

Optimism, Philly-Style

By Bruce A. Love

Some have called us the worst sports fans ANYWHERE! You see, I was born in Philadelphia, grew up in the Philly “burbs,” and attended college in the city. These factors qualify me as a Philly fan. The fact that I have lived on the western side of Pennsylvania for four years means little when it comes to team allegiances. My brother, who hasn’t lived in Pennsylvania in 25 years, is also a certifiable Philly fan! When you are born in Philly, you are a Philly Phan Phorever!

Philadelphia fans are often misunderstood by those who have grown up in other parts of the country. Contrary to popular perceptions, Philadelphians may be the most optimistic, persistent, and persevering people anywhere. We have to be. Our teams have not brought home a championship in 21 years. Don’t get me wrong. We love our teams, and we vocalize our support for them when they are doing what we want them to do. The challenge arises when our teams do not comply with our high expectations. We vocalize at those times too.

Recently, our teams have found new ways to dramatically end their seasons. Consider the Eagles impressive come-from-behind “fourth and forever” play this past January in which the Eagle’s quarterback completed a 26-yard desperation pass with mere seconds left in the game. That ultimately enabled the team to advance to the final round of the NFC championship. With home field advantage, Philadelphia fans knew they were Super Bowl bound! But, it was not to be. The Panthers shattered those dreams and denied the Eagles a NFC championship title for the third year in a row.

In Hockey, the Flyers also found a way to avoid the Stanley Cup Finals this year by losing the last game of a Conference Championship series. This was the year when all the planets seemed to be aligned for the Flyers to have a shot at Philadelphia’s first Cup in 29 years! This, too, was not to be.

In May, the city found a new athlete in which to place its hopes. For the first time, a Philly favorite actually had the support of sports fans nationwide. But like the disappointments experienced by other teams from this city, Smarty Jones came up short in the final stretch at the Belmont, and we lost our hope of seeing a “blue-collar” local win the first Triple Crown in 26 years.

I have come to the conclusion that it is no mere coincidence that the city’s most famous silver screen athlete is a South Philly boxer who raises the hopes and expectations of every moviegoer in the theater, only to lose his championship bout in dramatic fashion at the end of the movie. But Philadelphians persevere through the tough times. They know that, at the start of each game, series, or season, they are cheering for the team that is going to go all the way.

Philadelphia has a long rich history of persistent, persevering, optimism. After they experienced defeat at the Battle of Germantown, and a long harsh winter at Valley Forge, American troops emerged from their experiences stronger, and with more resolve to face their opposition with determination. These attitudes are qualities of every American citizen who has faced recessions, unemployment, and rising gas prices, and has never given up hope for a better future. We know that the challenges we face are momentary setbacks, and that we will learn from our mistakes and prepare for future successes.

This year, as Eagles fans prepare for Super Bowl victory, they draw upon their inherent optimistic spirit. This year it is time for their team to “win one for the Gipper!”

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