

F3 Leadership Devotional 4.17.19 – Courage, Perseverance

In 2017-2018, the Virginia men's basketball team went 31-2 during the regular season, won the regular season ACC champ, the ACC tourney, and were selected as the overall No. 1 seed in the NCAA tourney.

Then, they made history as the first #1 seed (and again, the overall #1 seed) to lose to a #16 seed. By 20.

After the game, Coach Tony Bennett: "If you play the game and step into the arena, this stuff can happen. That's life. You enjoy the good times, and you gotta be able to take the bad times. When you step into the arena, the consequences can be historic losses, tough losses, or great wins, and you have to deal with it. Adulation, praise, that comes. And then on the other side, blame, disappointment... those come. But they can't define you."

He received a letter from a friend – it was a copy of a letter Hall of Fame Coach Clair Bee wrote to Bob Knight after his undefeated team lost in the Elite Eight in 1975.

"Take a deep breath, get your bearings, set your sights on even greater heights and start all over again," Bee began. "All a frustrated young man can expect to see as he looks over his shoulder is a desolate cemetery where his broken dreams lie buried in defeat."

"A leader is strengthened by the blow that cuts him down. Now he knows the rough spots that pit the road and the quicksand that lies so innocently nearby. He knows because he has fought his way up that path of agony — almost to the very top."

But finally, a leader "grasps the new challenge with eager hands and races for the starting line. He will be back!"

The following season in 1976, Indiana went 32-0, remaining men's Division I basketball's last undefeated national champion.

So back to Virginia.

Before this season, Tony Bennett, described as "grounded by faith, inspired by success, and humbled by failure,"

said "I think if you know you can handle ... the worst thing that can happen and still find joy in the game, at some point you realize, 'Yeah, it stings, but it's OK and I made it through.' That's worth everything, and it allows you to go after it harder."

"You have to be freed up to know that because there are no guarantees in this game or in this life. I try not to place everything on winning . . . but I'm always hopeful."

This season, UVA went 35-2 during the regular season, with both losses to No. 1 Duke. They won a share of the ACC regular season title. Things were looking up.

Then they lost in their first game in the ACC tournament.

Then, the NCAA Tourney – the first round. The game started, and UVA got down by 14.

This year, the difference started in the locker room at halftime. Instead of “panic and yelling,” it was “don’t leave anything in this locker room. Don’t panic, but don’t you dare leave anything on the floor.”

UVA went on to win that game by 15.

And their next 5 games, ultimately winning the championship and earning an incredible redemption story.

“Their historic loss will always be mentioned as a footnote because of what they accomplished 1 year and 23 days later.”

Teddy Roosevelt, in 1910:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

Tony Bennett’s 5 pillars for his team: Humility, Passion, Unity, Servanthood, Thankfulness