and not in Joe Paterno.'

Is this all there is? There was also a video bite on ESPN that captured the truth concerning Joe Paterno the man rather than the football legend.

One of Joe's 2011 Nittany Lions spoke concerning Joe Pa. The football player was visiting Penn State to decide if this was where he would come and play football. He told his parents not to worry he wasn't going to commit just look around. After checking out the facilities he met with Joe just before leaving campus. Joe said one sentence to him, "Well kid are you in or are you out?" He knew right then that he was in and said so. That was how this kid summed up Joe Paterno. This memorial moment expressed more to me than Joe the legend, even more than his character but touched on the essence of what his life was all about.

At the core of life and its meaning, there comes a time when it's no longer about programs or coaches, legacies or legends but it's about "Are you in or are you out?"

As ESPN panned off the kid speaking from the podium they focused on a portrait of Joe relaxed and smiling. Right behind that picture, hanging on the wall, was a crucifix with a shroud draped from it. It was then it hit me: Joe Pa before the Gates of Heaven facing the Ultimate Question: "Well Joe is you in or are you out?" The answer would not be based upon his legacy or his wins. It would not be based upon his coaching and all the lives he touched. It would be based upon his relationship with his Maker, represented by the crucifix behind Joe's picture. It's the same for each one of us: "Well, kids are you in or are you out?" The decision is yours and mine to make. I trust it is a decision Joe has made as well.

(Personal note: This is the last of my articles as I am returning to Colorado. I wish to thank all those who have read what I have written while here and may the Lord bless you in the days ahead.)

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