An Evolution of Thoughts

Theories, whether scientific or not, are merely ideas and opinions. They are not FACT! A fact is that which can be proven over and over again, even through different circumstances. For instance, the sun always rises in the east and sets in the west in a pattern that may only change slightly depending on where you are on the planet. It may not rise directly to the east or set in a straight line to the west because of the changing locations of the rotation of earth, but the general fact remains true, regardless.

A theory is much different; every opinion a human can think about is little more than a theory, and opinions change according to the thoughts, wants, and experiences of the human involved, without regard for their individual or collective intelligence.

These theories often come to light in sporting contests, and spectators often insert their own theories into the outcomes of these games, particularly when their favorite loses. Should the coach have allowed the field goal kicker one more chance at the end of the game for the win, even though he had missed the last two times? Is a running play mandated at the goal line instead of a pass? Who takes the final shot in a tied-up basketball game? Is a pinch-hitter always the key to a win? And the list goes on and on.

These are known as ‘what if’’ theories, and as such are merely wishful thinking. Strategy and tactics are important in these physical meetings between teams, but the problem is always that they rely not just on the ability and drive of one team but are offset by the ability and drive of the other team.

Too much emphasis is usually loaded on the shoulders and performance of a single player in

sports, when the real culprit may indeed be the coach (or parent or teacher). In these ‘what if’’ moments it is really difficult to lay the blame. My experiences in Vietnam taught me a lot about these circumstances.

Strategy and tactics are often thought to be the same thing. Definitions of these two words show a marked difference though. Strategy describes the ultimate goals to be achieved while tactics are employing the available means to be accomplished. That is a fine line to draw, perhaps, but having an overall plan is more important while the tactics are merely the way to get to a positive result.

Both rely to a certain extent on being able to present an unsolvable solution to the opposition. If what your team is doing works, then changing it is not only unnecessary but can be very damaging. This results in a loss of momentum and drive and takes away the confidence of your players.

Even coaches at the professional level do not understand this well. Second-guessers abound once the game has finished unsatisfactorily. Coaches depend on theoretical plans, never quite being 100% sure of what will transpire on any given play. A pitcher, batting about .068, may hit a bases loaded home run; a weak-armed quarterback may deliver a pinpoint pass for a touchdown; a Shaq-type free throw shooter may hit the last six of seven from the line.

My most stirring memory was at a high school girl’s basketball game years ago. Gallup vs. Farmington was closely played through three quarters as the Scorpions’ defense controlled the inside tenaciously against the controlled ball offense of Gallup. The only time Farmington relaxed was when post Dani Aretino rotated to the outside. She was more than tough inside, but coach Lomasney only wanted his hotter-shooting guards to shoot from three-point range. Even her parents were vocally in agreement with the coach, encouraging her, over and over, to pass the ball, even when she had several good looks at the basket. Farmington really wasn’t guarding her closely outside of the line, leaving the tall, quick center plenty of time to line up the shot.

Meanwhile the clock was ticking away and the Scorpions were still ahead by one point. Finally Dani took the action into her own hands, set her feet and fired the ball in a high arc towards the basket. Swoosh! Gallup went up by two and the rest of the game belonged to the Bengals as they finished with an eight-point win.

Did the coach, parents, and most of the fans know best? Not in this case, although her dad just shakes his head when the memory is brought up to him today.

There was no ‘what if’ in this case, no regrets, and everything was positive. Unfortunately, the results are not always the same. That is what makes sports exciting.

The weather is getting colder, a sure sign of seasonal change. That’s good though, as we’ll all move inside now where we can keep warm. See you in the bleachers!