

## ***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**Life-lessons from Super Bowl 44.** Along with most of the planet (from what I can tell), I was rooting for the New Orleans Saints in the recent Super Bowl 44. In reflecting on the game—played right up the street from us—there are a number of life-lessons that leap out at us from Saints’ coach Sean Payton’s decision-making throughout the game.

Clearly, from early on, the Saints sent a message that their game plan was *not* a risk-free plan. Risk-taking in life is obviously a double-edged sword. When we take risks, sometimes we fail. At the same time, however, the risk-free life seldom takes us to the mountain top of contentment, joy and deep personal fulfillment.

**Playing to win vs. playing *not to lose*.** In football, as in life, there’s a profound difference between playing to win and playing *not to lose*. In the Super Bowl, neither team was playing *not to lose*. But the New Orleans took *playing not to lose* to a new level.

The Saints’ *onside kick* to open the second half was a play never seen before in the history of NFL (National Football League) playoff football.

For those indifferent to football (to your credit, you’re saving a lot of time), an *onside kick* is a high-risk play that is virtually always used as an act of desperation without much time left in the game. Essentially, you’re trying to get the ball back (by recovering what they call the *onside kick*) so your team has a chance to score again and hopefully tie or win the game.

This risky play, which was executed to perfection (i.e., New Orleans recovered their own kick), totally changed the tone of the game in favor of the Saints. Instantly, it seemed, the Saints were playing with a level of raised confidence and expectation.

Critics will accurately point out: but it could have failed. They have a point. It could have, as most *onside* kicks do. But, the larger point: it didn’t; it succeeded and the entire trajectory of the game changed as a consequence.

For sure, this feature of the Saints’ strategy was not *plan A*. It was a backup plan, a *plan B*. But, the point is: there was a *plan B*, a backup plan. And not only had they practiced the plan in pre-Super Bowl practice, but they were not afraid to put it in play at a decisive moment in the game.

So often in life, we just go through the motions of one predictable disappointment (under-achievement) after another. We might not look at it as failure, because it’s what we’ve always done. And in reflecting on it afterwards, we might offer up the usual knee-jerk, hackneyed response. Something like, *we just didn’t quite have it today*. Or, *we played hard, gave it all we had; that’s just the way the ball bounces*.

All of which is true. But how do we know we *didn't have it* if we never got outside of the box and tried a higher-risk strategy? How do we know *that's just the way the ball bounces* if we never gave ourselves the chance for the ball to bounce differently?

**Going for it.** Calculated risks—measured risks—will sometimes fail. But other times (as in Super Bowl 44) they can take us to places we've never been before. Like the victory of a lifetime; or a more fulfilling career or relationship.

It's important in life to be willing to risk failure. In baseball, a good hitter fails seven out of ten times. In basketball, even the greatest shooters miss some of their free throws and almost half their shots. Even the most accomplished violinist and pianist sound an imperfect note now and then.

*C'est la vie!* In the big picture of things, it's not about perfection. We're not machines; we're human beings. Stones are perfect. Gravity is perfect. But where's the passion and the exultant joy in a stone or in gravity?

Sean Payton and his Saints might have won Super Bowl 44 without the risky *onside* kick to start the second half. But again, they might not have. And if they would have lost without ever risking defeat (the worst kind of loss), their sense of themselves and their possibilities would be less than what it might have been.

Life is for the living—for those worried less about failing than about never having lived. When we're willing to risk possible failure, possible losing, our spirit, along with our expectation and hope, is lifted to new heights of possibility and fulfillment.