

Zigging and Zagging Through Sports Clichés

By Dennis Payton Knight

I had my career diagrammed perfectly, and it would only be a matter of time before I was enshrined in the hall of fame. But then I zigged when I should have zagged. I had an up and down season, rode the pine and only played sparingly. The game passed me by, I went on the trading block and got shopped around. "Coach," I grouched, "when it stops being fun, it's time to quit. Guess I better start working on the old golf game."

But then I remembered another crusty coach at dear old Lowdown High. "Coulda, woulda, shoulda!" he exploded, biting off another chew, "Get outta here and don't let that be the story of your life." He missed the spittoon wide left, but what a role model he was.

I took a good look in the mirror. "Self, what have you done for me lately?" I knew it was time for me, the plugger, the blue-collar player with mental toughness, to man-up. It was the turning point, gut check time, crunch time. I got back on the same page and set the tone of the game. You could feel the momentum swing. I started to gel, started to make some noise, bought into the system, turned the corner, raised the bar, got over the hump, got off the schneid, added a new wrinkle, got into game shape, worked my tail off, built some chemistry, and played with confidence.

I hit my stride, showed flashes of brilliance and field awareness, did the little things I needed to win, formed a nucleus, busted my butt, became multi-faceted, installed a swarming defense and a high-octane offense, and loved myself like family. I started to get the respect I deserved. You had to love my athleticism, you had to fear my physicality and you had to admire my courage.

It was a Cinderella story, a dream season. I played with a chip on my shoulder and became a one-man team of destiny. I was a changed athlete on a mission, had great durability, and got a new lease on life. I gave them many different looks and showed a lot of weapons.

You could feel the electricity as I scratched and clawed and got myself within striking distance. I riveted the crowd, brought them to their feet and got them into it. The place was bedlam, pandemonium even. I dodged some bullets, made my own breaks, earned a few grey hairs, and changed the entire complexion of the game. I played with a sense of urgency and went at it like a heavyweight. It was a whole new ballgame.

I've got a bad wheel, nowadays, but when the annals are written, put me down as an ambassador of the sport, an icon in this town, a winner in the bigger game of life, and one of the all-time great marbles shooters. My low center of gravity helped, but I played for keeps.