

The Cheering Section

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Have you ever noticed the difference a cheering section makes? Sometime ago I saw a college basketball game between two teams—one clearly considered the underdog in the match, the other a heavy favorite. The two teams had met each other earlier in season play, and the underdog had been soundly whipped. Everyone expected this particular game to be the same. Fan support was about evenly divided between the two teams until halftime, when an incident on the floor seemed to turn the crowd against the team that had been highly favored to win. Therefore, when the underdog team came onto the floor to begin the second half, the crowd was with them. Over 15,000 fans were on their feet. Every basket from the team brought a deafening roar. The noise was almost unbearable. Well, as you might have guessed, the underdog won that game and went into the finals.

A cheering section can make a difference in life. As you watch the world series, or the pro-football playoffs, or the NBA basketball finals, you can almost be assured that the home team will do well. Brazil has a soccer team that almost never loses when it is playing at home. The reason? Maracana Stadium in Brazil holds over 220,000 fans who scream their support at every game. And sports' franchises are bought and sold according to the degree of home-town support.

Wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of cheering section when you're feeling a little like an underdog in life, to feel as though it really matters to somebody whether you win or lose, whether you shine in victory or retreat in life to lick your wounds?

I'd like to bear you my solemn witness that each one of us has a cheering section, both seen and unseen. There are those pulling for us to succeed. We may sometimes doubt it, but it is true nevertheless. There are those we see: parents, children, brothers, sisters, relatives, teachers, friends. But there are also those who are unseen who care and are rooting for us: heavenly parents, loved ones who have gone before us, those who are yet to come. They want us to succeed. Bob Richards tells a great story about a young man who learned this truth. Let me share it with you in his own words:

“A fine football team coached by Lou Little was on their way to the conference championship. One last game. Now, Lou had a boy on his squad who couldn't quite make the team for four straight years. Three days before the big game, Lou was given a telegram to give to this boy saying that his father had just died. The

boy looked at the telegram sadly and then said, ‘Coach, I’ll be back for Saturday’s game.’ Well, the morning of the game he came up to his coach and said, ‘Lou, I’m back and I want you to put me in this game. I know I haven’t made the first team yet, but let me in for this kick-off. I’ll prove to you that I’m worthy of it.’ Well, Lou could see he was emotionally disturbed and he made all kinds of excuses, but finally he thought, ‘Well, he can’t do much harm on the kick-off. I’ll put the boy in.’

“When the kick-off came, the opposing quarterback took the ball on the goal line, moved up, and on the seven-yard line was tackled. The boy who’d never made the team had dropped him in his tracks. On the next play Lou left the boy in. It was a good move. He made the next tackle and the next tackle. You couldn’t move him out of there. In fact, he made practically every tackle that day for a terrific record in downfield blocking. He was the reason why Columbia won the championship. Afterwards, all the guys were pounding him on the back. When they were all done, Lou Little went up to the boy and said, ‘Son, I don’t understand it. Today you were an all-American. I’ve never seen you play like this in four straight years. What—what happened?’ And the boy looked up at his coach and he said, ‘Coach, you knew my dad died, didn’t you?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I handed you the telegram.’ The boy said, ‘You knew he was blind, didn’t you?’ Lou answered, ‘Yes, I’ve seen you walk him around the campus many times.’ Then the boy said, ‘Coach, today is the first football game my dad ever saw me play’” (“Life’s Higher Goals,” *Guideposts*, Sept. 1965).

There *are* those who continue to care, whether here or on the other side of this earthly veil. Of that I am sure! Even when you feel all alone, there are those who are rooting for you.

I remember a friend of mine who went to high school and college, then married and had a small family. One day a little-known acquaintance of his came up to him and said, “I know you don’t know me very well, but I am one of your greatest fans. I have always watched you and have tried to pattern my life after yours. I just thought you might like to know.”

There are people who care, even when we don’t know it. I wonder how many parents pray silently for their kids? How many sons and daughters must silently pull for their mom or dad? In how many crises do friends silently cheer for each other? I am convinced that they are almost innumerable. Of course, there’s only one thing better than rooting silently: that’s rooting silently *and* vocally; to let those around us know we really care.

But there are those who feel that they don’t get much support, silent or otherwise. To you in particular I want to give my assurance that there are those who cheer from on high. God created us and loves us. More than anything else, he desires our righteous success now and our safe return to him later. When we feel no other support, we can count on him. To David of old and to us he said, “Wait on the Lord: Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart” (Ps. 27:14).

To all of us who are trying to do the right things he has again promised: “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88).

And finally, if we can just remember those great promises, we will eventually be able to say, with Moses: “The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God” (Ex. 15:2). When all else fails, he will not.

All of us have parents, friends, or other loved ones who have passed away. They too exercise faith in our behalf. Do parents stop caring because they die? Are friends no longer friends at death? Does caring stop at the grave? I want you to know it does not. Life is eternal.

And what of those yet unborn? Do they have an interest in your success? Your unborn children watch you from above with great interest and concern. They want the best for themselves and for you. You can be sure of it. Probably millions of spirits yet to be born cheer loudly for the millions of us who prepare the way for them. I believe it could be no other way.

My message to you is, hopefully, clear. Every person in this life has a cheering section. It is composed of those around us, those who have passed over to the other side, and those who are yet to come.

Above all, I bear you my witness that there is a Father in Heaven who put you here and wants you back. His support alone will do it. May we draw close to him so we can know it. May we then give it to those around us who need it, especially our own families. May the Spirit give you the same assurance that I have that our Father lives, that he loves us, and that he, together with many others, can bring us safely home.