

Steelers Victory Gives Fans Hope By Deborah Molchan, MS



Who among us can deny our step wasn't buoyant and our mood infused with optimism after the Steelers beat the Baltimore Ravens.

The anticipation of the Pittsburgh Steelers winning their sixth super bowl crown fueled us with visions of success. We woke up Monday morning feeling good about our connection with the Black and Gold. The after glow temporarily suspended us from our focus on our current economic woes and the sub-zero temperatures.

The psychological and financial boost from a winning team is well documented. An Xavier University study claims NFL fans who live in the area of a winning team are more prosperous than fans who don't. Authors of the study economist Michael Davis and psychologist Christian End point to psychological literature which suggests that winning fans work harder and spend more money. Lifted by the Steelers success we will work, shop and take bigger risks.

However, there is more to be gained than financial boon. Sports heroes assist us to join together in a collective spirit of hope and focus on a mutual goal. Sports psychologist Richard Lustberg, PhD, points out that there is no universal hero, "Subjectively, the hero is created within you. Hero's are created as a great way to escape from whatever you need to escape from, and they can supply for you what you need."

The day after the Steelers victory the Black and Gold supplied a room full of swimmers with vision. I had the pleasure of facilitating a mental training session for a local swim team that morning. The team was facing a significant competitor in a swim meet the next day. The anxiety about facing such a rival was evident in the concerns voiced about losing to the competition. I looked at the room of swimmers and shouted, "Do you think the Steelers said they were going to lose before the game yesterday?" A resounding no echoed back to greet me. The Black and Gold gave these athletes hope. I quickly asked each swimmer to identify what plays of the game were their favorite. Passion infused voices that earlier were flat with defeat. I wanted to call Mike

Tomlin up personally and thank him and the team for assisting me with reaching young athletes. The Steelers were not physically present; however their athletic efforts were replayed in the minds of athletes and fans everywhere.

Dr. John Murray, sports psychologist developed the first scoring system in sports that standardizes overall team performance in a football game with just one number. This scoring system also captures important mental factors such as pressure management, reduction of mental errors and focused execution. The *Mental Performance Index* clearly demonstrates the importance of mental factors in sports. No doubt his scoring system accurately predicted the Steelers victory as mental skills of focus, mental toughness, perseverance and team cohesiveness were evident in the game. I am confident each player was primed to apply positive thinking and visualization to beat the Ravens.

It has been said by psychologist that who we identify with as our hero's say something about each one of us.

Although I am a fan of each player for the Steelers, it is no secret that Troy Polamalu is my favorite. A colleague asked me what it was about Troy

Polamalu that seemed to generate so many female fans. He teasingly asked me if it was his long hair. Perhaps the non-conformist hair speaks to Troy Polamalu's self actualized self, and therefore his strength in character, however, I doubt very much this is the factor. It is his superior athletic talent combined with his spiritual beliefs, his humble presentation and his devotion to his family. Besides, who didn't yell with a passionate cheer when he scored a final touchdown with a forty yard interception return. I can still replay the elation!

Thank you Black and Gold. Your fans send you off with images of a winning a sixth crown.

Deborah Sharp Molchan is a licensed psychologist in Uniontown. The telephone number is 724-425-0223. You may email your questions to info@sportpsychologyservicesofpa.com. Or fax questions to 724-425-0331.