

ART OF THE UPSET

Bruce Reynolds



ADVOCATE HOUSE SARASOTA FLORIDA

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FOREWORD

I would like to state clearly from the start that this book is a result of a lifetime of interaction with thousands of people. I have benefited from books, lectures, conferences, sermons, and a host of personal experiences and observations. When I speak of success, I have tried to be careful; it is all too easy to fall into the “I” syndrome, but it is clear to me that any success that I have ever had has not been done alone. I have benefited from nurturing and supportive parents, family, friends, teachers, colleagues, coaches, and players. *Art of the Upset* is a compilation of these influences. Where I have written a reference to myself and used the “I” word, please mentally substitute the word “we.”

I also want to make clear for the record that I have had the good fortune to lose big games as well as win them. I say “good fortune” because it was in the losses that I gained the most knowledge on how to win. This book, however, is not just about how to win the big games. It is more about how to develop a program and a philosophy that make the upsets possible. The mark of a successful program is consistency, but consistency cannot be maintained if you can’t win

the games you're supposed to win, and win some of those program-defining games that all coaches dream of pulling off – the upset.

I was a head football coach for 27 years; therefore, I have derived most of my illustrations from my chosen sport. However, the philosophy of the book applies to all sports and, I believe, to any chosen profession. I have also applied the methods and philosophy described in this book to my 31-year career as a social studies teacher; my 4-year career as the Coordinator of Community Relations for the Colonial School District; my 17 years as an Assistant Athletic Director; my 18-year career as a State of Delaware Representative and chairman of the House Education Committee, and my 35-plus-year career as a banquet emcee and motivational speaker. The lessons learned in all of these endeavors are reflected in this book. My goal is to share with you the core philosophy that will enable you to pull off the big upset and to offer something in this book that will be of help to you and your career. If you are a coach, try some of the things that my staff and I have learned through trial and error. Who knows? One idea learned here just might be the catalyst for that long-desired and dreamed-of upset of your archrival.

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The quarterback scrambles from the fierce rush, time running out. He gathers himself and heaves a desperation pass toward the streaking end. The defenders close in and simultaneously leap high in the air with the receiver. Hands stretch out and grab for the ball. The gun sounds to end the game as the players fall to the ground. Who caught the ball? Did we win . . . ?

As painful as it is sometimes, nothing compares to the emotional highs and lows of sports. Life at times meanders along with very little that truly excites us, but there are those times in sports when our emotions are jolted into high gear. Nothing moves the player, coach or fan more than the upset. It is that indescribable thrill that engulfs you when no one thinks you can do something and you do it. It becomes that one time when sacrifice, hard work, and belief in self and team collide into an explosion of high emotion. It is a phenomenon when time itself seems to momentarily stand still and one feels most alive. For the coach, player, or die-hard fan, it is a time when you put your passion, your talent, your whole being on the line for all to witness. When that long pass with seconds to go is sailing through the air and your heart is in your throat, nothing else exists.

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It's a moment of truth that will end in great exultation or bitter disappointment. Some can't stand living on the edge like that. But there is something in all of us that lives for that one-in-a-million time when the ball is caught with no time on the clock and your team wins! How I loved and lived for those moments! But what I enjoyed even more was the process that made that upset possible.

How does a coach instill in his players that "come from behind" approach to competition? You might think that calling that last-minute play was a stroke of genius on the part of the coach. Maybe it was! But really, the process of winning that game had begun months before, even seasons before the game was played. The victory was the result of a coaching mind-set I like to call the "art of the upset."

WHERE UPSETS BEGIN

Upsets truly begin in the mind. Your eyes and ears will deceive you. When you rationally look at a bigger, stronger opponent, you don't think that you could beat them. If you listen to the writers, the fans, and their take on your chances, you certainly don't think that you could possibly win. That's why the image of the upset must begin in your mind. Your mind can defy the rational. It can block the visual and auditory reality. Your mind's eye can be programmed to see a victory that others cannot see.

There is a blueprint that, if followed, can give you the edge you need to win. If David had let his eyes rule the day, there would be no story of a slain Goliath. He was too big, too strong, and too well-armored. But David had faith. In his mind's eye he could win. As a matter of fact, his confidence was so strong he did not believe that he could lose! Players and coaches have to take a leap of faith in order to win when the opposition is formidable. To re-word a Napoleon Hill axiom: You have to think it and believe it before you can achieve it.

James Allen, in his book *As a Man Thinketh*, confirms my own belief in this principle. He says, "Every thought-seed sown or allowed

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to fall into the mind, and to take root there, produces its own, blossoming sooner or later into act, and bearing its own fruitage of opportunity and circumstance. Good thoughts bear good fruit, bad thoughts bad fruit.” That is probably a take-off on a quote from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” So be careful of what thoughts you put in your head and plant in the minds of your players!

BE CAREFUL

Be careful of your thoughts
For thoughts become your word.
Be careful of your words
For your words become your actions.
Be careful of your actions
For your actions become your habits.
Be careful of your habits
For your habits become your character.
Be careful of your character
For your character becomes your destiny.
(Author Unknown)

James Allen also contends, “Man is buffeted by circumstance as long as he believes himself to be the creature of outside conditions.” His point is that circumstances come out of thought. If you can program yourself to believe in your self, your team, and your goal, you can and will create the climate for success. You will create the intended result by sheer will power. You can therefore

change negative circumstances into positive ones. It is all centered in your thoughts. For me, as location is to real estate, thought is to victory. For James Allen, the idea that circumstances grow out of thought has its proof with anyone who has tried this approach. He states that the person “will have noticed that the alteration in his circumstances has been in exact ratio with his altered mental condition.”

Here is a little exercise that demonstrates how your change of mental focus can change what you see. Hold out your hand and look at it closely. Your eyes see the hand clearly and everything else in the distance is blurry and unclear. Now, change your focus to a distant object. That object automatically comes into focus and your hand becomes blurred and out of focus. You can, at will, go back and forth between the two. The analogy is simple. You determine at will what you see and therefore what you think. It’s all about what you choose to focus on. If you focus on the negative reality of your circumstances, you won’t see the positive. You won’t see the upset. To pull off the upset, you have to change the focus and see only the positive.

Sometimes you have to create the positives in your imagination. The bottom line is that to avoid seeing only the external reality of your situation, you have to create your own internal reality. Ralph S. Marston, Jr. in *The Daily Motivator to Go*, relates, “The mind thinks about 60,000 thoughts a day.” So just by “sheer volume” you can see that your thoughts will have a huge impact on your life. He goes on to say, “Success is an inside job.” You can think positive thoughts, or you can think negative and limiting ones. You actually have a choice. Why do you think it is so hard to get a team who is used to losing to change its ways? They are mired in a negative-thinking mindset. Marston gives a great illustration to show this point. He talks about

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how juvenile elephants are trained. Baby elephants are tethered to a four-foot wooden stake driven into the ground. They repeatedly try to pull away from the stake, but to no avail. After hundreds of attempts they simply stop trying. This carries over into their adult life as well. How can you explain that 6 to 8-ton elephants cannot pull out 4-foot long wooden stakes? The explanation is simple: they stopped trying. In their mind they “know” that they cannot get free, so they don’t even try. That’s why a comparatively puny trainer can control a 12,000 – pound (or more) powerhouse. His lesson for us is, “When you believe in what you’re doing, and believe that you can do it, you’ll find a way to make it happen.”

You need to get your team to see that, in Marston’s words, “The reality of the outside world is only a mirror. A mirror that confirms and gives evidence to the vision that you have on the inside.” Your job is to get your team to create their own internal vision – their own positive internal reality. Remember, external facts (i.e., the other team is bigger, faster, stronger, better, undefeated, etc.) may be the external reality. But they must mentally ignore that and concentrate on their own created, positive-outcome vision. Their “reality” must tell them that if they work hard, never quit, execute with precision, and play inspired team ball, they will win the game. The poet Maya Angelou wrote, “If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities.” We followed up that thought with the adage, “The harder we work the luckier we get!” Remember, upsets do happen and that is where they begin – right in your own mind!