

WIN LIFE

*in
your*

™

FOLLOW THE PATH OF CHAMPIONS

**LEARN FROM THE
VILLANOVA WILDCATS**

MICHAEL LONDON – VILLANOVA '74



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WIN *in your* LIFE™

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VILLANOVA WILDCATS**

MICHAEL LONDON

Win in Your Life: Follow the Path of Champions;
Learn from the Villanova Wildcats

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To Mom, with love.

—*Michael*

My Deepest Appreciation to Everyone who
Helped Make *Win in Your Life* a Reality.

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Dedication

This book was inspired by a place that has impacted my entire life—my alma mater, Villanova University in Villanova, Pennsylvania. One of my goals in this book is to honor everyone who has played a role in making Villanova one of the best educational institutions and greatest service communities in the entire world.

I could hardly contain my excitement as I watched Coach Jay Wright lead our Villanova Wildcats on their epic run to the 2016 NCAA Men's Basketball Championship. It was a magical season—both for the team, and for me. I wish to celebrate their remarkable achievement by shining a light on the values that players and coaches exhibited on their path to ultimate victory. It is my hope that all who read this book will take those values to heart, apply them to their own lives and, ultimately, experience the same outcome—winning.

In April of 2016, I experienced the thrill of a lifetime—I was able to witness, in person, my Villanova Wildcats defeat the North Carolina Tar Heels for the national title. The post-game celebration, both in the arena and later in the team hotel, was an absolute dream.

To my delight, I got to relive that dream repeatedly, thanks to the extensive post-game media coverage. I couldn't let it go. A lifelong Wildcats fan, I immersed myself in every piece of commentary I could find. Out of this obsession, I learned much more about the Villanova team, its players, its staff, and myself. The result of this fascinating journey is *Win in Your Life*.

The Villanova story was a revelation. In my research about the 2016 team, I rediscovered the life lessons Villanova University imparted to me decades ago. As I came to realize while writing this book, I have guided my whole life with those very lessons. And here is the best part—my outcome has been the same as that of the Wildcats. I have been winning in my life.

Now, my goal is to share those life lessons with others—an ethic that comes right out of the Villanova playbook.

Whether they come from the saints of old, from one of America's founding fathers, or from the Wildcats of Villanova Basketball, the life lessons in this book are all about pursuing excellence—the true path to winning.

Sports fan or not, this book has something for you, and something for you to share with others.

It is with much love and appreciation that I dedicate this book to all who have contributed to the incredible Villanova story, culture, and legacy.

—*Michael London, Class of '74*


*“When the twilight shadows gather
Out upon the Campus green,
When the blue and purple night
Comes stealing on the scene,
Loyal heirs of Villanova
Sing a hymn of praise,
To our dear old ALMA MATER
And our College days.
Villanova, Villanova,
When we leave your shelt’ring walls,
We shall leave an echo ringing
Through your treasured halls.”*

*“We will leave an echo ringing
In the silent night,
While our memories are singing
Of our Blue and White.
When the last big game is over
And the last roll call is heard,
When the oldest pedagogue
Has had his final word,
We shall come to ALMA MATER
In our dreams again,
With a prayer for Villanova
And a sweet amen.”*

The Adventure Begins

HOUSTON HAS A PIECE OF MY HEART. IF YOU BLEED VILLANOVA BLUE AND WHITE, YOU SHOULD ALSO HAVE A ROBUST FONDNESS FOR HOUSTON. IT IS NAMED FOR THE LEGENDARY GENERAL SAM HOUSTON, A FORMER TENNESSEE GOVERNOR WHO BECAME THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS IN 1836.

Today, Houston is the fourth most populous city in the United States. Its official nickname is “Space City,” which makes sense, since it has been home to what is now known as NASA’s Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center since 1961. This is where the Mission Control Center and Flight Operations—as in “Houston, we have a problem!”—are located.



Built in 1887, St. Thomas of Villanova Church is a Roman Catholic church on the campus of Villanova University.

Houston is also where the Villanova Wildcats were involved in one of the greatest, most exhilarating Final Four games in NCAA Tournament history. It was like March Madness at its maddest—and it ultimately turned out to be a three-point victory for Villanova. It was a game that came down to the final seconds and that featured a decisive shot by a player whose name is now legend in Villanova Basketball lore.

All of us have experienced memorable moments that left an indelible mark, events about which years or decades later we can say, “I remember where I was and what I was doing when [fill in the blank].” For some, it is the JFK assassination on November 22, 1963; for others, it is Neil Armstrong in 1969 becoming the first man to walk on the moon. It could be the US Olympic hockey team’s “Miracle on Ice” victory over the Soviets in 1980, or the *Challenger* disaster in 1986, or the tragedy of 9/11 that we all shared together that fateful day in 2001. What’s yours?

One of mine was my school’s last-second Final Four victory in Houston, not just for how the game ended (with the outcome in doubt right down to the final buzzer) but for the immediate aftermath. Villanova fans were in wild celebration, both at the arena in Houston and back on campus near Philadelphia. I was in the middle of something I knew instantaneously would be the wildest experience of my life. I didn’t have to run to it, the celebration came to me, and I was awlirl in a collective jolt of victorious pandemonium. There were moments when my feet could not feel the ground.

As great as it was to witness the denouement of this historic basketball game as the final seconds ticked away, for me it was the feeling of being a part of the postgame experience that has stayed with me the longest. Nothing can substitute for the ecstasy of being squeezed shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, with screaming throngs of like-minded Wildcats fans, rejoicing in victory achieved on the biggest stage in college basketball. There were high fives all around with anyone and everyone—and screaming and yelling that was music to my ears.

This was the spring of 1971. I was less than two months away from completing my freshman year at Villanova; I was celebrating with friends, and, as it turns out, thousands of others just like me. Students poured out onto and across the university campus, hugging and kissing and laughing and jumping around in groups of two and eight and twelve. It was pure pandemonium—euphoria on steroids. That was forty-five years ago.

It was an adrenaline rush, and it left me craving more. Within a couple of days, I knew it could have been even better in two respects: one, if I had been in Houston at the Astrodome watching the game in person and been a part of that celebration, and two, if it had been the national championship game itself.

That memorable Final Four game in 1971 was Villanova’s double-overtime, 92–89 victory over Western Kentucky in a national semi-final game at the Houston Astrodome. All-American six-foot-eight forward Howard Porter hit the shot that sent the game into a second overtime on his way to scoring twenty-two points. Two days later, in the national championship, the Wildcats made a good game of it before ultimately losing to the John Wooden-coached UCLA Bruins, 68–62, during their unprecedented and still-unmatched seven-year run of consecutive national titles.

One interesting addendum to the celebratory aftermath of the victory over Western Kentucky: later that same night, or it might have been early the next morning, a large group of Villanova students, braving the cold, marched twelve miles to the University of Pennsylvania campus. They were chanting “*Let’s Go Nova!*” along the way and “*Ninety to forty-seven!*” once they got there. About a week earlier, Villanova had beaten Penn by that 90–47 score in the NCAA Tournament East Regional final. Until that loss, Penn had been undefeated, having beaten Villanova twice previously that year. Rubbing it in to a rival school a little bit is an okay thing in sports. Happens all the time.

As excited as I had been during and after the victory over Western Kentucky, the loss to UCLA left me with a tangible sense of unfulfilled destiny. I longed for the day that Villanova would come back and complete the mission, with me in attendance. It would take forty-five years, and another trip to Houston, of all places, to get to that proverbial mountaintop. Such an occurrence would be the ultimate what-goes-around-comes-around moment in my life.

What I felt for those forty-five intervening years prior to April 2016, I describe as a low-grade addiction. It was a nearly insatiable longing for another opportunity to relive and improve on what I had experienced in March 1971, except this next time it would have to be accompanied by my witnessing a national title victory. Villanova Coach Rollie Massimino's Wildcats, huge underdogs according to most pundits, would win the national title in 1985. They played a near-perfect game to beat the powerful Georgetown Hoyas, but that wasn't enough for me. I wasn't there.

A Little Background to Set the Stage

I arrived at Villanova in the fall of 1970, a freshman out of Calvert Hall College, a Christian Brothers high school in Baltimore, Maryland. Well, sort of. I didn't actually graduate from Calvert Hall. About the time I was to start my senior year, my dad moved our family to Norwalk, Connecticut. He really had no choice if he wanted to advance on his chosen career path.

As much as I didn't want to move and had to deal with some resentment toward my dad, his profession had intrigued me. It was all about airplanes, rockets, and space travel. I was fascinated by flight, whether it was in the Earth's atmosphere or out in space.

Up until the big move to Norwalk, Dad had worked for The Martin Company, which was a manufacturer of various aircraft used by the

US Department of Defense during World War II and into the 1950s and 1960s. Martin was also involved with the guided missile, space exploration, and space utilization industries.

Dad's involvement with airplanes and space travel excited me as a young kid, especially when Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the lunar surface. I can still remember staring at the moon at night wondering how in the world was it possible for man to have flown that far. I'm sure Dad's answer to that question would have been, "Just about anything is possible, if you set your mind to it."

Applying to and enrolling at Villanova was hardly a stretch for me. Coming out of a Catholic high school to attend a great Catholic university was pretty much the norm. My choice of where to go to college was very much influenced by the move to Norwalk. There, I spent my senior year in a small school where I was "the new kid." I was regarded disapprovingly by many students as if I were a visitor from another planet. ("Houston, we have another problem.") To them I had a strange Southern accent from having grown up way down yonder in "Merryland." My fondest memory of the time was escaping into television favorites, *Star Trek* and *Lost in Space*.

A major Villanova appeal for me was that attending school near Philadelphia would put me just an hour-plus motorcycle jaunt away from my old stomping grounds in Baltimore County. That was fine with me. If I wanted to see any of my old high school pals from Baltimore, it would be a much easier journey and certainly better received by my peers than going back to Norwalk.

When my father drove me to Villanova for the first day of college registration, he found a parking spot right across from the Villanova Field House. At that time, the site was used for home basketball games. It was also that day's destination for students arriving to register for classes.

Sitting in the car, Dad didn't give me a big speech about the wrinkles of passing from teen angst into manhood, but he did give me a couple of handy pieces of wisdom. One was to get "deeply involved in the community," the other to "find a way to make some money—both for now and for when you graduate." He was thinking of his and Mom's bank account as well as mine. I was the oldest of five kids, and my four sisters lining up behind me in descending order of age "deserved the right to an education as well," I was told.

Even then, back before a college education seemingly cost more than a shuttle round trip to the moon, Villanova tuition was hefty. Dad added, "If you want to have a social life while you're here, you'd better figure out how to make some money."

Fortunately, I was able to do both—and then some. This is where my story becomes an interlocking dynamic of "oh-my-God" moments and fortuitous connections. Some might call it a succession of coincidences spanning years, decades, and even centuries. At the center of my little universe, these connections tie together Villanova's philosophy of service and humility, a basketball coach's development of a core values strategy, and my personal life experience.

My self-appointed attachment to Villanova and the Wildcats began in my very first semester. I was at first unknowingly—but certainly ever since willingly—along for an incredible journey. I've been gladly swept up into the orbit around the Villanova philosophy and the school's basketball program. I would not truly understand the ramifications of this adventure for decades, until after Coach Jay Wright led the Villanova men's basketball team to the NCAA Championship. It was then I discovered that the values I learned as a student at Villanova, as later exemplified by Coach Jay Wright's fervent endorsement of core values, had come to define my own life, personally and professionally. It will take some doing for me to explain all this and what it can mean for you, but I'm more than happy to take you along for the ride.

Much of what I cover in this book has been extrapolated from bits, pieces, hints, and insights that Coach Wright, in interviews and speeches over the years, has handed out like pieces of a puzzle. These beg for consolidation and application. In his interviews, he has left behind clues to what makes him and the Villanova Basketball program tick. The Wright way is about winning basketball games and championships as a by-product of doing a lot of things the right way. It is with enthusiastic diligence that I have picked up those clues while following along behind Wright, piecing and packaging them together in this book.

In a sense, Wright has been an open book, not concerned about guarding the recipes for any of his secret sauces. He is not selfish about what he has learned and is never reluctant to give credit to others who have mentored him, such as Rollie Massimino. Wright served as an assistant coach for five years at Villanova and two more at Nevada–Las Vegas (UNLV) under Massimino. In his own way, Wright is paying it forward. All we have to do is pay attention.

At this point, I am reminded of an adage that says, "In every adversity there are the seeds of an equal or greater opportunity." You will hear me say that at least once or twice more, as it addresses a facet of positive psychology reflected in Wright's basketball program and Villanova University in general.

On that day when Dad dropped me off at school, I registered for my first-semester classes and then headed over to my dorm. I carried in my hands several takeaway trinkets that were made available to students during registration at the Field House. My first impulse, a fleeting one, was to throw them all away.

Curious, I sat on my dorm room bed inside Austin Hall and started to look through these free "gifts." They included a variety of advertising premium items from various local businesses, including a bank and a pizza joint, all designed to entice students to check out these places and maybe part with their money.

My “seeds of an equal or greater opportunity” were about to find a fertile field. Following my family’s move from Baltimore, I had gathered lots of opportunity seeds while facing adversities in my awful senior year at the little school in Connecticut. That year at my new school had been miserable, mostly from a social perspective. It also had its downside academically, or so it seemed at the time. For instance, I had to take a mechanical drawing course because all the other electives offered (a very limited selection) were classes I had already taken at Calvert Hall in Maryland. Despite my nonexistent interest in drawing, let alone mechanical drawing, I was soon using a T-square and triangle to subdivide a given area into various size rectangles and squares. Tedious at best. *I’ll never use this ‘talent’ in real life*, I thought.

That was about to change as I sat on my Austin Hall dorm room bed, seriously considering that maybe I should go buy a pizza, a thought that might have never entered my mind were it not for the ad in plain sight. I remembered what my dad had said: “Find a way to make some money.” Okay, why not sell some ads of my own? If I could come up with some useful item different from all the rest, I might be in business. I can’t remember what other ideas popped into my head, but within a few days or weeks I came up with the notion of a desk blotter—a large sheet of card stock with advertisements and sports schedules printed on them. Perhaps my fellow students could use such a large desk covering to work on while reducing the creation of messy marks, cuts, and stains known to populate college dorm desktops.

That mechanical drawing class I was so nonchalant about? Turns out it involved a skill that would now enable me to divide up a desk blotter into various size squares. With that, I could sell ads at varying price points. As an aside, years later, I would use the same skill set to create templates for carrying photos and text that allowed me to single-handedly self-publish a quarterly magazine that has averaged about eighty pages in size.

By the time I graduated from Villanova, I was publishing desk blotters at three different schools. This endeavor took me to Columbia, Missouri, where I partnered in 1973 with two other men to build the very first Shakespeare’s Pizza restaurant, which is still today “the pizza place” at the University of Missouri. The menu was printed on a desk blotter, and it offered fast, free delivery from Shakespeare’s Pizza. Nearly thirty thousand students arrived in the fall of 1973. After the desk blotters were distributed campus-wide, the phone didn’t stop ringing.



Austin Hall / Housing and Admissions Office.

All of this happened because I hung in there with that mechanical drawing class long enough to develop a skill. With it, I gained the ability to recognize a marketing and advertising opportunity that otherwise would probably have been hidden from my view. In that regard, I am proud to say I share an experience very similar to one that Apple founder Steve Jobs experienced that he spoke about while giving a now-famous commencement address at Stanford University. One of the anecdotes Jobs shared was about the time he took a calligraphy class in college. Baffled at first about what he was doing there, Jobs learned how to gracefully form fancy-looking letters on paper. He never forgot that class, using what he had learned as the basis for developing multiple type fonts of varying sizes that were later introduced with his first Macintosh computer. The Mac effectively

launched the era of desktop publishing and gave me the opportunity to be an independent magazine publisher.

Essentially, I became an entrepreneur while at Villanova. The teachers encouraged creativity. In many courses, students weren't required to take a final test if they could create a project that demonstrated a strong understanding of the material. That option stirred something inside of me—I might not go so far as to call it creative genius, but it was along the lines of taking the innovative spirit seriously. These special projects influenced my life in many positive ways. Perhaps most important, they resulted in me taking up photojournalism, a skill that has served me and others over my entire life.

Honestly, when I enrolled at Villanova I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do with my life. This all changed after my freshman year. At Villanova, we were required to take seven courses in either philosophy or religion, all of which were taught with the underlying theme of “service to mankind.” This combination of courses, along with my interactions with other students, faculty, and Augustinian priests, truly made an impact on me. Exposure to the service-oriented principles and philosophies of Villanova is why I became a psychology major—the reason I wanted to make an impact. Villanova taught me to excel and be of service to others in whatever professional field I pursued after college. Although I didn't recognize it at the time, this was to be my life's underlying motivation.

Remember, too, how my dad, when he dropped me off my freshman year, had also mentioned something about being deeply involved with the community? That's one of the wonderful things about my four years at Villanova; not only was I able to cobble together a treasure chest of skills and knowledge that would help me navigate the world, but I was able to get involved with a community of other like-minded people rather quickly and easily.

One of the very first people I would meet as a freshman was Bob Genuario. Besides being a great guy with a good sense of humor, Bob was also a cheerleader. That meant he had his own ready-made orbit of friends that, of course, included the female cheerleaders. Keep in mind that the Villanova student body at that time was made up of about 90 percent males. That works out to be about “too many” guys for every gal on campus.

My early social life at Villanova revolved pretty much around athletics. We went to the football games, and the parties were great. But the basketball games were the best, mostly because Villanova was a powerhouse in basketball and at that time barely a blip on the national football scene. The basketball games were unbelievably exciting. Being a friend to the cheerleaders, I often sat close to the team's bench and all the action on the court.

There were two Villanova Basketball teams at the time, freshman and varsity. When we played a Big Five opponent (Temple, Saint Joseph's, Penn, and La Salle are the other four), the freshman teams would often play one another, followed by the varsity.

It was always a crescendo of unbelievable joy to watch our Wildcats compete game after game, especially in that Final Four season of 1970–71. That's when we had the starting five of Howard Porter, Chris Ford, Hank Siemiontkowski (who, by the way, scored thirty-one points in that Final Four game), Tom Inglesby, and Clarence Smith. Each of them averaged thirteen or more points a game that season. It was an unbelievably wonderful time in my life, although it would be a one-shot deal for me in terms of NCAA Tournaments while a student at Villanova. I graduated in 1974, with the Wildcats never making it back to the big dance in those last three years. My burning desire to again live through what I had experienced in the aftermath of that thrilling double-overtime victory over Western Kentucky would not be satiated for another four and a half decades.

A Quick Trip from Villanova's Campus in 1974 to Houston in 2016

After graduation, I had a life to live and an expectation to live up to. This expectation was manifested in my wish to be a champion for my community and was motivated by my service-oriented training at Villanova. It was something with which my father would have agreed. The trick was finding out how to merge that community-oriented desire with the need to go out and earn a living after college.

This would not be easy. It was the seventies, a turbulent time in America. The Vietnam War was still raging in Southeast Asia. Antiwar protests, some deadly, were being held across the United States. Within three months of my graduating from Villanova, President Richard Nixon resigned from office in disgrace. His involvement in the Watergate scandal finally caught up with him. Gas prices were about to go through the roof, leading to gas rationing and long lines at the pump. By decade's end, fifty Americans were being held hostage in Iran, and President Jimmy Carter was delivering his famous "crisis of confidence" speech. This became known as his "malaise" speech and was perceived by many as having chastised Americans instead of inspiring them. To say the least, it was not an easy time to start a career.

Over the next twenty years, after I left Villanova with my bachelor's degree in psychology in hand, I embarked on a life's journey that mixed travel and adventure with business opportunities. These endeavors included jobs in the auto industry, solar energy, and sales and management training. Eventually, I ended up with a career in publishing—mixed liberally with travel and adventure—that continues to this day.

My first big postgraduate adventure was a trip to California and parts of the West Coast with five high school friends. Many college-age

(and older) Americans aspire to live the Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, experience of just jumping into a car, a van, a jeep, or whatever, and hitting the road. Destinations were not entirely known. Well, we did exactly that. Our group called ourselves "Six Pack to Go" after the number in our group and our favorite beverage. We were looking to see what was out in the world, with no preconceived notions heavy on our minds.

This was several years before the launch of ESPN, so it wasn't like I was sacrificing a lot of chances to see my Wildcats play. Most of the time, their games weren't being televised anyway, anywhere, at any time. Finding a sports bar, even if they had existed back then, wouldn't have done any good, either. There was no cable TV, no Monday night or Wednesday night Big East versus Big Ten show-downs—the Big East wasn't even in existence yet.

My buddies and I customized a couple of vans, grabbed whatever cash we could scrounge up, and hit the road. From Maryland, we went up into Canada, headed west, crossed the Rockies (yes, they extend north into Canada), and kept on going to the Vancouver Islands. We then went back to the Canadian Rockies, headed south, met a friend from Villanova at Yellowstone, and dropped down into Colorado. We moved on to Las Vegas, went southwest to San Diego and across the border into Mexico before we pulled a U-turn. Then we headed back to the good ol' USA, drove up the coast of California and across the Golden Gate Bridge before we ran out of money and gas. We were in Marin County, California, on the other side of the channel connecting San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. Who knows—in all that driving, somewhere along the line, we might have even passed Forrest Gump on one of his really long runs. Whether or not Forrest was out there, we had a lot of really nice days—nearly four months of them.

So there we were, six guys in their early twenties in the mid-1970s, settled into Northern California, right across from San Francisco. Me?

I was still imbued with that Villanovan directive about service to mankind. As it turned out, Marin County was the epicenter of what would become known as the Human Potential Movement. Adherents focus on trying to improve their lives and enhance the community in which they live. This approach was later integrated into the field of psychology.

Originally, psychology was about dealing with people with problems. In 1998, a new branch of psychology opened up, and it was known as positive psychology, which is designed to help ordinary people become better. Its seeds can be found in the Human Potential Movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The Human Potential Movement seminars I attended inspired me to try, again, to be a psychologist. While at Villanova, I had tried counseling as a volunteer in a home for emotionally disturbed children, but I found it wasn't right for me. This time I enrolled in the University of California's Humanistic Psychology program, but by the end of the first year, I realized counseling was not my lot in life. Then came one of those "aha!" moments that set me on a different course.

One day when I got home, I walked in the door to find an episode of *One Day at a Time*, with actress Mackenzie Phillips, on TV. I'll spare you the details of the episode, except to say that at one point one of the characters reached behind a bar and pulled out the last remaining bottle of booze from behind the counter—the rest had been stolen. The camera zooms in to show it as a bottle of wine: Christian Brothers, just like the high school I had gone to back in Baltimore. It was a sign, telling me to pay attention! As the episode ended, a news flash said that Governor Jerry Brown had just announced that any California resident installing a solar energy system on his or her home would get a 55 percent discount in the form of a tax credit.

Given the energy crisis the country was facing, the new field of solar energy looked like a great way to earn a living and be of service to the community. I was inspired to get involved. So I did—and very

successfully. I soon became recognized as a leader in the field of solar energy and was a keynote speaker at an early industry convention. My biggest accomplishment was helping to change public policy, widening the geographic area eligible for alternative energy incentives. Unfortunately, in the early eighties, both federal and state governments got rid of the solar energy tax credits. I, and my industry, was virtually out of business.

At that point, I went back into the automobile business. I had worked briefly selling cars between the time graduating from Villanova and going on that extended road trip with my friends. It seemed like good timing. Car dealers were offering huge rebates and zero-interest loans to move a glut of inventory. I was making \$10,000 or more a month—equivalent to more than \$20,000 in 2017 dollars, but the nice paychecks couldn't offset my lack of interest in making car sales my career. While I used friendly, courteous service to set myself apart from others in the job, it was just not enough of a service to my community to hold my interest. My plan was to stay with it just long enough to find another career.

There had to be something better, and it didn't take me too long to find. Surprisingly, it was in the automotive business. General Motors was about to launch its Saturn automobile project. CEO Roger Smith had gathered ninety-nine of the brightest people in the world to analyze a variety of industries and put together a best-practices plan to reinvent the auto industry. This would give the Saturn program a completely fresh start, unencumbered by unions, contracts, convoluted management, and trench warfare. Smith's vision was an American-made car that would rival Japanese-manufactured cars in terms of gas mileage and exceed their Asian counterparts in performance and durability.

I liked what I saw about GM and Saturn. Based on what they were doing, I wanted to join the Saturn team. This was because I could see a community service component to this new venture. I would be

helping our country, even if in a very small way, to compete in its biggest and most important industry. The survival of the American car industry, and by extension the American economy, was at stake at the time. What better way to use my business skills and be of community service?

In addition to a new car, built a whole new way, Saturn had also developed a novel way to sell their revolutionary product. They devised a plan to move beyond the old ways of selling cars with slick salesmen spouting BS. No more nods, winks, and clammy handshakes. They created what was called the “Saturn Culture and Management Training” based on a set of core values specific to Saturn. It was to be taught to a gathering of car people in advance of the launch of Saturn automobiles.

It’s a small world after all. I was invited to the very first Saturn training program where the new “Saturn Way” was introduced to auto industry management. Surprisingly, the Saturn core values were very similar to concepts I learned at Villanova and during my continuing education in the Human Potential Movement. At the event, my understanding of the core values being taught resulted in my acting as an interpreter between the Saturn trainers and the auto industry members in attendance. This resulted in my being selected as the primary person responsible for introducing the “Saturn Way” to the employees of Saturn dealerships from the Golden Gate Bridge south to San Jose. That region was right on the “front lines” where rival Japanese cars were landing at West Coast ports for distribution throughout the United States.

It was a good thing while it lasted, which wasn’t long. GM’s Smith left the scene, and those who took his place refused to fund a second generation of American-made Saturn cars. They decided instead to slap Saturn emblems on German Opel automobiles and import second-generation “Saturns” from Europe instead of building them in America. Saturn dealerships soon disappeared. Yet, Saturn did leave a lasting

legacy. Their “new way” of treating people set record levels of customer satisfaction as measured by the standard industry survey system.

After leaving Saturn, I got a master’s degree in organizational management with a specialty in total quality management (TQM) for the service industry. I eventually left California to return to my family’s home, then located in St. Louis. A short time later, I visited Branson, Missouri, a country music haven known as the “*Live Music Show Capital of the World.*”

Home at last. I’ve been in Branson for the last twenty-three years. I publish a travel industry magazine that serves tour operators in the United States and Canada, instrumental in bringing tens of thousands of tourists to town. In a number of other ways, I have been immersed in performing a variety of community service innovations. This includes launching a publicity event that generated millions of dollars’ worth of free publicity for the Branson community.

What I had missed most during those nearly twenty years on the West Coast was Villanova Basketball. For much of my first decade in California, I had to travel a good distance to find a public establishment with ESPN cable access. Sadly, and to my great frustration, even when Villanova TV coverage was scheduled, it was often preempted to cover a local team.

One bright spot while I was in California was getting to see Coach Rollie Massimino’s Villanova team upset Georgetown in the 1985 NCAA Tournament title game. I watched it in the bedroom at a friend’s house, because that was the only TV he and his wife had. As it turned out, I had no one with whom to celebrate the win. The couple had gotten into an argument and then departed for parts unknown. That 1985 victory was sweet, but it reignited that burning desire of mine left over from 1971. Wanting to be there in person and to celebrate a national championship with friends, it was a pretty empty feeling to be there all alone.

For the past twenty years, I have had the opportunity to spend my winters in China and Southeast Asia. As hard as it was for me to watch Villanova games while I was in California, it was far more difficult in the Orient. There are satellite dishes that bring sports coverage into distant pubs, but what you get are mostly European soccer games. No matter how hard I tried to get one of those satellites to pick up a Villanova Basketball game, it was often an exercise in futility. Fighting a spaghetti of incompatible wiring and cables, worldwide time zone differences, and the nearly insurmountable wall of communication with Asian bartenders at 5 a.m., I never had much luck. Even when I'd finally manage to find a Villanova game, reception was usually horrible, or the connection would be suddenly lost entirely, often at a critical moment in the game. Trying for two decades to watch a Villanova game while in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and so on, was a true challenge to my otherwise usually positive attitude.

Then came the move of televised Villanova games to Fox Sports One with nationwide access across the United States through its affiliation with Fox. That, plus the release of a magical product (magical to me, anyway) called Slingbox, allowed me to use my home TV to record every Villanova game. Even when on the other side of the world, as long as I had an Internet connection, I could watch the games at any time of day. Suddenly my winters in Southeast Asia became significantly more pleasurable. I haven't missed a game in several years. Villanova Basketball was back on my radar, and in a sense, I was back in its orbit!

I would always return from my trips to Southeast Asia, where I did a lot of off-the-beaten-path travel, just in time for the NCAA Tournament. That's when I would call my cheerleader friend from Villanova, Bob Genuario, to get caught up on what was going on with the 'Cats. We would exchange our respective analysis of what was about to transpire in the tournament. Bob was the one who got

me involved in this adrenaline addiction called Villanova Basketball. Now both of us were following the Wildcats very closely—even me, the world traveler, thanks to my Slingbox.

When I arrived back in Branson in the spring of 2014, just in time to watch the tournament, I called Bob and said, "Hey, these guys are looking pretty good."

He said, "Yes, I think they're going to win the NCAA Tournament next year [2015]."

I said, "You know, I think they'll need one more year of maturation, but let's go when they get to the Final Four."

As we now know, Villanova didn't get to the Final Four in 2015. They lost in the first weekend of the tournament for the fifth time in six years, and in 2012, they didn't even make the tournament, finishing with a dismal record of 13–19.

In 2016, two years after my phone conversation with Bob, I returned from Southeast Asia as late as I could to still publish my magazine on time. The plan was to go to the NCAA games as soon as my magazine was off to the press. I didn't get it done in time for the Sweet 16 game. I didn't miss much as Villanova easily defeated Miami by eighteen points to set up an Elite Eight game against No. 1 South Regional seed Kansas, to be played in Louisville, Kentucky.

On Friday night I finished the magazine at midnight. At 12:01 a.m., I was online to see if I could buy a ticket for the Villanova-Kansas game later the same day. I found a ticket for what was listed as a third-row seat, but that ended up being in the first row for fans because the first two rows were for media. So I was at the foul line, in the first row of fan seating for the Elite Eight game against Kansas. Before the game, I was standing by my seat, and just a few feet away

from me were the guys I'd been watching on TV via the Internet for the past two years. My heroes were just feet away. It was unbelievable, as was the game. Villanova won, 64–59, thanks to making the game a defensive “street fight,” holding the Jayhawks’ prolific scorer Perry Ellis to just four points total.

I almost didn't make it to that game. As soon as I secured my StubHub game ticket online, after midnight, I immediately checked to see what flights would get me from Springfield, Missouri, to Louisville in time. Only one flight would work: a 7 a.m. flight, and I needed to be there at least an hour early. That meant leaving my house at five o'clock in the morning, only to find out when I got to the airport there was a flight delay due to some sort of mechanical problem with the plane.

When I got to the gate, I could see other passengers waiting there, several giving the American Airlines gate attendant a very hard time—as if the delay were her fault! It got so bad that airport security was called, and they took one completely unruly person away. When I got to the gate, I told the attendant she had done an incredibly good job of handling that situation and that she should be proud of herself. She thanked me and told me to have a good day. Smiling, I told her, “I plan to have a good *night* because I am headed to Louisville to watch my Villanova Wildcats *crush* the Kansas Jayhawks.” I said it loud. Most of the passengers around me were also from Missouri, a rival state to Kansas. A rousing applause ensued.

Then I was sitting on the plane, which was still not taking off. I could see the pilot and the mechanic shaking their heads, looking at all these blinking red lights. Meanwhile, some of the unruly people were still being unruly. It was horrible, and I was embarrassed for humanity. A moment later I saw that gate attendant stepping into the cabin to whisper something to the flight attendant, who in turn walked down the aisle, stopped beside me, and whispered in my ear, “Don't worry, sir. She's made arrangements for you to have a different connection so you won't miss your game.” Until then, I had given up

the idea of being there in time to watch the start of the contest, and I was worried that I might not get there at all. Thanks, American!

I made it to Louisville just in time. It was an exciting win for us, but once again I felt somewhat alone in the celebration. I didn't know anyone there, and everybody else seemed to be with friends. I talked to a few people, but it wasn't the same as being there with my own friends or family. Sharing something like that with somebody you know is what it's all about. In any event, Villanova was now headed back to the Final Four for the first time since 2009.

The next morning I decided to go back to St. Louis so I could watch the national semifinal game with my family, including two nephews, one of whom I'm in business with and the other of whom is my godson. I wanted to share the finals with people I loved.

As we sat to watch the semifinal game against Oklahoma, I told my nephews, “*When we win this game, I'm going to buy tickets for you both to go see the national championship game with me.*” Victory was hardly certain as Oklahoma had defeated Villanova during the regular season, 78–55. That was the Wildcats' worst of its five losses for the season. Now, in the second half of the NCAA semifinal game, Villanova was routing Oklahoma. I used the big lead to jump online and buy tickets to the



Final Four Championship Tickets.

championship game. We ended up with three seats in the twenty-fifth row that were directly behind the Villanova team's bench.

Two days later, we flew to Houston, picked up our tickets, went to the team hotel, and then headed out to the game. Going up the seemingly endless ramp at NRG Stadium, I looked over and saw the neighboring Astrodome. Suddenly, it dawned on me that I was looking at the same site as the 1971 Final Four. This was when the whole odyssey really came together for me. It was the culmination of a forty-five-year yearning and journey, and all that needed to happen was for Villanova to beat North Carolina and once again become national champions. I was there with loved ones, and everything had been put in place. "Houston, this moment is heavenly!"



Author with Nephews at NRG Stadium.

My heart was pounding. My dream was coming true. Maybe.



St. Thomas of Villanova Giving Alms to the Poor
by Bartolomé-Esteban Murillo, c. 1678, Oil on Canvas.

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

CHAPTER 2.

Historical Context

ASK A VILLANOVA BASKETBALL PLAYER AFTER A VICTORY WHAT THE KEY WAS TO WINNING THE GAME, AND USUALLY THE RESPONSE WILL INCLUDE SOME VARIATION OF THE FAMILIAR PHRASE, “WE JUST PLAYED VILLANOVA BASKETBALL.”

Picture a sports reporter covering a Wildcats game and in a postgame interview asking a player, “What was discussed during halftime that allowed you to turn things around in the second half and come back and win?”

“We just told ourselves we had to get back to playing Villanova Basketball. So we did.”

And after a loss, a rare occurrence in recent years: “We just didn’t play Villanova Basketball.”

Villanova Basketball isn’t just what takes place on a basketball court. The term is not a reference solely to the sport of the same name. Basketball is a game played using a round, brown ball that gets bounced on a wooden floor thousands of times, thrown through orange hoops eighteen inches in diameter and ten feet off the floor. It has sixty-five hundred sets of eyes glued to its whereabouts at the Villanova Pavilion as it makes its way up and down, over and back, and from one side to the other, on a court that measures ninety-four feet by fifty feet. All that by itself is not Villanova Basketball.

Villanova Basketball is based on the rich traditions, winning principles, and ethical values that have been passed down from one player to the next, one class to the next, and one coach to the next, since the first team took to the hardwoods in 1920. Its unique style is a reflection of the centuries-old philosophy upon which Villanova University was founded. The teachings of two Irish Augustinian friars from Saint Augustine’s Church in Philadelphia permeate the campus today, as they have since 1842.

According to Villanova University’s official website (upon which much of the information in this chapter is based) Villanova was named after Thomas Garcia, better known as Saint Thomas of Villanova. As a renowned sixteenth-century lecturer and professor of philosophy, Thomas was enthusiastically received by audiences for his clarity and conviction. Many of his students and colleagues praised him for his friendliness and helpfulness.¹

Thomas, the son of a miller, was born in 1486 in Fuenllana, a village not far from Villanova de los Infantes in Castile, Spain. He was ordained a priest in 1520 and worked his way up in the Augustinian order. He was a well-educated man of many skills, including scholarship, oratory, mediation, and administration. While admired

by many, he was also detested by some of his peers. His staunch determination to see church leaders devote themselves to living their lives according to the Beatitudes was manifested in the blistering attacks he made against his fellow bishops. In the process, he stamped himself as a reformer.

Thomas was also known as “the father of the poor” for his selfless work in establishing social programs to benefit those in need. His legacy of service to those less fortunate included building boarding schools for young men of limited means. He also established dowries for girls from poor families, providing them with the means to someday be married with dignity. As a priest and archbishop, Thomas was adamant in chiding the Church, persisting in his stated belief that it should share its material resources with those most in need.

In addition to the boarding schools and dowries, he fed the hungry through a soup kitchen in the bishop’s palace, and for the homeless, he made a place to sleep. In keeping with his values, he matched his actions with his words often giving the poor virtually all of his clothing.

A model of austerity and humility, Thomas once sold the straw mattress on which he slept to give the money to the poor. He was also frugal; for years he wore the same habit that had been given him in the novitiate, sewing it himself as need be to make any repairs.



Saint Thomas was known as “father of the poor.”



San Agustín by Antonio Rodríguez, c. 1600's, Oil on Canvas
Saint Augustine is considered one of the greatest figures
in the history of the Christian Church.

While preaching a sermon he gave on Advent, Thomas said, “Rejoice, then, you poor people; shout for joy, you needy ones; because even if the world holds you in contempt, you are highly valued by your Lord God and the angels.”

If Thomas represented the feisty yet compassionate spirit that the two Augustinian founders of Villanova wished to bestow on the school, Saint Augustine of Hippo was their guiding inspiration. Augustine lived and died more than a thousand years before Thomas was born. His legacy isn't so much about philosophy or theology. It is about a dynamic of people living together in community, united in mind and heart, with every heart restless in the committed search for wisdom.

As he would openly admit, Augustine was no saint in his early life. He was eager to make a name for himself in the Roman Empire's world of academia, which he accomplished while in his twenties. By the time he was thirty, he was basking in the ways of pleasure with a number of women and living it up in the ways of the world.

Even though Augustine was materially successful, he had a restless heart. He felt this worldly life was not his destiny. While reading an account of Saint Antony of the Desert, Augustine had his own long-awaited spiritual epiphany. He turned his back on marriage, rhetoric, and teaching, devoting his life wholly to God. This devotion included a decision to live a life of celibacy and sacrifice. About a year after Augustine was baptized, his mother and son both passed away, leaving him in solitude. After establishing the Garden Monastery in Hippo (what is now modern-day Algeria), he lived out the rest of his life in Africa.

Alone and aging, Augustine immersed himself more than ever in God's teachings. What he found was a desire to commit to a life of integrity, strong moral character, and selflessness. To try anything else at this stage of his life would have been empty and unfulfilling. Instead, he lived his last forty-plus years embracing the principles of

truth, unity, love, and dedicated service to others. He spent every possible moment for the rest of his life sharing these truths with others. These principles still work today for anyone who is willing to embrace and live by them. They remain a central part of what defines Villanova University in the twenty-first century and were a part of Saint Augustine's very being until his passing in the fifth century, AD 430. As the patron saint of the Augustinian Order, he is also remembered as the patron saint of brewers, printers, theologians, the alleviation of sore eyes, and a number of cities of Catholic dioceses.

I have other connections to Villanova in addition to my degree. I'm essentially a printer and have been known to enjoy the brewer's gifts.

After purchasing approximately 200 acres from the Belle-Air Estate in Radnor Township outside Philadelphia, the Order of Saint Augustine friars founded Villanova in 1842. They soon faced financial hardship when, in 1844, Saint Augustine's Church in Philadelphia was burned to the ground. In what were known as the Nativist Riots, anti-immigrant mobs attacked Irish-American homes as well as Roman Catholic churches. The bloody violence was part of a wave of riots that had besieged other American cities starting in the 1830s.²

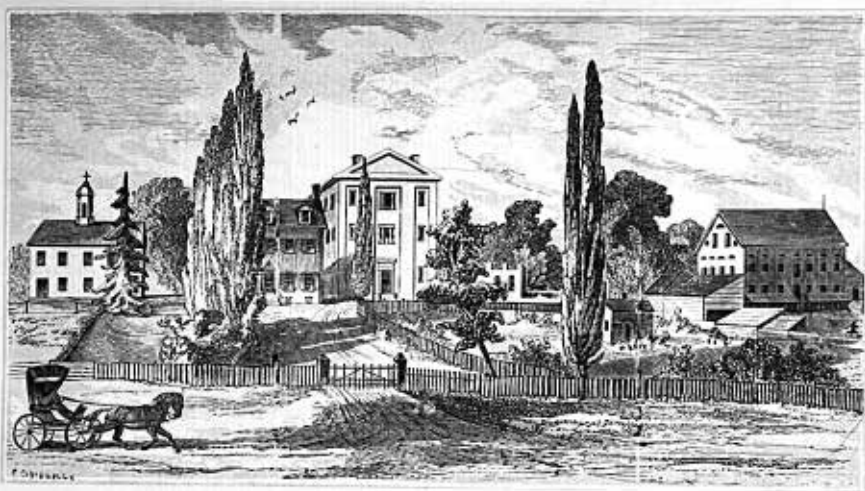
The local militia eventually subdued and halted the riots, which were seen at the time as the manifestation of nativists' use of xenophobia for political gain. The destruction of Saint Augustine's Church forced the Augustinians to close down Villanova in February 1845. Determined to make the young college a long-term success, they reopened a year later, and the first class graduated in 1847.

Originally called the "Augustinian College of Villanova," the founders sought to provide students with a foundation of principles they knew to be essential to real and lasting success—the principles of integrity, sound morals, and selfless service.

Today, the mission statement says:

Villanova University is a Catholic Augustinian community of higher education, committed to excellence and distinction in the discovery, dissemination, and application of knowledge. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the University is grounded in the wisdom of the Catholic intellectual tradition and advances a deeper understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. Villanova emphasizes and celebrates the liberal arts and sciences as foundational to all academic programs. The University community welcomes and respects members of all faiths who seek to nurture a concern for the common good and who share an enthusiasm for the challenge of responsible and productive citizenship in order to build a just and peaceful world.³

One hundred and seventy-five years after the graduation of its first class, Villanova University is now a private coed school. With a student body nearly fifty-fifty male to female, it is ranked among the top fifty colleges and universities in the country by *US News and World Report*. As of 2017, it had an undergraduate enrollment of about sixty-five hundred and a total student population of more than ten thousand, taking into account its graduate programs, such as those in the Villanova School of Business and the School of Law.



View of Villanova from Lancaster Pike as it appeared in 1849. (From an engraving by C. G. Hookey) The twin spired University Chapel occupies this spot today.

With a serene, beautifully appointed campus of 260 acres, Villanova sits twelve miles from downtown Philadelphia in the suburb of Radnor Township. Villanova bears a spirit of excellence that remains in keeping with the ideals espoused by Saint Augustine of Hippo and emulated centuries later by school namesake, Saint Thomas of Villanova.

The school's athletics program embodies Villanova's spirit of excellence. As of 2016–17, Villanova athletics comprised twenty-four varsity sports. More than five hundred student-athletes compete and strive to model the founding principles of the school while achieving success, only in part measured by victory. This is demonstrated by Men's Basketball Coach Jay Wright's firmly held belief that his team's ultimate goal is not to win a national championship. In the spring of 2016, Philadelphia Eagles head coach, Doug Pederson, asked Wright to share his insights about the championship atmosphere at Villanova—the one that allowed the Wildcats to win the 2016 national title.

“Our goal wasn't to win a championship,” Wright said. “Our goal was to be pure and committed to each other in the process. If the result is

a championship, great, but first we've got to be true to playing hard with great effort and playing for each other, being intelligent players... That was really what our goals were, and then the championship was a result of that.”²⁴

Note that through the end of the 2016 school year, Villanova student-athletes had earned an average GPA of 3.0 or higher for twenty-six consecutive semesters. Over the years, the school has produced twenty NCAA team national championships and one hundred conference titles. The school has also produced nearly sixty Olympians who have participated in every Summer Olympics since 1948.⁵

The Villanova Athletics Department emphasizes academic achievement. The Villanova men's basketball program is proud that for over four decades, every player who has spent four years in the program has earned his degree.

Villanova's Athletics Department, headed by Director of Athletics Mark Jackson, has its own mission statement:

Villanova University enjoys a long and visible history in intercollegiate athletics. Athletic success has been achieved without compromising academic standards or goals. The academic and personal development of every student athlete remains the primary concern of the University and of the Department of Athletics. Educational experiences in the classroom are complemented by those in athletics, which promote discipline, teamwork, leadership, and good sportsmanship.

Ultimately all these programs and support are seen as a means of developing the total person: intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and physically.⁶

The school not only has a mission statement for its athletics program, it also brandishes a vision that lays out six core values: excellence, integrity, sportsmanship, community, opportunity, and service. “*In striving to achieve these goals,*” the vision statement concludes, “*we endeavor to maintain the University’s strategic goal which states that Villanova will offer equitable athletic opportunities at the intercollegiate, intramural, club sport, and recreational levels, and achieve national recognition in selected programs.*”

Say it again: “National recognition in selected programs.” That brings us to Head Coach Jay Wright and the men’s basketball program. Villanova Basketball is a brand. It symbolizes a style of play made possible by focusing on having the right attitude at all times—and competing with the team’s motto in mind: “Play hard, play together, play smart, and play with pride.” There’s also the tradition of playing for past Villanova players and current teammates, a commitment embraced and often vocalized by Wright and his players. It’s about doing all the little things the right way in the service of others, much as it says in II Corinthians 9:12 (NIV): “*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*”

That’s in some part the Jay Wright way, and the Wright way is rooted in the comprehensive liberal arts education offered at Villanova. The university professes a shared commitment to the Augustinian ideals of truth, unity, and love, and to a community dedicated to the service of others. Students learn to think critically, act compassionately, and succeed while serving others. The school’s motto is “*Veritas, Unitas, Caritas.*” Translated, that means “*Truth, Unity, and Love.*”

From the 1985 Championship to the Final Four in 2009

Before 2016 there was 1985, the only other time Villanova had won the national title in basketball. The coach of the Wildcats then was a short, somewhat roly-poly guy with a jovial, effervescent personality, always exuding confidence and optimism. It wasn’t the kind of cocky, in-your-face confidence that grinds your gears, but the MacGyver type of confidence. It convinces you that even in the worst of times, in the most difficult predicaments, there’s always a solution, a way out. That coach was Rollie Massimino, who coached nineteen seasons at Villanova, from 1973 to 1992, winning the national title in 1985 along with three other Sweet 16 appearances, as well as a return trip to the NCAA Tournament’s Elite Eight in 1988.

Villanova’s 1985 victory over the Georgetown Hoyas team is still considered the biggest upset in NCAA basketball championship game history. Massimino’s Wildcats entered the tournament as the No. 8 seed, and to this day, going into the 2017 tournament, no other team seeded eighth or lower has won the national title.

Expert observers call Villanova’s 66–64 triumph over Georgetown “the perfect game,” as the Wildcats won by playing a nearly error-free game. It included few turnovers and terrific defense while committing only twelve fouls (no player had more than three) and working for good shots. The team shot a record high 78.6 percent from the field for the game, including nine of ten from the floor in the second half, and finished the game twenty-two of twenty-seven from the free-throw line.

While Villanova’s 1985 national championship victory is called “the perfect game,” the 2016 victory over North Carolina has been called by many “the best game” among tournament finales. So when



Villanova Fans Celebrate 1985 Championship. Rollie Massimino Sports Big Smile.

you talk about “perfect” and “best” on the grand stage of college basketball, both times the Villanova Wildcats are there.

Coach Massimino did his best each year to build college basketball’s band of brothers. Each recruit was welcomed with open arms. From that moment on, he was part of the Villanova family for life and forever part of Nova Nation: an all-inclusive group of students, alumni, and fans of Villanova from around the world.

Family always came first with Massimino. Family values extended from the dinner table to the campus, to the practice floor, to arenas around the country. These values also extended to viewers watching at home and to the podium of the victorious Wildcats after the 1985 title game. Massimino’s way became a model for how people of varying backgrounds can get along and achieve great things together.

In 1985, Georgetown was going for its second consecutive national title after having beaten “Phi Slamma Jamma” Houston in 1984. Before the game, Massimino told his team: “Close your eyes and



President Ronald Reagan Hosts 1985 National Champions at White House.

picture yourself playing this game to win. Don’t play this game not to lose. Play it to win. *Believe you can win.*”⁷

Everyone loves an underdog, and the Villanova story was loved by many. Over time Villanova’s victory story morphed from a David-and-Goliath tale into one about Cinderella, alluding to how Cinderella wasn’t even supposed to be at the ball, yet she won the crown.

Whether a David or Cinderella tale, the victory showed that people can create incredible results by working together with a “*we’re all one family*” attitude.

Massimino now had his national championship trophy, but he would not have the time to enjoy it for long. He was losing a number of his key players from that 1985 team and would need to rebuild. A year later, when an assistant coaching vacancy opened, he reached out to a young man he had seen working with kids in Villanova’s own gym, a young coach for whom he had much admiration and whom he saw as a good fit for the Villanova family. Jay Wright had taught



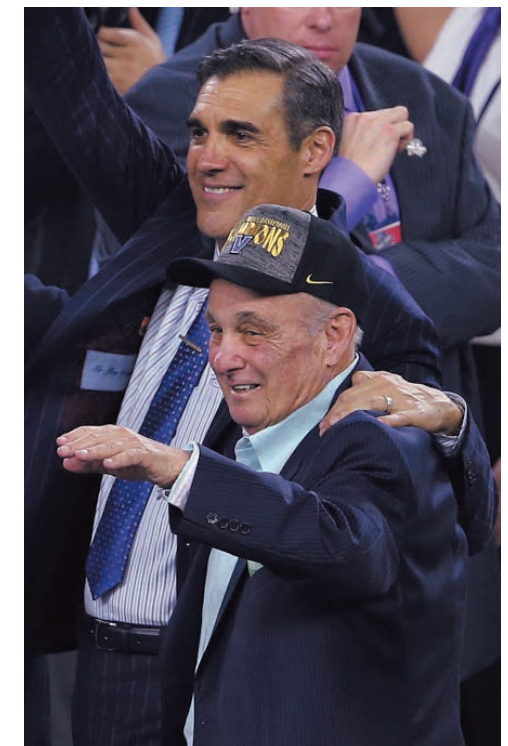
at basketball clinics held on the Villanova campus, and his coaching skills and rapport with young players impressed Massimino.

In fact, Massimino liked what he saw in Wright on several levels. “We hired him because of his leadership qualities, his enthusiasm, and his meticulous way of doing things,” Massimino said. “He ran our camp for a couple years, and I just felt he would be a tremendous addition. He also had an ability to be around kids and teach them.”⁸

A Team-First Tradition Leads to Success

Wright spent seven seasons working for Massimino as an assistant—the first five years at Villanova and the next two at Nevada–Las Vegas. During this time, Massimino mentored Wright on how to nurture a genuine family atmosphere that included everyone associated with the program, not just the players.

After spending those years working under Massimino, Wright got his first head-coaching job at Hofstra, taking over one of the worst programs in the country. Wright led a turnaround that was gradual, yet steady, eventually leading Hofstra into postseason play in his fifth year, followed by NCAA Tournament bids in 2000 and 2001.



Jay Wright and Rollic Massimino – A Tradition of Excellence.

The following summer, the head-coaching job at Villanova opened. The administration, with Massimino's encouragement, contacted the Hofstra coach. Villanova was Wright's dream job, and he took it without hesitation, passing up an offer from Rutgers.

Villanova's sustained basketball success is a remarkable story of excellence and service, as evidenced by the team-first approach that Massimino and now Wright have endorsed and taught for years. It has been said that you must have teamwork to make your dream work.

Villanova Basketball is now secure in its tradition of excellence passed down from one generation of coaches and players to the next. Massimino himself has said, "To see Jay win [the 2016 championship] because of all his efforts and those kids—those kids are great kids, wonderful kids—they really play as a team. He taught that philosophy of it's all about 'we.'" In keeping with his slogan of "We play for the kids before us," Wright has said he wants all of his players to be part of Villanova University for life and all past players to be welcomed back at any time as part of the Nova Nation family forever.⁹

Wright's effort to further Villanova's basketball family tradition begins with the type of student he recruits. He looks for students whose parents will play an integral role in supporting their child's focus on being a student first and an athlete second. These are the type of players he has found to be most coachable. Along those lines, when he or anyone on his staff is making home visits to meet with recruits and their families, they are looking for parents who tell their kids, "Do what the coach says."

A typical presentation from Wright on a recruiting trip involves telling players about the program's core values of playing hard, playing together, playing smart, and playing with pride. He explains he only wants them to come to Villanova to be part of a team if they are willing to embrace the core values, and what they do on the basketball court counts for only a small part of that equation.

Wright immediately had tremendous recruiting success utilizing his New York area connections. He landed four highly prized recruits: Randy Foye, Allan Ray, Curtis Sumpter, and Jason Fraser.

Things really started happening for Wright and the Wildcats in his fourth season. In 2005–06, Villanova posted its first winning season in Big East Conference play. The team finished 11–5 in the Big East en route to a 24–8 overall mark, highlighted by a trip to the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16. That was followed in 2006–07 by records of 14–2 in the conference, and 28–5 overall. Their record resulted in a No. 1 seed. They advanced to the Elite Eight where eventual national champion Florida knocked off Villanova, 75–62. The next year, Wright led the 2007–08 Wildcats to the Sweet 16 where the 'Cats lost to the eventual tournament champions, Kansas.

In 2008–09, Wright took a team to the Final Four for the first time in his career, and the first for the Wildcats since their 1985 national championship. The game was played at Ford Field in Detroit, where North Carolina ended the season for the Wildcats in an 83–69 semifinal. This would be the fourth time in the last five years that Villanova lost to the eventual national champion.

In the months that followed, Wright wasn't telling fish stories about the big one that got away. Instead, he was telling stories, as he did at a 2009 Villanova leadership summit, detailing how Villanova's newly resurrected reputation as a national basketball power meant that more top recruits were now penciling in Villanova on their short lists. However, along with the school's rising reputation in basketball, a series of new challenges would soon pop up as well.

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Mission Statement, Villanova University

Right: Saint Augustine in His Study. Fresco by Sandro Botticelli, 1480, in the church of Ognissanti, Florence, Italy.

Augustine of Hippo, patron saint of the Augustinian Order, was an early Christian theologian and philosopher whose writings influenced the development of Western Christianity and Western philosophy.





PHOTO: REUTERS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

*Villanova Wildcats
2009 East Regional Champions*

CHAPTER 3.

Building The Right Foundation

WALL STREET HAD ITS CRASH IN 1929; VILLANOVA BASKETBALL HAD A CRASH ALL ITS OWN IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GLORIOUS 2008–09 SEASON. AFTER WINNING THIRTY GAMES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SCHOOL HISTORY AND GOING TO THEIR FIRST NCAA TOURNAMENT FINAL FOUR IN NEARLY A QUARTER OF A CENTURY, THE WILDCATS WERE IN TROUBLE.

It had taken Jay Wright eight years to build Villanova Basketball back up to national title contention, and now the program was about to steadily slide downhill. They just didn't know it yet.

This was not just one of those typical cycles that basketball programs go through. Nor was it part of an ongoing evolution in which several key players leave, and a coach needs a year or two to rebuild. These were different circumstances. Ask ten observers of the program what went wrong, and you would hear ten different versions of what took place. The one common element would likely be that Wright had lost his compass for the program.

This downturn wasn't for a lack of pure basketball talent. In the wake of the 2009 Final Four trip, Wright's recruitment of skilled players at all positions was generating even more excitement for the future. Four- and five-star recruits were now knocking on Villanova's door and there was no problem getting phone calls returned and visits scheduled. Wright and his staff were beginning to get a taste of what basketball blue bloods such as North Carolina, Duke, and Kentucky experienced every year.

Essentially, Wright had his pick of some of the best talent in the nation, which was good and bad. It was good because Villanova never before had the luxury of being able to pick and choose so readily—at least not to this extent. It was bad because Wright, as he later admitted, wasn't vetting potential players properly.

Wright was eager to build on Villanova's newfound reputation as a basketball powerhouse and the school's recruiting process was operating at full throttle. Unfortunately, in retrospect, it seemed as though several new recruits never quite fully understood and embraced Wright's core values—playing hard, playing together, playing smart, and playing with pride.

Amid great results on the basketball court—the wins, the NCAA Tournament bids, and the undeniably terrific individual play—the seeds of an impending crash were, at first, almost indiscernible. This was a big-wave wipeout, in slow motion. In 2009–10, the Wildcats tied for second in the Big East with a 13–5 league mark. They won

twenty-five games against only eight losses, good for a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament. One of the losses, however, ended the season prematurely. It came on the first weekend of the NCAA Tournament, a 75–68 upset defeat to Saint Mary's in the round of thirty-two.

The backslide was underway. A year later, in 2010–11, Villanova stumbled to a 9–9 mark and tied for ninth place in Big East conference play. The team then lost to George Mason, 61–57, in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, ending their season at 21–12. Then came the worst of the crash: a 13–19 finish in 2011–12 that included a 5–13 mark in Big East play and no postseason invitation, not even a trip to the National Invitational Tournament. The Villanova Basketball program had hit rock bottom—or so it was hoped.

For the first time in his eleven seasons at Villanova, Wright's team would not be a part of "March Madness," the trademarked nickname of the NCAA Tournament. The nickname aptly describes all the brouhaha surrounding the event, complete with office pools and brackets distracting millions from their jobs every year. Suddenly, Villanova was mired in an affliction known as "March Badness," which led to "March Sadness" for program fans and supporters.

It was time for some soul-searching, and it began with Wright acknowledging there was a problem with the recruiting process. Wright certainly had the savvy coaching staff needed to help him get recruiting and the program back in sync. His assistants at the time included Billy Lange (his second stint as a Villanova assistant under Wright), Doug West (a former Wildcats player under Rollie Massimino and Wright), and Jason Donnelley (an assistant coach since 2008). The team chaplain, Father Rob Hagan, O.S.A., also belongs on that list in his role as confidant to the coaches and players, his door always open.

Father Rob is the soul of Villanova Basketball. He sits on the bench for every game, both home and away; reading a Bible passage and then discussing it with team members during pregame meals. Father Rob

also leads the team, coaches included, in a prayer circle before and after every game.

“I never feel like it’s ‘Hey, Father, can you say the Hail Mary and get out of the way?’” said Hagan, a priest ordained in the Order of Saint Augustine and a former criminal defense attorney. “It’s really a part of everything that we do. The coaches understand this is part of our tradition. This is a big piece of what it means to be a Villanova student-athlete. The kids get it. They participate. They understand that this is just another thing that can help them.”¹

The essential point was this: as Wright himself would later say, he and his players had lost touch with the program’s core values. In 2010 and 2011 at least, Villanova was winning much more often than they were losing, but the cracks were there if you looked closely. Players weren’t working hard. They weren’t playing together, and the offense became stagnant. They weren’t running through their plays. Taking charges, setting picks, and blocking out were becoming lost arts. It was a lot of dribble, drive, and shoot, which starts to look an awful lot like keep-away. Teams with lots of talent can still win plenty of games. Less talented teams—but with the discipline to run the plays and pass the ball—can win championships.

Wright knew this, and he understood what was missing. “It was disappointing for us, more in terms of how we played and how we represented Villanova Basketball more so than our record,” Wright told reporters in October 2012 during a preseason press conference. “We were in a lot of games [in the 2011–12 season]. You could be a team that played true to our core values and lose close games and still feel good about yourself. We weren’t true to our core values, and that starts with us, the coaching staff.”²

“One of the things we’ve learned as a staff is that just because you’re winning doesn’t mean that the players understand why you’re



PHOTO: CAL SPORT MEDIA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Jay Wright Expresses Concern.

winning...It’s not just getting great players, but making sure we understand why the great players want to come. When we started getting some success, everybody wanted to come; it was easy, and maybe we got a little lazy in not researching it... and maybe we got a little lazy not teaching them when they got here what the standards were.”

The 2011–12 season ended badly. The nineteen losses were the most the program had suffered in a single season since

the 1992–93 squad finished 8–19 under coach Steve Lappas. The next season, 2012–13, got off to an even gloomier start. On November 20, five games deep into the season, Columbia upset the Wildcats, 75–57, at the Pavilion no less. As an Ivy League school, Columbia comes out of a conference that typically merits only one NCAA Tournament bid each year—the conference’s automatic bid. For the Lions to beat a Big East team was almost unheard of—yet they won with relative ease.

The progression, or more accurately, the regression, of those three seasons, 2010, 2011, and 2012, would have been enough to get the

coach fired at most schools. To Villanova's credit, they stuck with Wright. He, in turn, stuck with his time-tested coaching philosophy rooted in his basic core values system. Instead of reinventing the wheel, Wright doubled down on "playing hard, playing together, playing smart, and playing with pride." As he had done in previous years, he went out and found character-driven players who would mesh with his values-based coaching philosophy. No more square pegs in round holes. There would be no more chasing after "big man on campus" type players. During that time, several players left the team for a variety of reasons; some transferred out, and some went to the NBA. One way or another, Wright needed to clean house. The voluntary departure of several players made that task a bit simpler. Next, he would have to find replacements, new recruits who would buy into Wright's core values.

Putting the Cornerstones in Place

It seemed destined for Ryan Arcidiacono, a six-foot-three guard with an eagle-eye shooting touch, to play basketball for the Wildcats. Both of his parents had gone to Villanova—his dad, Joe, played football there. Wright himself planted a seed with Ryan when the boy was in the seventh grade. During one of the basketball camps at the Villanova Pavilion, Ryan and a group of other boys were running by, and Wright stopped him for a brief chat. Wright's message to young Ryan was that both of his parents bled Villanova blue and white, and "so will you someday."³

It made perfect sense, but it wasn't going to be that easy. We live in a society of free will, and Arcidiacono had plenty of suitors by the time he was a junior basketball star at Neshaminy High School in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. This was in close proximity to where Wright had gone to high school. Both families were originally from northeast

Philadelphia before relocating to Bucks County, and Wright's wife, Patty, had lived in the same freshman hall at Villanova as Ryan's mom, Patti, had. Patty and Patti.

Destiny? Not yet. Small world? Definitely. There was still the matter of Arcidiacono's recruitment by other schools, and several were in hot pursuit. None was more aggressive in going after Arcidiacono than Florida, where coach Billy Donovan had taken the Gators to national championships in 2006 and 2007. With most basketball recruits making their commitments by the fall of their senior year, junior year was the prime time for recruiting, coaches' visits, and taking trips. Arcidiacono was determined he was going to visit Gainesville and check out Donovan and the Gators before he signed the dotted line of a national letter of intent.

"I remember it was October of my junior year [in high school], and I was on a visit to Florida, and I loved it," Arcidiacono said. "Both my parents wanted me to go to the best school for me, and they weren't going to let their desire for me to go to Villanova affect me. If I really wanted to go to Florida, they would have let me."⁴

Then again, maybe not. None of his family could force Ryan to choose Villanova over Florida. A little emotional pressure, however, was not out of the question.



Ryan Arcidiacono – Destined for Greatness.

After making a visit to Florida, Arcidiacono returned home and sat down in the living room with his mother and oldest sister, Sabrina. Ryan told them he was going to Florida to play for the Gators. All seemed well until he left the room. Moments later he heard his mother and Sabrina crying. They thought he had gone upstairs, when in fact, he was in the kitchen hearing every word and sob coming out of their mouths.

“My sister started crying because she was recently married and was going to have a kid soon, and she was upset I wasn’t going to be around her kids,” Ryan said.⁵

If Wright had heard Arcidiacono’s declaration for Florida, he might have been crying as well. Ryan Arcidiacono was exactly the kind of player and leader he needed to rejuvenate his program, to get it back to where it had been before. Several years later, when Ryan was a senior at Villanova, Wright would admit that he had erred in not being quicker on the draw in extending a scholarship offer to Arcidiacono. Wright’s reluctance was that he wasn’t sure Arcidiacono was good enough at basketball to play at Villanova.

“I’m always concerned when you take a local kid, you have to make sure as a head coach he can really play,” Wright recounted. “We’d rather take the hit for not recruiting him than the long-term hit [if he doesn’t turn out to be as good as the local fans expected]. A local guy being in the program and not being happy locally is harmful.”⁶

After Ryan had visited Florida and returned home, Wright knew he wanted him, only it might have been too late. Twenty-twenty hindsight was not going to work at this point. After Ryan told his mom, Patti, that he was going to go to Florida, she had a conversation with Wright in his driveway. She told him she didn’t want her baby going to Gainesville. Wright told her that if they were going to get Ryan to change his mind and switch to Villanova, he needed her help in making that happen.

“You’re crying to me? I’m begging *you*, please help me get this done,” Wright said he told Mrs. Arcidiacono.⁷

She did. “Hoops Mania” is Villanova’s version of the annual event known as “Midnight Madness” at other schools—when teams officially begin the fall season with an open house and lots of fanfare for everyone to come and see the new team. It was coming up soon. Patti talked her son into going to see for himself what Villanova Basketball was all about. This would be her last shot at turning him into a Wildcat.

Patti discreetly rounded up all her family members and everyone she knew to go to “Hoops Mania” to be there with Ryan. It worked.

“I just saw everyone there and was like, ‘How can I pass this up?’” Arcidiacono said. “I remember the car ride after I left ‘Hoops Mania.’ I told my parents, ‘Ah, I think I want to go to Villanova.’”

“My mom was like, *‘You have to call Coach Wright now!’*”⁸

Arcidiacono was now a Wildcat. Fortunately, Wright’s redemptive work with his program was already underway. Earlier in the year, he had recruited and signed another exceptionally talented player who would embrace the four core values with enthusiasm and patience.

Enter Daniel Ochefu (aka “Chef”), a six-foot-ten forward who weighed in at a rock-solid 245 pounds. He arrived at Villanova in the same 2012 recruiting class as Arcidiacono. Ochefu’s recruiting story isn’t an emotional, drama-filled nail-biter, but it’s a story rich in culture and knowing one’s family roots.

Ochefu took the scenic route in working his way to Villanova, courtesy of his parents. He grew up and went to middle school in Baltimore, where he was as much interested in soccer as he was in basketball.



Daniel Ochefu - Destined for Greatness.

He played basketball at a young age, but it wasn't the full-time obsession with him that it is with many future Division I caliber players.

When Daniel was twelve, his parents, Hassan and Elizabeth Ochefu, uprooted the family (including two sisters and a brother). They moved to Lagos, Nigeria, population twenty million plus. The Ochefus had deep family roots there. This was not just an extended vacation for Daniel and his siblings to meet relatives and take in some sights and sounds

so they could feel better about themselves. They stayed there for the long haul—a little over two years. “I want you to understand what our background really is,” Hassan told his children in explaining the move. “I want you to get grounded at home.”⁹

Basketball just wasn't that big of a deal in Lagos. Soccer was a much bigger deal there. And that suited Daniel just fine.

“It was different,” Ochefu said later. “The academics were sped up and there really wasn't much basketball around, so I was playing soccer a lot more. I would only play basketball maybe once a month.”¹⁰

Fortunately for Ochefu and Villanova, he attended a basketball camp in Lagos. His skills prompted the coach to encourage his father to send him back to the United States where he could do “big things.”

Ochefu was sent to West Chester, Pennsylvania, just in time to start his freshman year in high school. At the age of fourteen, Ochefu enrolled at Westtown boarding school. By then, he had started to grow taller than most of his peers. The summer before school started, Ochefu began to draw notice as a basketball player. Seth Berger, the head basketball coach at Westtown, was among those enamored with his potential, evident not only by his size but also by his quick feet and physical strength.

“Coach Berger told me that I had a great talent and, that if I worked hard, it could present me with an opportunity in basketball,” Ochefu said. “After a few months there, I could see the improvement we had made in that short time and felt like I should chase the dream.”¹¹

By the end of Ochefu's freshman season at Westtown, college coaches were also starting to see him as a prospect. Included in the mix was contact from Notre Dame. The question was: “Where would Villanova fit into that hunt?” Ochefu's two main criteria were finding a program compatible with his own goals, and going to a school that would prepare him for a career after basketball. Fortunately, on those two fronts, Villanova was the perfect fit. During his visit and vetting of Villanova, Ochefu was especially intrigued by the university's business school, rated one of the best in the nation. He verbally committed to Villanova in March 2011. It was his junior year at Westtown, a season in which he averaged sixteen points and twelve rebounds a game.¹²

Note: In its 2016 ranking, *Bloomberg Businessweek* named the Villanova School of Business (VSB) the nation's No. 1 undergraduate business school. While VSB has been named among the top 25 business schools for more than a decade, *Bloomberg's* new, more thorough methodology places greater focus on career outcomes. The ranking is determined by student and employer satisfaction, as well as student internship and recent graduate salary statistics.

Highs and Lows from 2012 to 2015

In Arcidiacono and Ochefu, Wright had exactly the kind of players he vowed he would seek out to restore the values-based foundation of his team. Their presence gave new hope to a program that had not completely lost its way but needed a major adjustment to get back on course.

Two walk-ons (non-scholarship players) joined Arcidiacono and Ochefu. The group of four would eventually come to call themselves “The Redemption Class.” They focused together on getting the Villanova program back to its former glory.

It didn’t happen overnight. For one thing, there was the unseemly loss at home to Columbia in November 2012. That loss came during a stretch in which Villanova lost four of five games. Once Big East play started in January, Villanova victories over Saint John’s and South Florida preceded another mini-slump consisting of five losses in a seven-game stretch.

In mid-January, Wright made a striking move: He named freshman Arcidiacono a co-captain. This was an unprecedented move in Villanova Basketball. Wright had seen that Arcidiacono was uncommonly mature, confident, and physically tough for an eighteen year old. Wright’s move to make the freshman a co-captain seemed to be as much a get-tough message to the rest of the team, especially the returning upperclassmen, as it was a gesture of supreme confidence in Arcidiacono’s leadership persona.

The move paid off almost immediately, and Villanova’s season turned around with hallmark wins against two top-five teams in the same week.

Villanova would eventually get to twenty victories for the season, but Wright’s team was now on the NCAA Tournament bubble. They squeezed into the field with a No. 9 seed that meant the Wildcats

would be playing No. 8 seed North Carolina in its tournament opener. Final score: Tar Heels 78, Villanova 71, ending the Wildcats’ 2012–13 season with an improved but still ho-hum 20–14 record. Notably, it was the third time North Carolina beat a Wright-coached Villanova team in the NCAA playoffs.

Getting back on the north side of a .500 win/loss ratio had been a step in the right direction for the Wildcats. However, another troubling tendency was growing more exasperating with each passing year. The loss to North Carolina marked the third consecutive time since the 2009 Final Four that Villanova had been unable to make it out of the first weekend of NCAA play. Wright continued to recruit well, bringing in six-foot-six forward Kris Jenkins and six-foot-five guard Josh Hart in 2013. The Wildcats started playing the kind of season they had enjoyed in 2008–09 on their way to the Final Four. In 2013–14, Villanova rolled through Big East play at 16–2 to win the regular-season title, but a one-point loss to Seton Hall in a Big East Tournament quarterfinal was a bad sign. The Wildcats were given a No. 2 seed in the NCAA East Region. However, after beating Milwaukee, they lost to Connecticut, who would go on to win the national title. Villanova was once again not able to make it past the first weekend of NCAA play.



Wildcats Suffer First Round Defeat.

It would be a similar story in 2014–15 when it looked as though Villanova was well positioned to make a serious run at the national

championship. The Wildcats ran out to a 13–0 start; again won the Big East regular-season title at 16–2, and then for good measure won the Big East Tournament. They achieved a 32–2 overall record for the season and earned a No. 1 NCAA seed, this time in the East Region.

In its first game against No. 16 seed Lafayette, Villanova rolled, 93–52, to advance to the round of thirty-two. Next, the Wildcats would face No. 8 seed North Carolina State. The Wolfpack had survived a 66–65 squeaker against Louisiana State University. NC State was looking to give credence to the theory that teams that win close tournament games decided in the last few seconds are often wired to keep on winning such games. Could NC State pull off the upset against a Villanova team with a fan base that was ready for Final Four prime time?

Villanova had started the 2014–15 season ranked No. 12 in the inaugural Associated Press (AP) weekly poll. By early March they had risen to No. 4 in the country behind Kentucky, Duke, and Virginia. Three straight Big East Tournament victories had solidified the Wildcats’ fortune. Now they were about to play a Wolfpack team that had not been ranked in the AP top twenty-five at any point during the regular season.

Once again, it was not to be for the Wildcats. North Carolina State led for most of the game and by as much as twelve points in the second half. Wright had his team push the tempo. When Darrun Hilliard hit his fifth three-pointer with 41.1 seconds left, Villanova was back within two points, 67–65.

When North Carolina State then threw the ball away with thirty-six seconds left, the Wildcats had plenty of time to go for the tie or the lead. They worked the ball, setting up Dylan Ennis for a wide-open three-point shot from the top of the circle. Unfortunately, Ennis’ shot

hit off the back of the rim. NC State hit a pair of free throws with 1.4 seconds left, making it 71–68. Villanova had one last desperate shot to tie, but Josh Hart’s court-length inbounds heave was intercepted by the Wolfpack, and the game was over. So was another Villanova run at a championship season.

Now it had been six straight seasons without making it past the NCAA Tournament’s first weekend. This was the most heartbreaking of the early exit games. The Wildcats had missed a great chance to take the lead with fifteen seconds left and then failed to convert on their last attempt to tie and force overtime. It was an especially tough night for Arcidiacono and Ochefu, who each finished with just four points and relatively poor shooting performances.

For everyone associated with the Villanova men’s basketball program, nothing symbolized more powerfully the pain of loss than the tears that streamed down the face of senior student Roxanne Chalifoux, a piccolo player in the Villanova band. Chalifoux later said her now-famous display of sadness wasn’t just a reaction to the Wildcats’ heartbreaking loss, but also from the realization that her four years as part of the band were now over.

Chalifoux would get an appearance on *Late With Jimmy Fallon* and a bobblehead doll all her own. But as far as Villanova Basketball was concerned, this was the end of the road. On the other hand, Arcidiacono and Ochefu would get another chance, their last chance, in the following 2015–16 season.¹³



Another First Weekend Loss Brings Tears.



CHAPTER 4.

The Last Chance

A WEEK AFTER VILLANOVA'S LOSS TO NORTH CAROLINA STATE IN THE FIRST WEEKEND OF THE 2015 NCAA TOURNAMENT, RYAN ARCIDIACONO WAS FEELING THE BLUES. HE WAS DISCONSOLATE BECAUSE FOR THE THIRD STRAIGHT YEAR HIS VILLANOVA WILDCATS HAD BEEN ELIMINATED FROM THE NCAA TOURNAMENT IN THE FIRST WEEKEND. THE LAST TWO TIMES WERE AS A NO. 2 SEED AND NO. 1 SEED.

Seven days later, it was Arcidiacono's twenty-first birthday. He was out on the town in Philadelphia with his oldest sister, Sabrina, and brother, Michael. It should have been a celebration. After all, a young man's twenty-first birthday is a big deal. Yet all Ryan was feeling that

night was the heavy burden of remorse. Sabrina and Michael had taken him out to Frankford Hall in hopes of cheering him up and to help their brother celebrate this momentous occasion.¹

Frankford isn't exactly a sports bar; it is a beer garden. There were several TVs in the place, and March Madness was still in full swing. At that specific moment, there was a scintillating Elite Eight game unfolding on-screen. It featured No. 1 Kentucky against an upstart Notre Dame team playing in its first NCAA regional final in more than three decades.

Even if you weren't a fan of the "Fighting Irish" or those "other Wildcats" from Lexington, it was an exciting time to be out and about on the town, enjoying Philly. That is unless you were Ryan Arcidiacono. Everyone in the place was watching one of the big TV screens, except Ryan. He just sat there, his back to the nearest screen. He was not feeling it and certainly not watching. "This should be us," he kept saying, looking at Sabrina. "We should be playing in a game like this."²

He was right. Villanova should have been playing in an Elite Eight game that weekend. Even a Sweet 16 game would have been a marked improvement over either of Villanova's two previous seasons, for which Arcidiacono had been a part of as well.

Arcidiacono and his teammates had a hard time stomaching three hasty jettisons from the NCAA Tournament. Especially because under Coach Wright, they had done almost everything right to get to the point at which they were eliminated. After the 2011–12 season, Wright recommitted to his core values and to recruiting the type of players who would best fit the school's way of doing things. The talent was there, the self-sacrificial nature of the players was back on display. Perhaps best of all, the Wildcats were winning a lot of games—with winning being a by-product of playing using their core values. Still, they could not make it out of the first weekend of the NCAA

Tournament, and that is the *biggest* measuring stick for comparing basketball programs across the country.

All that work to get there, doing all things by the Augustinian book, embracing Wright's values, and earning a high seed, only to stumble against a lower-seeded opponent. Just like that—with a snap of the fingers—they must reset and wait until the following November to try again, starting over from scratch with the record set back to 0–0.

The 2015–16 season looked like it would be a burden for the Wildcats. Their 2015 loss to North Carolina State stamped them as tournament underachievers. Wright's challenge would be to get his staff and players to push the thought of underachieving out of their minds. If he couldn't get them to forget it, to wipe it from their memories, the least he could do was get them to stick it into the far catacombs of their minds. Coach Wright wanted "playing hard, playing together, playing smart, and playing with pride" running through players' heads repeatedly, as if on a loop, or like a ticker running across the bottom of the TV screen.

There's a lesson here for all of us. If we want to win in life, we must be able to compartmentalize and cordon off failure and negativity into the deep recesses of our minds. We must focus on applying winning habits, such as Villanova's core values.

Still, for Wright's Wildcats, there would be incessant media inquiries. At the end of the 2014–15 season, Wright said the right things. He told his team and the media that the early loss in the NCAA Tournament would not define the program. It wouldn't define 2015, just like it hadn't done so in 2010, 2011, 2013, or 2014. However, the nation's media had other ideas. Reporters were obsessed with asking questions about the team's first-weekend tourney flops. This became a topic at virtually every press conference over the following year. In fact, the questions started in October 2015, before a single game had even been played—five months before Villanova would get another chance

to prove its postseason mettle. It seemed as though the pesky reminders would never cease. The Wildcats would have to play and win their way out of this predicament.

In every post-game press conference of the 2015–16 season, Wright and his players knew in advance what one of the questions would be. “Do you think your victory tonight is a sign you’ll win in March?” was just one of many ways the same question would be asked, repeatedly.

In the fall of 2015, starting in November, the Wildcats would prove to be just as successful in pre-tournament games as they had been the previous two seasons. Yet, the question was asked over and over in postgame press conferences, “Can you win in March?”

Villanova went 27–4 during the regular season of 2015–16, beginning the year with a 7–0 run. All four of its losses came against teams ranked sixteenth or higher in the nation. Three of those four losses, in fact, were to teams ranked eighth or better. The loss at the Pearl Harbor Classic in Honolulu, to the seventh-ranked Oklahoma Sooners, was the Wildcats’ first defeat of the year.

The loss to the Sooners was decisive, a 78–55 final worth noting. The two teams, not knowing it at the time, would meet again in April with much higher stakes on the line. About two weeks after the loss to Oklahoma, Villanova would lose to No. 8 Virginia, 86–75. That dropped the Wildcats to 8–2 less than a week before Christmas. The team then reeled off nine straight victories. An 82–76 overtime loss at home against No. 16 Providence ended any thought of making it through Big East Conference play undefeated.

As well as the Wildcats were playing in January, it was not entirely smooth sailing. Daniel Ochefu, their dominant, now six-foot-eleven center, was suffering one physical ailment after another. This drastically cut his time on the floor and forced him to miss some games. For Wright and Villanova, they were experiencing another of those

proverbial adverse situations in which the seeds of an equal or greater opportunity would hopefully sprout. Over the second half of the season, Ochefu suffered through a deeply bruised tailbone, a sprained ankle, a concussion, and a nasty bout of the flu.

Seeds of opportunity? There’s always a silver lining in the clouds of predicaments that we encounter. For Villanova, it was finding out they could win even when not at full strength. They discovered they could still be victorious without Ochefu. He was their dominant rim protector and an awesome passer, around which the rest of the small-ball offense effectively operated. Yet Ochefu’s frequent absence also meant more playing time for other players such as Darryl Reynolds, Mikal Bridges, and Phil Booth. It gave them valuable game minutes that would make them better contributors as the season progressed.

Another facet of the Wright philosophy is “next man up.” Players normally confined to limited playing time need to always be ready to step into a more significant role at a moment’s notice if someone gets hurt or fouls out. Consequently, several players getting more minutes in team co-captain Ochefu’s absence meant they would be better prepared for postseason play.

If we wanted to amplify the benefits of Ochefu being gone at times, one could make the argument that missing games saved him some wear and tear from the intense Big East Conference play. That rest may have made him fresher for the March-April push through the Big East and NCAA tournaments. That’s looking at the bright side. Let’s think of it as Ochefu having more gas in the tank for a late-season run, when the games counted more than ever.

Following the loss to Providence, Villanova won its next seven games to improve their record to 24–3. During that time, the Wildcats rose from No. 6 in the national rankings to No. 1 for the very first time in school history. They stayed atop the charts for about three weeks until their 90–83 loss to No. 5 Xavier in late February. Foul trouble hurt

Villanova in that game. Kris Jenkins scored twenty-two points before fouling out with more than eight minutes left in the game. Ochefu was confined to the bench for most of the second half with four fouls (a fifth foul disqualifies a player for the rest of that game).

When Villanova met Xavier, it was the first time in years that two Big East teams had played each other while both were ranked among the top five in the nation. The game garnered a significant amount of national attention and provided a boost to the Big East's reputation, which had been in question since it was relaunched in 2013. The league had been reintroduced as a modified ten-school conference without several traditional basketball powers such as Syracuse, Connecticut, and Louisville. Wright and his Villanova team were carrying the burden of trying to shed the reputation as NCAA Tournament underachievers. They were also carrying the banner for the Big East conference, now perceived as being a shadow of its former self.

Questions about Villanova's worthiness for postseason respect in 2016 continued to crop up during the Big East Tournament. It wasn't enough that the Wildcats had captured the regular season title and won twenty-seven games against only four losses. The "something to prove" finish line in front of them just kept getting moved back. In the conference tournament, Villanova knocked off Georgetown and Providence, before losing to Seton Hall, 69–67, in the championship game. That loss probably cost the Wildcats a No. 1 seed in the NAAs, and they had to settle for a No. 2 seed. Along with that came the doubts of the cynics: Could the 'Cats win the big game when it mattered the most? Was this a sign that their hopes would inevitably be dashed in the NCAA Tournament on the first weekend—again?

There was also the matter of the size of the school. In the thirty-one years prior to 2016, going back to when Villanova won the 1985 national title, only sixteen different schools had won the national championship. The average size of those sixteen schools was about twenty-five thousand students, or nearly four times larger than

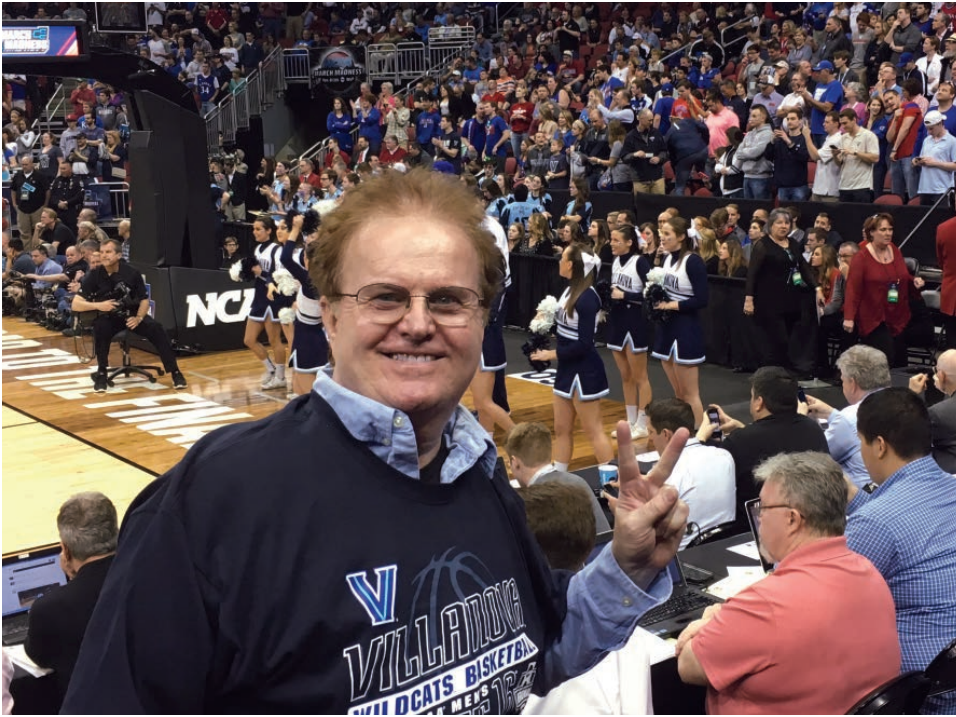
Villanova's undergraduate enrollment. The only other championship-winning program in that thirty-one year stretch with a student enrollment comparable to Villanova's was Duke. Consider, however, that Duke did have at least one distinct advantage over Villanova in terms of numbers: Duke had an endowment fund in the billions of dollars, while Villanova's was a fraction of that amount. This meant that every other champion, from 1985 to the present, had far more resources to build incredible practice and game facilities, making it far easier to attract high-profile recruits.

When the brackets, pairings, and seeds were announced on Selection Sunday in 2016, Villanova was awarded a No. 2 seed and placed in the South Region. Kansas was the South's No. 1 seed as well as the NCAA Tournament's overall top seed. The Wildcats would open tournament play against North Carolina-Asheville, not to be mistaken for North Carolina State.

Villanova opened its 2016 tournament by beating North Carolina-Asheville by thirty points. Before the game was over, every member of Nova Nation knew the next game would be the most important one in many years. Could the 'Cats get out of the opening weekend in NCAA play for the first time in six agonizing years? This was not only on the minds of Villanova fans; it was the fodder of countless news articles and television commentary for two straight days.

Fortunately, in the next game against Iowa, Villanova came out with a hot shooting hand. The team made 59.3 percent of their baskets from the floor, including a torrid 52.6 percent from behind the three-point arc. Final score: Villanova 87, Iowa 68.

For the first time in too many years, the Wildcats had advanced to the Sweet 16 round, finally making it to the second weekend of the tournament. The monkey was now off the Wildcats' back in terms of escaping negative expectations.



Author at South Regional Elite Eight Game.

As a No. 2 seed with the talented senior-leadership duo of Arcidiacono and Ochefu on Jay Wright's team, Villanova's NCAA Tournament work was far from complete. Still, winning its way to the Sweet 16 prompted Wright to share a celebratory hug with Arcidiacono for this huge, incremental accomplishment.

After the game, Wright heralded Arcidiacono's contribution to the team. "I really don't talk to him that much," Wright said. "It's amazing—he is me. He takes care of everything. I really do worry about not having him here next year because I'm going to have to work harder because he just—everything he does is what I do. Everything he thinks about is what I think about...It's just like we're the same person."³

The next meeting for Villanova was against Miami for a regional semifinal game in Louisville, Kentucky. Again, Villanova took control

and won rather easily, beating Miami 92–69. Jenkins and Arcidiacono each scored twenty-one points on combined nine-of-thirteen shooting from three-point range. The Wildcats shot an astounding 66.7 percent on three-pointers. Suddenly, Villanova was in the Elite Eight, where they would be going up against the top-seeded Jayhawks of Kansas. Both teams had won each of their first three games of the tournament by double-digit margins.

With the winner of Kansas–Villanova headed to the Final Four, the game was won primarily on defense. Ochefu and his teammates put the clamps on Kansas' all-American forward Perry Ellis. Ellis would score only four points as Villanova held the Jayhawks to a season-low point total in a 64–59 victory. It was a balanced effort for the Wildcats: Arcidiacono, Hart, and Jenkins each finished with thirteen points. The best part of this game for me? I was there to see it.

The Road to a Championship Ends Here – Houston 2016

Villanova would meet the Oklahoma Sooners in Houston for the first game of the Final Four. The vast majority of sports analysts across the country picked Oklahoma to win the 2016 semifinal game. The Sooners featured National Player of the Year candidate, Buddy Hield. The media frenzy in Houston focused on Hield as if he was the only player that would take the floor. It was almost as if the Villanova players had been totally forgotten.

Thankfully for Wildcats fans, Josh Hart led a defensive team effort against Hield that stymied the superstar, holding him to just nine points. This was the second fewest Hield scored all year. The Wildcats won by a Final Four record 44 points. Led by Hart with twenty-three points, the Wildcats had six players that scored in double figures. Jay

Wright's team shot a remarkable 71.4 percent on the game, just below the Final Four record set by the 1985 Villanova Wildcats in their championship game against Georgetown.

Despite ending as a blowout, the game was close for most of the first half. The Sooners even had the lead at 17–16 with less than twelve minutes left in the first half. Mikal Bridges sank a three-pointer for the Wildcats, and they were off and running, stretching their lead to fourteen points by intermission.

Oklahoma managed to cut the deficit to nine points early in the second half, but over the last sixteen minutes of the game the Wildcats outscored the Sooners by a margin of 49–14 to win 95–51. That runaway victory gave me the opportunity to break away from the TV set and start making ticket and travel arrangements for my two nephews and me. We were determined to get down to Houston for Monday night's title bout against North Carolina, who was an 83–66 victor over Syracuse in the other national semifinal.

Villanova vs. North Carolina was quickly being touted by the press as a David vs. Goliath match (as if we had never heard that analogy before). In some respects, that might have been true from the standpoint of history and pure basketball pedigrees. Over the years, the Tar Heels had won five national titles to Villanova's one and had been to nineteen Final Fours to Villanova's four.

North Carolina had opened the 2015–16 season as the preseason No. 1 team in the country. Villanova began at No. 11, but even that was considered generous by some. The Wildcats had put together a string of NCAA Tournament early exits that made any ranking in the top twenty-five a dubious choice to many pundits.

As my two nephews and I walked up the ramp to enter NRG Stadium, I looked over to see the Astrodome. So there I was, seeing the site of the 1971 Final Four, memories of those 1971 games rushing to

my mind. It felt as if I were in some sort of time warp, half of me in 1971 again, eighteen years old, the other half clearly still present in 2016, where I was sixty-three. It was especially strange knowing that I might finally achieve the long-coveted sensation of being present to experience Villanova winning a national championship. If we were going to win, and if there was going to be a wild celebration, I was going to be right in the middle of it—living it, loving it.



Final Four Game Sites: NRG Stadium (2016) and Houston Astrodome (1971).

As I finished the walk up that long ramp, my legs felt as light as air, as if I were about to lift off. “Houston, we no longer have a problem.” We stepped through our entry point into the arena, and an adrenaline rush hit—a big wave of it. It was like heaven opened up before us as we stepped in through the mezzanine and past the T-shirt sales into an opening, where we saw the arena floor far, far below.

We worked our way down toward our seats. My heart was pounding as I spotted the likes of Rollie Massimino, the coach of the 1985 national champions, now eighty-one years old. And there was Michael



PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

Memories of Past Thrills Inspire Enthusiasm.

Jordan, sitting in a seat not far from the court. “I’m really here,” I thought. Famous athletes, celebrities, and fans were just as thrilled as I was about what was to take place on the basketball court mere feet away.

The Best NCAA Championship Basketball Game in History

It has now been called “the best championship basketball game in NCAA Tournament history.” North Carolina led most of the first half; Villanova was ahead most of the second half. North Carolina’s biggest lead of the night was seven points; Villanova’s was ten. North Carolina’s Marcus Paige was his team’s leading scorer with twenty-one points. A surprising performance by Phil Booth led Villanova with twenty points (off the bench). North Carolina turned the ball over only ten times; Villanova gave it up eleven times. The taller North Carolina team had thirty-six rebounds to twenty-three for Villanova. Offsetting that edge, Villanova shot 58.3 percent from the field while North Carolina shot 42.9 percent for the game. No one fouled out for North Carolina; no one fouled out for Villanova.

With just 5:29 left in the game, a pair of Arcidiacono free throws was followed seconds later by a pair of Booth free throws. This gave Villanova its largest lead of the night, 67–57. At this moment, I thought, “Hey, we are going to win this thing.” I felt like I was about to float off the floor.

It looked like the beginning of the end for the Tar Heels, except this was going to be “the best championship game in NCAA Tournament history,” remember? Villanova’s upset victory over Georgetown in the 1985 title game was the “perfect” championship game; this was to be the “best” championship game.

Down 67–57, North Carolina patiently and confidently worked its way back—its heritage as a basketball blue-blood now on full display. An Isaiah Hicks steal led to two Joel Berry II free throws at the other end, cutting Villanova’s lead to 67–59. Several more minutes passed

without much progress either way, and the Wildcats were up six, 70–64, with less than two minutes left.

With 1:35 on the clock, Marcus Paige hit a three-pointer, and the Tar Heels were suddenly within three points, 70–67. About a minute later, Paige rebounded his own missed shot and put it back up for a lay-up that brought North Carolina to within ONE. When Hart made a pair of free throws for Villanova with thirteen seconds left, the score was 74–71. The stage was set for the finish of the ages.

Following a time-out, the Tar Heels quickly worked the ball up the court. With six seconds left, an airborne and twisting Paige, leaning sideways, unleashed a double-pump long-distance three-point jump shot. It was the shot of the game (up until that point). It was as much a push as it was a wrist flip, and the ball swished through the net. Instantaneously a huge roar was accompanied by tens of thousands of orange basketball-emblazoned seat cushions being tossed high above and raining down everywhere. For Tar Heel fans, this was a moment of pure ecstasy. For me and Villanova fans, it was as if the air had been sucked right out of the huge arena. I suddenly felt thirty pounds heavier, no longer floating above the ground.

Villanova quickly called a time-out with 4.7 seconds left,

the score now tied at 74–74. There was just enough time left on the clock for the Wildcats to run one good play. But the momentum had swung to the Tar Heels. North Carolina had overcome a ten-point deficit. Villanova had foul troubles. Overtime did not look as if it was going to be a good time for the 'Cats.

With the ball and one last chance to win the game in regulation, Wright didn't need to draw up a play or improvise a new one. This was a scenario his team had practiced many, many times, in virtually every practice session for years. There was plenty of time to quickly work the ball up the court and go through a succession of looks to see which player would have the best shot. The Wildcats needed to just run the play, knowing that the worst that could happen would be a missed shot or a turnover as the clock ran out, forcing overtime.

Wright did not even have to call the play by name. Each Wildcat on that court, at that very moment, could hear the word "Nova" ringing in their ears. They listened to Coach Wright's focused instructions and came together in a huddle. Then in unison, they shouted, "One, two, three—*ATTITUDE!*"

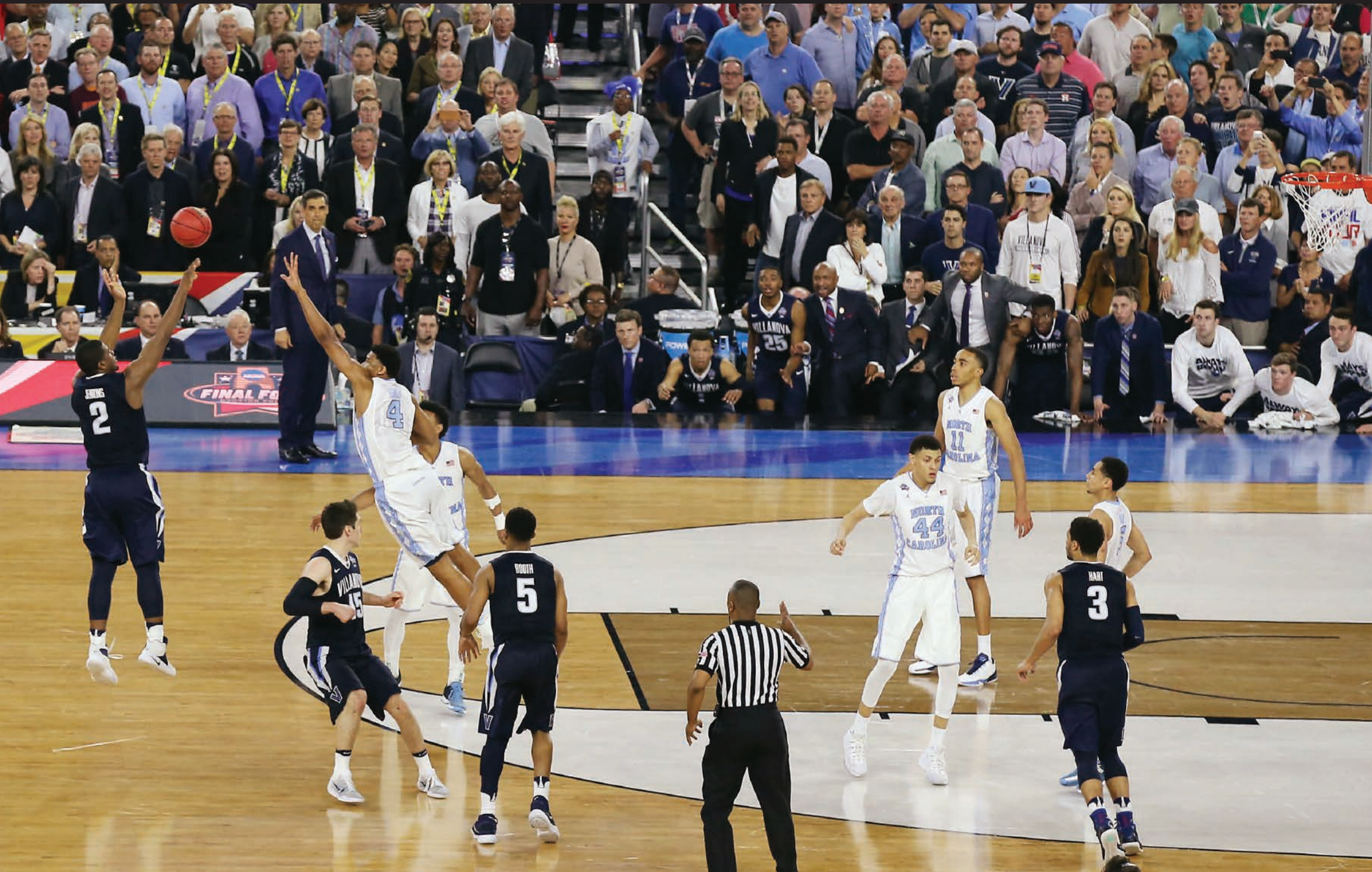
The whistle blew. Jenkins inbounded the ball to Arcidiacono. He used an Ochefu screen at midcourt to get just slightly free of his defender, then passed the ball back to Jenkins. With the clock running out, Jenkins caught the ball in stride, pulled up, and shot a long three-pointer.

The ball left Jenkins' hands with 0.6 of a second left, flying toward the basket.



PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

Marcus Paige Launches Game-Tying Shot.



Time Stood Still.

Time stood still—I now know what people mean by that expression. It seemed like forever that the ball was in the air after Jenkins had let it fly. The whole arena went silent as it floated its way toward the basket. Wright said, “Bang,” as if to will the ball through the basket for an explosive win. “Ball game” is what Jenkins said went through his mind as soon as he launched it. The game-ending buzzer went off as the ball was still in the air, eventually snapping through the net. Confetti exploded from above. Villanova had just won the 2016 NCAA Men’s Basketball National Championship.

Here are some of the media reactions that flowed in:

Greg Bishop of *Sports Illustrated* cited the game as “one of the best moments in sports history.”²⁴

Noted sports journalist Stephen A. Smith said, “It’s one of the, if not the, most exciting moments in the history of national championship basketball—a phenomenal, phenomenal, moment in NCAA history.”²⁵

USA Today, “the nation’s newspaper,” called the game “arguably the best NCAA championship game ever.”²⁶

The Wall Street Journal said that Villanova “won an all-time classic national championship with a shot that may have been the most unforgettable in the history of college basketball.”²⁷

This moment was as good as I had dreamed it would be—and better. The place erupted, at least those parts of the arena where Villanova fans were seated or, more accurately, standing and jumping around. My nephews and I were right there with the rest of them, high-fiving and backslapping one another and other ‘Cats fans around us. It was a celebration I had dreamed about for forty-five years, and I wasn’t about to stop.



Team Captains Raise NCAA Men’s Basketball National Championship Trophy.

We had plenty of company—untold thousands—who shared our sentiments and unbridled enthusiasm. The feeling of euphoria did not lessen a bit as we watched the trophy presentation, the airing of the “One Shining Moment” highlight video, and the net-cutting ceremony.

Then came the after-game party back at the team hotel. Many fans swarmed from NRG Stadium so they could join in the celebration that lasted well into the night and early morning hours. I was there too, my circle of Villanova Basketball life now complete. The Villanova band was there as well, and this time the girl playing the piccolo was smiling.



Excited Fans on the Way into the Postgame Party at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Houston.

After I returned home to Branson, Missouri, I started reading as much as I could get my hands on concerning all aspects of the NCAA tournament games, the Villanova team, its coaches, and its players. I pored over endless accounts and analyses of the championship game, the Villanova Basketball program, and the school that I assumed I already knew so well.

I was drawn to game videos, interviews, and other editorial pieces about Wright and Villanova that further illuminated what had been accomplished. One video in particular grabbed my attention: it was of Wright giving a presentation on attitude and leadership in the wake of the team's Final Four journey in 2009. Segments from it are quoted in an earlier chapter. (Wright's speech is must-see on YouTube.⁸)

One resonating message from Wright's 2009 presentation is his declaration that winning doesn't happen on its own as an isolated objective. He explains that winning is a by-product of a team doing things the right way and exercising "core values" such as being positive, being humble, and being team-oriented.

That's when it hit me. I had taught a customer service philosophy based on core values while a trainer at Saturn. I remember thinking, "How is it possible that even though I am an avid Villanova fan and have taught core values concepts, I had either not heard or recognized that the Villanova Basketball team's coaching philosophy was based on a set of core values?" If I didn't catch that, countless others must not have as well.

In the immediate aftermath of Villanova's national title, and even after watching the 2009 leadership video, I had no idea I would be writing about these core values. Then I watched a video of President Barack Obama's phone call congratulating Jay Wright and the team. In the call, President Obama acknowledged the Wildcats as a "team of high character." President Obama was echoing the very things about Villanova Basketball that Wright had been saying for years. I knew at that moment there was something really important to capture and share with others.

I began researching the exercise of core values that have defined and guided Villanova under Coach Jay Wright's watch. In this research I discovered an overarching story line that was fascinating to me, not just from the standpoint of basketball, but also in terms of life lessons. I am confident that people from all walks of life can experience victory in their own endeavors if these core values are applied to daily living.

There are incredible lessons to be learned from the core values that define the Villanova Basketball program. These values are discussed in detail throughout the rest of this book. Enjoy reading about the "Sweet Sixteen" values that Wright and others have used to attain great success. Choose to adopt these values, and you'll improve the odds that you will "Win in Your Life."



*Jay Wright – Head Coach, Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER 5. SWEET SIXTEEN

“The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude. It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome.”

– William James

Be Positive

OFTENTIMES THE FIRST WORD OUT OF COACH JAY WRIGHT’S MOUTH IS “ATTITUDE.” SOME OF THE TIME, IT’S THE ONLY WORD OUT OF HIS MOUTH, BECAUSE NOTHING ELSE NEEDS TO BE SAID. WHEN HE SPEAKS IT, HIS PLAYERS KNOW EXACTLY WHAT HE’S SAYING. IT’S TIME TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT PLAY, THE NEXT MOMENT. NOW IS WHAT COUNTS, NOT WHAT HAPPENED THIRTY SECONDS AGO. NOT LAST NIGHT. NOT WHEN YOU SHOT THAT AIR BALL THAT COST YOUR TEAM THE GAME.

Wright himself is quick to point out that having the proper attitude applies to one’s entire life, not just basketball. In fact, he uses every moment he can to teach his players lessons that are as valuable in life

as they are on the court. He challenges his players to have the right attitude at every moment, in all of their activities, starting the moment they wake up. Life lessons in attitude, and all of the other core values Wright espouses, are intertwined with basketball principles.

Villanova players and staff wear “Attitude” bracelets where they can see them all the time. The word attitude is scrawled on the team’s practice facility walls. It is taped on the entry of home and away locker rooms, where players say the word every time they enter and depart. During timeouts and at the start and end of every practice, players yell “Attitude!” to one another. They also say it to each other before each trip to the foul line. Team members and fans commonly share the use of #attitude on Twitter.

Having a positive attitude is not dwelling on what went wrong but on what needs to be done next—and believing you are going to do it right the next time. In so many words, it means having the right attitude. The right attitude any time you are around Wright is a positive attitude. What’s past is past; what comes next is an opportunity that should be accompanied by the expectation that you will be successful. It’s being able to forget a goof-up or failure and move on, smartly, without missing a step. It’s having a short memory. Pro golfers deal with it all the time. That double bogey on the last hole, when you three-putted from eight feet? Gone. Nada. Dust in the wind. Why worry about it now? Can’t do any good.

“It’s natural for young players to become frustrated, because they care. As coaches and teachers, it’s important that we remind them that whatever just happened, it’s over now.

“You can still help your team when things don’t go the way you want by staying positive and encouraging your teammates,” Wright says. “Some of the most important moments for our team come when things don’t go our way, and the guys who aren’t in the game are up off the bench cheering and encouraging their teammates by shouting, ‘Next play.’”¹

On March 29, 2009, the Villanova Wildcats were in a thrilling game against No. 1 seeded Pittsburgh in the East Regional final of the NCAA Tournament. The winner would advance to the Final Four, something no Villanova team had done since the Cinderella run to the national title put together by Rollie Massimino’s Wildcats in 1985.

With six seconds left in regulation and the score tied 76–76, the Wildcats would be taking the ball out underneath their own basket. They needed to go the full length of the court for a chance to win and avoid overtime. A lot of things can happen in an overtime, some of them not good. They hoped to avoid it at all costs.

That game in March 2009 sounds like the Villanova–North Carolina contest in April 2016, doesn’t it? Except in 2009, the Wildcats had been just a few seconds removed from a costly turnover. With ten seconds to go against the Panthers, and Villanova up by two with a chance to salt away the game, Villanova guard Reggie Redding, inbound- ing the ball, overthrew teammate Dante Cunningham. The turnover gave Pittsburgh renewed life, and Levance Fields made a pair of free throws for Pitt, after being fouled with six seconds left, to make it 76–76.

In between two opponents’ free throws, Wright had called time-out, by which time the entire Wildcats bench was yelling, “Next

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”

—Winston Churchill

“Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.”

—Thomas Jefferson

“Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation.”

—Brian Tracy

play! Next play!” They wanted to put Redding’s turnover behind them and inject a bolt of confidence into the five Villanova players on the floor. This time, with a second chance, Redding made a great inbound pass to Cunningham. He quickly got the ball to Scottie Reynolds, who then drove the floor for a lay-up with 0.6 seconds left, clinching the 78–76 victory and a trip to the Final Four for the Wildcats. The play, Redding-to-Cunningham-to-Reynolds, had enacted the “next play” that got Villanova to the next level. Amazingly, this was the same end-of-game play the Wildcats would use *seven years later* to win the 2016 national championship. A play named “Nova.”

“Our guys kept a great attitude and by doing so were able to execute a play at the most crucial moment,” Wright proudly proclaimed after the game.²

Attitude – The Most Important Principle for Winning in Sports and in Life

“Attitude” is not just a buzzword that Wright keeps tucked up his sleeve as a psychological ploy to trigger his players to do something special. To Wright, attitude is an overarching principle that defines his whole philosophy. He believes that at any given moment, a person’s attitude, good or bad, influences present and future results. No question: a positive attitude is his choice, his expectation, his demand. It goes hand-in-hand with “next play” or “next game.” Forget it, guys; let’s move on.

Wright’s emphasis on attitude is formalized in the team’s Attitude Club. Players are rewarded with “attitude points” for a list of extra-effort behaviors, such as diving on the floor for a loose ball, tipping a rebound to another player, or making a pass that leads to an assist.

The attitude points program is highly purposeful and has surely been researched with due diligence. Wright has systemized the Attitude Club into a measurable metric-based program to motivate behaviors that lead to great results. This encourages his players to do all the little things that add up to winning.

Having the right attitude can influence anyone’s life in a positive way. Don’t let past failures—even if they are recent—determine what comes next. Instead, let them inspire you to something great that is about to happen. What if your shot rolls around the rim once or twice and spins out? What if the ref misses it when you get hacked on the arm while dribbling? What if your pass to an open teammate sails over his head out of bounds? The answer is the same: forget about it. Move on. Next play.

Anybody can take this concept of instantaneous attitude adjustment and apply it to his or her own circumstances. This is true at the workplace, on the golf course, or in your kitchen. When you knock over a glass of milk, just clean it up, refill your glass, and move on. If not, why not? What good does it do to cry over spilled milk?

Having the right attitude, being positive, and staying positive have all been things I’ve had the chance to learn about and use

“Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.”

—Albert Einstein

“People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude.”

—John C. Maxwell

“If you have a positive attitude and constantly strive to give your best effort, eventually you will overcome your immediate problems and find you are ready for greater challenges.”

—Pat Riley

“The only disability in life is a bad attitude.”

—Scott Hamilton

“If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.”

—Maya Angelou

“Choosing to be positive and having a grateful attitude is going to determine how you’re going to live your life.”

—Joel Osteen

“Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude.”

—Zig Ziglar

in my own life. I often attended motivational seminars in the San Francisco area when I lived there years ago. In these seminars, I was inspired by attitudinal role models such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the two Kennedy brothers, John and Bobby.

By then I had challenged myself to be a life-long learner in the Human Potential Movement, reading books such as *Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude*. In the process, I learned that in every adversity, there are the seeds for an equal or greater opportunity. I believe this is what Jay Wright believes, and I also believe that it is a philosophy applicable to all of us in our lives. However, it is a philosophy we must choose. Attitude is a choice.

To most of us, including Wright’s Wildcats, having the right attitude and staying positive in everyday circumstances are a means to success and achievement. To others, such as it was for John McCain, it can be the difference between life and death. Now a US Senator from Arizona, John McCain was held captive for five and a half years. Shot down in his Skyhawk bomber over Vietnam, Lt. Commander John S. McCain III, a Navy flier, was held captive as a prisoner of war (POW) from October 1967 until the spring of 1973.

McCain had nearly drowned in a lake after he was shot down. He’d broken his right leg and suffered other injuries while ejecting himself from his damaged aircraft. During his first

several years of captivity, McCain was often beaten by his captors, including having his shoulder crushed. He was denied medical treatment. The beatings continued while he was being interrogated, but he gave up only his name, rank, and serial number. For a time, he was sent to solitary confinement.

Through it all, McCain kept a positive attitude, even turning down offers from his captors to be released early. He would always insist that other prisoners who had been there longer be freed before him. Living with broken bones in deplorable conditions with little medical care, food, or clean water, McCain and other POWs endured horrific treatment. Despite the horrors of their reality, McCain and his fellow POWs chose to have a good attitude.

In a detailed, first-person account he provided to *US News and World Report* soon after his release in 1973, McCain explained how prayer had helped sustain him. “It wasn’t a question of asking for superhuman strength or for God to strike the North Vietnamese dead,” McCain said. “It was asking for moral and physical courage, for guidance and wisdom to do the right thing. I asked for comfort when I was in pain, and sometimes I received relief. I was sustained in many times of trial.”³ McCain’s attitude brought him through this desperate situation.

In his memoir, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Viktor E. Frankl recounts stories of what life was like in Nazi death camps, in which he labored between 1942 and 1945. One of his passages resonates when placed alongside McCain’s story of being a POW and of what attitude meant to his survival. “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread,” Frankl wrote. “They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”⁴

Attitude is a choice. Choose a positive attitude.

Question to Ponder

When was the last time you had the presence of mind to turn on your positive attitude switch and turn what could have been a failure or bad situation into a success?

#bepositive | #attitude

“We can’t always control what happens to us, but we do control how we react to it.”

—Jay Wright



*Jay Wright – Head Coach
National Champion Villanova Wildcats Honored at White House*



*Daniel Ochefu – Co-Captain Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER
6.
SWEET
SIXTEEN

*“Humility must accompany
all our actions, must be with us
everywhere; for as soon as we glory
in our good works, they are of no
further value to our advancement
in virtue.”*

—Saint Augustine

Be Humble

HUMILITY IS HAVING A MODEST VIEW OF YOURSELF. IN OTHER WORDS, IF YOU ARE HUMBLE, YOU DON'T SEE YOURSELF AS BETTER THAN OTHER PEOPLE. BEING HUMBLE IS HAVING AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF YOUR OWN SKILLS, TALENTS, AND CAPABILITIES WHILE APPRECIATING THAT IN GOD'S EYES, THEY ARE NO BETTER THAN SOMEONE ELSE'S. ACTING WITH HUMILITY DOES NOT LESSEN OUR OWN SELF-WORTH. INSTEAD, IT AFFIRMS THE WORTH OF ALL PEOPLE.

Humility is a big deal to Jay Wright, which is why he broadcasts his embrace of this virtue. Promoting humility in itself would seem contradictory, but Wright emphasizes a humble lifestyle regularly as a

precautionary reminder to his staff and players. Humility is a quality he looks for in his recruits, and expects in his team. In addition to the “Attitude” wristband, Wright has his players wear a second that says “Humble and Hungry,” which is short for one of his favorite mottos: “Stay humble and stay hungry.”

Wright reinforced the value of humility after his team’s victory over North Carolina in the 2016 national championship game, encouraging his players to handle the victory with humility. He reminded them they had handled adversity in past tournament losses with humility. He wanted them to now handle the championship victory with the same mindset.

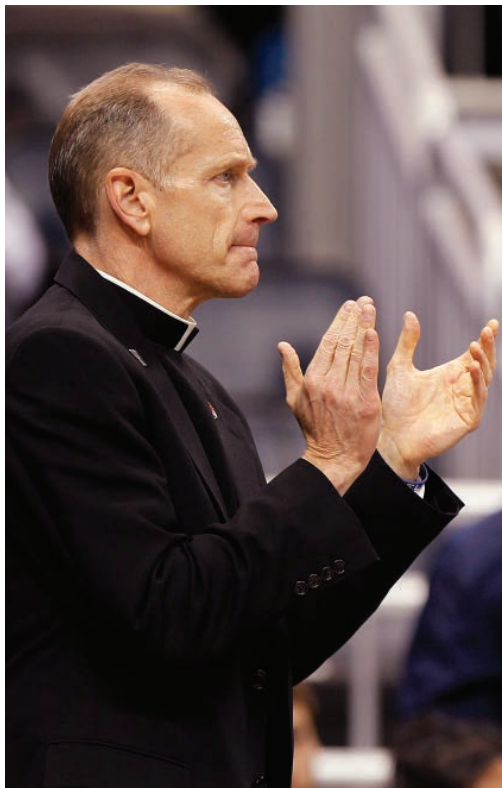


PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

Father Rob Hagan, O.S.A. – Team Chaplain.

One of Wright’s champions of humility is Father Rob Hagan, chaplain for the Villanova men’s basketball team and associate athletic director. He is an ordained a priest in the Order of Saint Augustine. “Father Rob,” as he is known to Villanova players, is a big believer in the power of humility. So much so that two days after the Wildcats defeated North Carolina in the 2016 NCAA Tournament championship game, he singled out humility as the team’s greatest strength.

Actions speak louder than words. With just seconds left in the game and the score

tied, Villanova guard Ryan Arcidiacono had the ball. He could have taken the last shot. Daniel Ochefu, later said he had begged “Arch” to be the one to take the final shot. Instead, at the critical moment, he passed the ball to teammate Kris Jenkins. Arcidiacono reasoned that Jenkins had the best chance of getting off a great shot. Jenkins took the pass and without missing a beat, fired the long jumper and made the winning three-pointer.

Jenkins got the glory, but Arcidiacono got the assist. This is basketball’s most quintessential expression of humility: giving up the ball and a shot at glory to someone with a better chance of scoring. “It’s called making it happen for the team.”

“These men are extremely talented,” Father Rob told the *Boston Pilot*, a publication for Catholics, “but what makes them unique is how they sacrifice themselves [giving up popularity or adulation for the team’s greater good].”¹

As a priest of the Augustinian order, Father Rob’s love for humility reflects his spiritual connection to Saint Augustine, who considered humility as central to the Christian faith. In his work, *Confessions*, Augustine frequently mentioned the stark contrast between humility and pride. It was reflected in the thirty-plus years he had spent searching for who and what he was supposed to be. He eventually realized that he could only follow Jesus Christ

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.”

—C. S. Lewis

“To be humble to superiors is a duty, to equals courtesy, to inferiors, nobleness.”

—Benjamin Franklin

“A great man is always willing to be little.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Now that I have and I’m not a have-not, I’ve learned how important it is to maintain humility.”

—Shania Twain

“An able yet humble man is a jewel worth a kingdom.”

—William Penn

“Practice radical humility. Take no credit for your talents, intellectual abilities, aptitudes, or proficiencies. Be in a state of awe and bewilderment.”

—Wayne Dyer

“I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough to confess my errors and to retrace my steps.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

through a spirit of humility. “Pride was the mark of the unconverted Augustine, and humility a goal of the rest of his long life,” as stated by *Augnet.org*, a website devoted to Saint Augustine.²

Saint Augustine, born in AD 354, lived during the fall of the Roman Empire. He died in AD 430, during a siege of the town where he had been a spiritual mentor to residents. Others begged him to leave, knowing that warriors were advancing on the city—raping, killing, and pillaging while en route. Yet he valiantly stayed behind to be with the people he embraced and mentored. He continued to serve them, offering up his life in an ultimate act of humility. He put other people’s well-being ahead of his own.

Although they lived centuries and worlds apart, there is a connection between Saint Augustine and Father Rob. It goes beyond the priestly order. When he was a senior in high school, young Rob’s father passed away suddenly of a brain aneurysm. Some time later, he was looking through the trunk of his father’s car and found a library book his dad had checked out months earlier. It was *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*.

“I didn’t know my dad to be a particularly religious man,” Father Rob said. “I picked it up and figured if Dad was reading it, it might be worthwhile for me...I read it, and I came to meet a man who was a sinner before he was

a saint...[Augustine] has this wonderful prayer...where he says, ‘Lord, you’ve made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.’ That resonated with me.

“A lot of us have restless hearts, and we chase after this, and we chase after that. We want to win, we want to get this job, and we want to pursue all these things, and they’re all good things, but maybe the biggest thing is making sure we have a relationship with our higher power and the good people that God puts in our life.”³

Taking Saint Augustine’s words to heart, Father Rob embodies a deep sense of humility, something he often shares with others. On Holy Thursday, prior to Villanova’s Sweet 16 game against Miami, Father Rob instructed the players to take off their shoes and socks. They took turns washing one another’s feet. This was just as Jesus had done with his disciples during the evening meal before the Passover festival (John 13: 1–17).

Humility is self-restraint from excessive vanity and should be foundational for all our actions. Humility is putting others before ourselves. Humility is admitting when we are wrong or flawed and never forgetting our own propensity for making mistakes.



Christ Washing the Feet of the Apostles by Meister des Hausbuches, 1475 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin).

“Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.”

—Saint Augustine

“There is a universal respect and even admiration for those who are humble and simple by nature and who have absolute confidence in all human beings irrespective of their social status.”

—Nelson Mandela

Humility is not only listening to other people in a conversation before we speak, but it is also taking to heart what they say; their idea or solution might be better than ours. Humility is being able to accept constructive criticism without being defensive.

The counterpart to humility is narcissism or excessive ego. There is a lesson to be learned here for all of us. Especially for any of us who know, deep down, that to others we come across as overly self-confident or, worse yet, arrogant.

No one likes a know-it-all. That is something we have heard throughout our lives from a variety of sources. It issues from our parents, our teachers, our Sunday School or catechism teacher, or from a friend looking us in the eye and telling us how humility is more desirable than arrogance.

The results from a personality test, as part of my personal assessment, said, “Your extreme self-confidence may appear to others as arrogance.” The remedy, I’m told, is simply to “be humble.” Not that simple. It goes against my nature. To succeed in life, I must adopt words and acts of humility. In the beginning, it felt phony for me to do this, like I was an actor portraying humility. Over time, as I practiced the concept of humility, it became easier to be genuine. However, it is still something I must work on, as self-confidence is a powerful driver of how I present myself to the world.

One of the truly great role models when it comes to humility is Michael Jordan. That observation comes from no less an authority than Phil Jackson, Jordan’s coach when both were with the Chicago Bulls. Jackson says Jordan recognized his weaknesses as a player and would spend an inordinate amount of time working on his flaws, striving to turn them into strengths.

“Nowadays, so many kids come into the league with arrogant attitudes, thinking that their talent is all they need to succeed,” Jackson said. “By contrast, there’s a certain humility in Michael’s willingness to take on the difficult work of making himself a more complete player.”⁴

The Connection between Villanova and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

There is, in a sense, an arc of history carrying Augustinian values from Saint Augustine to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Father Rob Hagan and, finally, to Daniel Ochefu.

Saint Augustine was one of Dr. King’s Christian heroes. King is known to have studied Augustine’s work extensively. Augustine cited humility as the value that must come before all others. We can surmise that King’s humble manner and his speeches were influenced by Augustine’s views on humility.

King might have had humility in mind when he gave his famous, “Street Sweeper,” speech. King said “even if it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, go on out and sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures. Sweep streets like Handel and Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry.”⁵

In effect, King may have been saying, don't be so proud that a menial job is below you. Instead, be humble; accept whatever your role in life happens to be at that moment. Perform that role as would a world-famous artist.

Father Rob Hagan often used King's street sweeper story as a metaphor when addressing the Villanova team. One of the Wildcats principles is to embrace your role on the team, whatever it is at the time, with wholeheartedness. Thus, Father Rob might say, if you are a practice player, perform that function in the best possible manner, as if you were creating Michelangelo's version of that role.

Daniel Ochefu, who considers King one of his idols, took Father Rob's interpretation of King's street sweeper story to heart. As the emotional leader for the Wildcats, Ochefu epitomized King's street sweeper during the waning moments of the national championship game. Just before the final play, a young ball boy was having trouble mopping a wet spot on the floor. Ochefu offered to help with the mop and finished the job. He made extra sure the court was once again safe for full-speed basketball.

Some people, not knowing why Ochefu took the mop, saw this as something of a humorous gesture, perhaps to break the tension of the moment. Others saw this janitorial move as a display of servant leadership, a spur-of-the-moment act of humility, with Ochefu willing to do the grunt work to help his team out. After the game, Ochefu told a reporter, "I knew the little kid was having a tough time with it, and I knew that specific area was where I was going to be setting a screen, and Arch would be coming off it. I'm like, 'Let me grab this mop and make sure the floor is a hundred percent dry so none of us slips and we don't turn the ball over.'"⁶

Ochefu swept that floor as Michelangelo would have done. He was extra diligent in his approach to the job. In doing so, he literally helped sweep the Wildcats into the championship. He was not too



Dr. Martin Luther King giving his, "I Have a Dream," speech, Washington, D.C., Aug. 28, 1963.

proud to be seen mopping the floor by tens of thousands of people. He approached his task with a humble attitude, to do anything it took to help his team win.

Humility in action arcs through history from St. Augustine to King to Father Rob to Ochefu. Consider that a coincidental stretch of history? Well, let's add to the intrigue; it was Father Rob who was especially instrumental in getting Ochefu to choose Villanova in the first place. Ochefu's mom, Elizabeth, is a devout Catholic, and it was Father Rob's appeal to her beliefs that played a major role in getting Ochefu to play for the Wildcats. Although many other schools were

coming after Ochefu, his mother's desire was for him to become a priest. Father Rob assured Mrs. Ochefu he would look out for her son's soul and spiritual development.

Still too much of a stretch to connect those dots? Read on to the concluding chapter to find other pieces of the puzzle in this amazing set of "coincidental" facts linking Villanova and Dr. King.

Ochefu and Arcidiacono were from different races and backgrounds. However, their shared Augustinian values made them a compatible and potent pair of leaders on the court. They tamped down their own personal ambitions to subjugate themselves to the team's greater good—humility at its best.

The character trait of humility has often been given a bad rap. Cynics see humility as weakness—the same thing as letting people walk all over you. They're wrong. Humility isn't about being walked on; it's walking beside others (and sometimes behind them) for the good of everyone—including yourself.

Humility is an essential attitude to possess if you truly want to win in life.

Questions to Ponder

How would you rate yourself in terms of humility, and would those people who know you best agree with that assessment? Is your personal foundation built on humility?

#behumble | #stayhumble

"If you should ask me what are the ways of God, I would tell you that the first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is humility. Not that there are no other precepts to give, but if humility does not precede all that we do, our efforts are fruitless."

—Saint Augustine



*Ryan Arcidiacono – Co-Captain Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER 7. SWEET SIXTEEN

“The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential...These are the things that will unlock the door to personal excellence.”

—Confucius

Be Hungry

HUNGER IS IMPORTANT IN COACH JAY WRIGHT’S PLAYBOOK; IT IS ONE OF THE CORE VALUES THAT HE IS ALWAYS ESPOUSING. “STAY HUNGRY” IS WRIGHT’S DICTATE TO HIS PLAYERS. NEVER BE SATISFIED WITH WHATEVER LEVEL OF SUCCESS YOU HAVE ATTAINED BECAUSE THERE’S ALWAYS ONE MORE STAIR TO CLIMB.

Remember the Villanova Basketball wristbands? One says “Attitude.” The other says “Humble and Hungry.” This is in keeping with Wright’s motto of “Stay humble and stay hungry,” as mentioned earlier in Chapter 6.

“Wanting something is not enough. You must hunger for it. Your motivation must be absolutely compelling in order to overcome the obstacles that will invariably come your way.”

—Les Brown

“I’m always asked, ‘What’s the secret to success?’ But there are no secrets. Be humble. Be hungry. And always be the hardest worker in the room.”

—Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson

“I’ve won many awards, and I want more. If you want to call it hunger, then I’m hungry for awards.”

—Shah Rukh Khan

Arrogance and complacency are the enemies. If you are satisfied with your lot in the workplace, kicking back in your chair with your feet up on the desk is a dangerous position. That’s the time you might want to brace yourself. The fall to the floor can be a nasty one.

One of the first things you need to know about Ryan Arcidiacono (friends call him “Ryan” or “Arch”) is that he stays hungry. That’s true even when he eats three squares a day topped off by a few snacks in between meals. He’s hungry in the sense that he’s always looking to improve, always wanting to learn how to do something better. He’s relentless in his approach to basketball and being the best that he can be.

Arcidiacono knows a thing or two about crashing to the floor. It was Villanova’s first practice in 2012, the beginning of Arcidiacono’s freshman year with the Wildcats. He was coming off back surgery that had forced him to miss his senior year of basketball. On the first day of practice, he probably should have been throttling back on the basketball court; instead, Ryan had the pedal jammed to the metal.

Picture this: players were immersed in an intersquad warm-up game. The new team member, six-foot-three Arch, was mixing it up with the rest of the Wildcats. One of the opposing players was massive JayVaughn Pinkston. He was a redshirt sophomore out of Brooklyn, who

at six-foot-seven and 260 pounds could have passed for boxer Mike Tyson’s bigger brother.

In one sequence, Pinkston had the ball and came driving down the lane, one player between him and the goal. It was 180-pound Arcidiacono, who chose to stand strong—not budging—to take the charge. Pinkston drove hard into Arcidiacono, knocking the freshman guard to the floor. For a few seconds, it looked as though Arch would be heading straight to traction and an extended hospital stay.

Arch got right back on his feet. As soon as he got the ball again, Arcidiacono went straight for the basket at the other end. This time it was he who plowed into Pinkston, hard enough so that both tumbled to the floor. Arcidiacono’s knee drove into Pinkston’s nose, breaking it. It was reminiscent of Rocky Balboa, another tough kid out of Philly. Is that being hungry the Villanova way? Oh, yes.

Wright, after catching his breath, surely knew right then the young guard was going to be very special. After 2011-12, his worst season with Villanova, Wright was focused on rebuilding. He now had one of his foundation blocks firmly in place: a freshman guard made of granite.

Arcidiacono’s transparent hunger is what made him tick since he was a tyke. When his parents had bought one of those plastic Fisher-Price basketball hoops and set it up in the family room, young Ryan hogged it. While Ryan

“Stay hungry, stay foolish.”

—Steve Jobs

“I loved gymnastics. I was eager to compete. I was hungry to go out there and be the best in the world, and I had that determination.”

—Dominique Moceanu

“Don’t think that because you haven’t heard from me for a while that I went to sleep. I am still here, like a spirit roaming the night. Thirsty, hungry, seldom stopping to rest.”

—Spike Lee

“I’m hungry for knowledge. The whole thing is to learn every day, to get brighter and brighter. That’s what this world is about.

You look at someone like Gandhi, and he glowed. Martin Luther King glowed. Muhammad Ali glows. I think that’s from being bright all the time, and trying to be brighter.”

—Jay-Z

“We are hungry for more; if we do not consciously pursue the More, we create less for ourselves and make it more difficult to experience more in life.”

—Judith Wright

played, an imaginary announcer’s voice in his head called play-by-play and counted down the clock. Ryan would hit the buzzer-beating shot, and “the crowd” would go wild.¹ Not so much if he missed or if the ball took a bad bounce and broke something, like the glass on the frame of Mom and Dad’s wedding photo.² Oftentimes, his dad would get down on all fours to play defense, and Ryan would take the rock to the hole, more determined than ever. With his dad having been a Villanova football player, Ryan surely had some tough competition to get past while growing up.

He was hungry, too, as a ten year old, when he braved a heavy snowstorm into Philly to watch Villanova thrash No. 2 ranked Kansas by twenty-one points.³ A sign of things to come—such as the 2016 Elite Eight game against Kansas? When he was in seventh grade, at one of Villanova’s basketball camps, Wright told him he was destined to play ball at Villanova. That didn’t seal the deal for Arch in terms of going to Villanova—remember, he almost went to Florida— but it was proof that Wright saw something special in the kid. Just as he would several years later.

“I watched him in high school. He’s diving on loose balls, diving in games, playing defense—even though he’s the team’s leading scorer,” Wright said. “So, this is a dream. And he was like that from day one coming in here, and that’s why we made him captain as a freshman.”

As a youngster, Arcidiacono was hungry to play winning basketball. Prophetically, in his eighth-grade yearbook, his favorite quote is: “3... 2... 1... and the crowd goes wild!”⁴ Years later, that is exactly what happened when Arcidiacono orchestrated the final play that won the national championship.

A Burning Desire to Succeed

To be hungry is to have a burning desire to learn, to achieve greater things, to always be building on what you have accomplished. It doesn’t mean driving yourself into the ground aimlessly, wearing yourself out. It means being excited for what is to come next and having the drive, perseverance, and hunger to achieve goals.

This sort of hunger goes hand-in-hand with having a vision, as well as being humble enough to know when there is something you can’t accomplish on your own. It means pushing through to get something done instead of slacking off or procrastinating.

When my California-trip friends were still playing around and partying, going on ski trips, etc., I spent weekends in seminars learning about marketing, human potential, public speaking, working with spreadsheets. I knew I needed to learn to be successful in my career. I’m not bragging about this; I had to do it! It was part of my self-awareness. I knew I needed to keep building a toolbox of knowledge and skills to excel in life. Villanova had instilled this understanding in me, and I was fulfilling this mission with seminar after seminar.

It’s no surprise that Jay Wright places such a premium on hunger. It has been instrumental in getting where he is today. He is a national championship coach in charge of one of the nation’s elite basketball

programs. His hunger manifested in his going to extra lengths to soak up coaching wisdom early in his career.

When he was still an assistant coach, Wright would skip attending the NCAA Tournament Final Four games in person and, instead, join other coaches congregated in a hotel suite so he could overhear their conversation, much of it analysis of the basketball action on TV. It was a ready-made coaching clinic at the highest levels of his profession.

The Mind Is the Limit

Perhaps no other public figure has ever been associated with staying hungry and how it can lead to extraordinary success as much as Arnold Schwarzenegger. He is a world champion bodybuilder, movie star, politician, and new star of *Celebrity Apprentice*. Schwarzenegger was raised in humble beginnings in Austria where he diligently worked his way to European success as a bodybuilder. This gave him the confidence to take his dreams and aspirations to a worldwide level, his eye aimed on America. His tremendous career success across several fronts was not happenstance. He envisioned himself achieving Hollywood success and great political influence years in advance.

It's no coincidence that a movie based loosely on Schwarzenegger's career as a bodybuilder—during which he won five Mr. Universe titles and seven Mr. Olympia crowns—was titled *Stay Hungry*. In the film, we see Schwarzenegger's dedication to the “no pain, no gain” aspect of his profession. In real life, this dedication involved persistence and self-assuredness. He spent thousands of hours perfecting his body and his poses through obsessive weight training. He was willing to deny himself many of the guilty pleasures that can distract others less committed. He practically lived in the gym so that he could focus on dozens of excruciating workouts. He literally watched his success and growth manifest right before his eyes.

“The mind is the limit,” Schwarzenegger said. “As long as the mind can envision the fact that you can do something, you can do it, as long as you really believe one hundred percent...For me life is continuously being hungry. The meaning of life is not simply to exist, to survive, but to move ahead, to go up, to achieve, to conquer.”⁵

Another Hollywood legend, director Steven Spielberg, has his own outlook on the power of staying hungry:

“Even though I get older, what I do never gets old, and that's what I think keeps me hungry.”⁶

Questions to Ponder

What do you hunger for the most? How do you stay hungry when you have a big task that needs to be completed or a goal you want to reach?

#behungry | #stayhungry



Arnold Schwarzenegger – Winner of Mr. Universe Titles (5) and Mr. Olympia Crowns (7).



*Josh Hart – Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER
8.
SWEET
SIXTEEN

*“If people knew how hard
I worked to get my mastery;
it wouldn’t seem so
wonderful at all.”*

—Michelangelo

Be a Hard Worker

IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, JAY WRIGHT WOULD NEVER PICK THE EAGLES’ CLASSIC HIT SONG, “TAKE IT EASY,” AS A SELECTION TO BE PLAYED DURING TIMEOUTS. HE’S NOT THAT KIND OF COACH. AS YOU KNOW BY NOW, WRIGHT’S OVERRIDING PHILOSOPHY SAYS IT ALL. IN ONE OF HIS THREE FAVORITE TEAM MOTTOS, WRIGHT LINKS FOUR CORE VALUES TOGETHER: “PLAY HARD, PLAY TOGETHER, PLAY SMART, AND PLAY WITH PRIDE.”

Let’s start with “play hard.” There is no “gear it down” in Wright’s playbook. Don’t even bother trying to sneak a peek; you won’t find it there.

“The price of success is hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand.”

—Vince Lombardi

“There is no substitute for hard work.”

—Thomas A. Edison

“Luck? I don’t know anything about luck. I’ve never banked on it, and I’m afraid of people who do. Luck to me is something else: hard work—and realizing what is opportunity and what isn’t.”

—Lucille Ball

The Villanova Wildcats play hard all the time, even in practice. That’s a Wright trademark: play hard on every possession, for all forty minutes of the game, regardless of the score. At the 2016 Final Four, the team had an extra practice session open to fans. Instead of putting on a show, the Villanova coaching staff ran an intense, hard, and disciplined practice—an approach noted by the media as different from the other teams.

Forward Josh Hart might be the hardest-working player on the Villanova Basketball team, a team known for its uncommon work ethic. But it didn’t come naturally. His father, Moses Hart, planted that seed inside him when the boy was ten years old, after Josh’s team had lost a rec-league basketball game.

Late in the game, Moses had detected a sense of resignation in his son’s play; the young boy had quit working hard. Dad brought that up during the car-ride conversation and got the confirmation he didn’t want to hear. Josh said, “It’s okay, Dad. The game was over; we lost anyway. I’m not going to worry.”¹

At that point, Moses lost it. Growing up in St. Louis, he had seen the same attitude in other kids—that sense of giving up. From behind the wheel, he taught Josh an on-the-spot lesson—one that could not wait until they got home. Moses said, “I don’t care if you’re losing by twenty points, you go all out. You continue to play hard. You give it your all.”

The lesson didn’t end there, as *foxsports.com* reported in a lengthy February 2016 story on Hart. Moses drove Josh to an outdoor basketball court near their home in Rockville, Maryland. By then, it was dark out, so he turned on the headlights, the high beams, so he could take his son onto the court and pick up where Josh had started dialing it down in his rec-league game. There they stayed until almost midnight in the falling rain, with Moses drilling Josh on fundamentals such as ball handling, proper shooting techniques, and how to play defense, for real. This was tough love, from father to son, a lesson learned about the value of a strong work ethic. You don’t go home or turn out the (head)lights until the job is done. Josh’s father later explained, “I just wanted to instill in him at a young age that you play hard for the team. You don’t pick and choose when you play hard.”²

Josh was reminded of his father’s lesson nearly eight years later. The Boy Scouts’ deadline for earning the rank of Eagle Scout was 18, and Josh’s 18th birthday was just around the corner. He was only a few requirements short and contemplated abandoning his pursuit of the Eagle badge to focus on basketball. Instead, he applied his father’s lesson, focused on the importance of a hard work ethic, and ended up earning his Eagle. The value of hard work applies to all endeavors.

Hard work also bailed out Josh when he found himself in a pinch after enrolling in Sidwell Friends, a Washington, D.C. private school. Sidwell had recruited him to play basketball starting his sophomore year. It took him just one day in class to realize he was out of his league academically. He didn’t do well in his courses, and by the end of his first year, bad grades resulted in a note from Sidwell’s headmaster saying that Josh would not be allowed to continue at the school. However, Josh’s friends and their parents wrote letters on Hart’s behalf to the headmaster beseeching him to let Hart stay. He got that second chance. With help from tutors and long after-school hours, Hart caught on academically, and his grades came up. Hart came to embrace a work ethic that fit in well at Villanova when he arrived there in 2013.

“Keep your dreams alive. Understand to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself, vision, hard work, determination, and dedication. Remember all things are possible for those who believe.”

—Gail Devers

“Nothing ever comes to one that is worth having, except as a result of hard work.”

—Booker T. Washington

“I enjoy hard work; I love setting goals and achieving them.”

—Jewel

“I’ve never seen a player with a motor like his,” said Eric Singletary, Hart’s basketball coach at Sidwell. (The school’s students have included the two daughters of President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle.) “The only thing I can think of is that it’s something that’s been embedded from his dad when he was small. Being the underdog, having to work harder than everyone else, all of this, it really spoke to his character.”³

As a college prospect, Hart wasn’t what could be described as “everybody’s all-American.” He had been recruited by several schools, but he wasn’t an obvious choice to be the kind of player who would help lead a team to a national championship. Yet his work ethic manifested in countless hours fine-tuning his game. It was reminiscent of another great college basketball player known for being pushed to a superior work ethic by a hard-driving dad: Pete Maravich.

Maravich was never the biggest, fastest, or strongest player on the court. But he could handle the ball, pass it, and shoot it in ways that stymied opposing players and amazed spectators—from both teams. Maravich had grown up with a basketball in his hands, practicing with it for hours a day, even outside his team’s practices. When his father, Press Maravich, drove young Pete anywhere, Pete would often open the car window and dribble the ball on the street alongside the car. That’s the sort of work ethic that describes Josh

Hart, even if he never actually dribbled a ball from a moving car. It begins with a love of the game, and a commitment to success.

Late in the first half of Villanova’s 2016 championship game against North Carolina, the Tar Heels were up by seven points. They had grabbed a turnover and were racing down the court for an easy lay-up to go ahead by nine points leading into halftime. North Carolina’s Justin Jackson was driving to the basket when Hart raced down the court even faster than his foe and blocked the shot from behind. With nine seconds left, an Arcidiacono rebound and quick pass up the floor set up Phil Booth for a buzzer-beating basket at the other end. Hart’s amazing come-from-behind block pulled the Wildcats within five points. Starting the second half at a deficit of five points instead of nine



Josh Hart Makes Critical Play in Championship Game.

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

made a big difference psychologically. This was easily one of the most important moments of the game.

It was not the first time Hart had exerted himself above and beyond the norm on behalf of Villanova. He was named Most Outstanding Player of the 2015 Big East Tournament, won by Villanova, even though he wasn't a starter.

"We definitely saw his work ethic when we recruited him," Wright said of Hart. "He was the guy who did a lot of the dirty work. We really felt like we were getting a great player. Maybe he didn't have the name of the other guys, but...he's getting talked about in those circles now, and that's where he belongs."⁴

Hard work was also a hallmark of Daniel Ochefu's four years at Villanova, just as it had been while he was in high school at Westtown School. It was there Ochefu continued growing from a six-foot-seven freshman to become the biggest guy on the team. In basketball, being the tallest usually puts a player in a leadership position. Essentially, Ochefu *grew* into being a hard worker; he had to be. "I was the biggest guy on the court and the best player," Ochefu said, "so I was just forced to be a leader."⁵

According to his high school coach, Seth Berger, it was toward the end of Ochefu's sophomore season at Westtown that his leadership qualities started to really emerge. "At that point," Berger said, "it started to click for Daniel that for him to be as good as he could be, and for our team to be as good as it could be, he had to lead by example. He had to be the first guy in the gym and had to work with the kids on the team. So it was at that time when he began to work his hardest and demand the most of his teammates and himself."

Ochefu's work ethic, as much as his intrinsic ability in high school, caught Jay Wright's attention. "He wasn't a finished product in high school, obviously," Wright said in 2015 when Ochefu was a junior,

"but we saw how much work he was putting in with his high school coach. And since he has come to Villanova, it's been the same."⁶

Ochefu worked overtime at Villanova to improve his defense as well as his offensive moves around the basket. He also took it upon himself one summer to undergo some Navy SEAL training—which is about as tough as it can get.

"If there was ever a Career Most Improved Player award at Villanova, Daniel Ochefu would win it," *vuhoops.com* writer Brendan J. Reilly remarked. "He came into the program as a raw talent that needed development. His sophomore year he took a big step forward as the defensive anchor of the team, earning him Co-Big East Most Improved Player along with teammate Darrun Hilliard. In his junior season, Ochefu made major improvements to his offensive game, adding post moves and taking advantage of his quickness. And finally, in his senior year, Ochefu became a leader and educator for a team of young players and new starters."⁷

Most valuable things in life require hard work. Hard work isn't always easy to measure; you just know it when you are doing it. Especially when that little voice inside of you might be telling you to "ease off" or to "finish the job tomorrow" or "let someone else do it" or "you could be watching TV." Hard work is being industrious, diligent, persevering—doing the

"I learned the value of hard work by working hard."

—Margaret Mead

"Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work, so most people don't recognize them."

—Ann Landers

"Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice, and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do."

—Pelé



The Creation of Adam, Fresco by Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, c. 1508–1512.

job well, and then some. Unfortunately, our lotto-driven society can fool many people into believing that the next lottery ticket they buy is the ticket to never having to work again. People with a true work ethic know there is no such place as Easy Street.

A hard work ethic is often born of necessity, as I have found in my own life, both in the career and recreational sense. When I was working in the solar energy field, I spent countless hours in seminars and at my desk, studying and scrutinizing spreadsheets. My hard work helped me develop effective sales and marketing strategies. I used these strategies to help homeowners and apartment owners in Marin County, California, save energy and money by installing solar energy systems. Yes, it was the proverbial burning of the midnight oil, and it paid off.

I also remember as a young man placing a peach basket on the side yard of our house and hitting hundreds of short, chip shots into it as I honed my golf skills. It didn't feel like hard work because it was fun, but that peach basket exercise paid off in making me adept at "scrambling" around the greens, knocking strokes off my scores.

A powerful work ethic is not a twenty-first-century invention. Famed sculptor and artist Michelangelo lived most of his life in the sixteenth century, and he has long been renowned as one of the most industrious workers in history. Maybe he had no choice. In February 2016, the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* suggested that Michelangelo had a degenerative arthritic condition in both hands. His "grueling lifelong work ethic may have helped him combat his well-documented struggles with what we now know to be osteoarthritis." Despite that, he was still creating masterpieces up until the time of his death, at age eighty-eight, in 1564.⁸

Let's take a moment and look at Michelangelo's situation from a "seeds of opportunity in every adversity" perspective. The master artisan suffered what for many would have been a debilitating medical condition.

Michelangelo could have easily responded to his adversity by withdrawing from a pursuit that required extensive and exhaustive use of his hands. Instead, though burdened, he chose to create. His crippling condition may have been the precise motivation he used to keep working at his unbelievable pace. Without his tenacity and commitment, the world would never have been graced by his masterpieces. Through his adversity and pain, he left us with the *Sistine Chapel*, *La Pieta*, *David*, and scores of other remarkable works. Michelangelo found the seeds of opportunity in his adversity. Now there's a magnificent silver lining for the ages.

The Magic Number

Hard work translates to music as well. The Beatles are considered one of the greatest rock bands of all time. The “Fab Four,” which consisted of Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr, dominated the pop charts in the 1960s. Their dozens of famous songs included No. 1 hits such as “She Loves You,” “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” “Get Back,” “Let It Be,” and “Hey Jude.”

The Beatles were a worldwide sensation, playing to adoring, screaming fans wherever they performed. That included coming to the United States in 1964 to appear live on the popular Ed Sullivan show. They would later play before huge crowds in such venues as Shea Stadium in New York City. The two surviving members of the Beatles, Starr and McCartney, are now in their seventies, but they still perform and are firmly entrenched as icons of their genre.

When the Beatles first came to America, they were in their early twenties and considered overnight sensations. The legend is that they came “out of nowhere” to dazzle the world, even though they were already well-known in Europe. Their robust success was not serendipitous or accidental. It was the result of years of hard work and fingers rubbed raw on guitar strings. It started when the group’s founders, Lennon and McCartney, were in their early teens.

The Beatles’ extraordinary work ethic was extolled by Malcolm Gladwell in his best-selling book, *Outliers*, in which he introduced his “10,000 Hours Rule.” It’s a counterpoint to the long-held belief that great people are born great, the result of innate genius. Gladwell’s well-researched premise is that the “magic number” for achieving expertise and success for athletes, musicians, writers, and so on, is ten thousand hours of work in the form of practice and performance.⁹

In the case of the Beatles, their “newfound” fame was rooted in the thousands of hours they had spent practicing, performing, and experimenting with their craft through thick and thin, hits and misses, trials and errors. They performed sets at nightclubs that would last for hours, sometimes around the clock. They tried new material and found out what worked best for them, even when it left them bone-weary and exhausted.

The Beatles as overnight sensations? Only in the sense that they often performed, as relative unknowns, through the night with pittance for pay. Break it down: twenty hours a week for fifty-two weeks a year for ten years—that will get you to about ten thousand hours. Josh Hart is well on his way to hitting the ten-thousand-hour mark, as are some of his Villanova teammates.

Working hard paid off for the Villanova Wildcats in 2016. Make it pay off for you.

Question to Ponder

On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the best, how would you rate your own work ethic, and why?

#playhard | #hardworker



*Villanova Wildcats Team
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER
9
SWEET
SIXTEEN

*“I am a member of a team,
and I rely on the team, I defer to
it and sacrifice for it, because the
team, not the individual, is the
ultimate champion.”*

—Mia Hamm

Be a Team Player

THE SECOND PART OF JAY WRIGHT’S FOUR LINKED CORE VALUES PHILOSOPHY IS “PLAY TOGETHER.” THAT MEANS PLAYING AS A TEAM; INDIVIDUAL GLORY IS NOT A VIRTUE AT VILLANOVA. ANY ATTEMPT TO PAD INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE TEAM IS A TICKET FOR AN EARLY TRIP TO THE SHOWERS.

“Togetherness” is how Wright described it in a 2009 speech. “You have to trust everyone around you—any organization. You have to trust that everybody is giving 100 percent, and you have to do that in practice, not just in the game, so there’s no question as to anyone else’s effort.” Wright went on to explain that it’s even more important to understand that you need other people and to recognize them



Kyle Lowry – Villanova Wildcats 2004–05 / 2005–06
US Olympic Gold Medal Winner 2016

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

when they're giving great effort. Later in the seminar, Wright said, "The most important thing we do as a team is to have a clear mission. We have to be passionate. Our mission is very, very simple. We want every young man to come in and learn to excel as an athlete, learn to excel as a student, and learn to excel as a man that lives for others."¹ The attitude of living for others is exemplified by how team members behave toward each other on and off the court. Helping each other—inspiring each other to be great—that's playing together.

Villanova Basketball didn't just win a national championship in 2016. It also had a hand in the US Olympic men's basketball team winning a gold medal in Rio de Janeiro. The Villanova connection who helped complete that doubleheader sweep was former Wildcats guard, Kyle Lowry. He came off the bench to give the Americans a boost when they needed it most, especially on defense.

On a team best known for its established superstars such as Kevin Durant, Carmelo Anthony, and Klay Thompson, it was the lesser-known Lowry who stood tall as the United States swept through Rio with an 8–0 record. This was no big surprise for Villanova fans as Lowry, under Jay Wright's tutelage, had helped lead Villanova to the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

After the 2016 Olympics basketball competition was over, both US head coach Mike

"Teamwork makes the dream work, but a vision becomes a nightmare when the leader has a big dream and a bad team."

—John C. Maxwell

"Servant leadership is the foundation and the secret of Sam Walton's ability to achieve team synergy."

—Michael Bergdahl

"In any team sport, the best teams have consistency and chemistry."

—Roger Staubach

“The bottom line is, when people are crystal clear about the most important priorities of the organization and team they work with and prioritized their work around those top priorities, not only are they many times more productive, they discover they have the time they need to have a whole life.”

—Stephen Covey

“You can talk about teamwork on a baseball team, but I’ll tell you, it takes teamwork when you have twenty-nine hundred men stationed on the USS Alabama in the South Pacific.”

—Bob Feller

Krzyzewski and assistant coach Jim Boeheim singled out Kyle Lowry as particularly instrumental in the US victory. Coach “K” called Lowry his team’s “unsung hero...incredibly valuable on the court and off the court.” Boeheim called the six-foot guard the best player on the team. “[Lowry] just really bought in and was a great leader and gave everything he had every time he went out there,” Boeheim said. “That was important for our team.”²

It was certainly important in an Olympic quarterfinal against Argentina, when the United States fell behind early, 19–9. At that point, Krzyzewski inserted Lowry and Paul George into the game—their mission: to put the defensive clamps on the Argentineans. Mission accomplished; the Americans went on a 28–2 run and ultimately won the game, 105–78. If attitude points like those kept by Villanova Coach Jay Wright had been kept in Rio, Lowry’s total number would have been off the charts.

“Team play” is not a lost art in college basketball or the pros, but it rarely gets quantified in a manner that makes sense to fans and the press. They tend to focus on performance criteria related to offensive production, such as points and assists. Yet, as Michael Jordan is famous for saying, “Defense wins championships.” That is surely why Coach Wright gives attitude points for extra hustle on defense and stresses values that encourage team members to play defense together as a team.

Team play can be evaluated in a variety of ways, but a willingness to play great defense is high on the list of criteria. Lowry has proven he is more than willing. In his two years at Villanova (before going to the NBA) he averaged under 10 points per game. Normally, that kind of offensive production would not garner any recognition. Yet, Lowry was named to the Big East All-Freshman team in 2005 and made the All-Conference second team the next season—plus was so good overall he was drafted early into the NBA. One of the main reasons he received these honors and got drafted early was because of his relentless defensive efforts— team work at its best.

In his 2009 leadership presentation, Coach Wright spoke at length about values such as attitude, playing hard, and playing together as a team. At one point, he mentioned Lowry, recounting how “when he came [to Villanova] he couldn’t shoot well, so he didn’t like to do it in practice.” Yet Lowry and others on the team were inspired to learn from one another, to trust one another, and to need one another. Thanks in great part to Coach Wright’s philosophy of team members helping one another, Lowry eventually learned how to shoot with a golden touch.

We often hear the word “teamwork” bandied about as if it’s the main ingredient in a secret known only to those who belong to the team. When a team wins a game, a conference title, a national championship, or even a gold medal, one of the first things we hear is, “We won because of our teamwork. It was all of us working together,” etc. To the average listener, these statements might sound a bit superficial. But anyone that has been behind the scenes in a winning team’s practice session knows that teamwork means working together for a common cause.

Team play is trust. Or sacrifice. Or humility, unselfishness, or communication. It is not a given with every team. Many teams, even ones loaded with individual talent, lack team play. Great teams have players that subjugate their personal egos to do what’s best for the

“When you are a successful business person, you are only as good as your team. No one can do every deal alone.”

—*Magic Johnson*

“Michael Jordan and Magic and myself all learned how to play the game in college programs that emphasized the team.”

—*Kareem Abdul-Jabbar*

“The secret is to work less as individuals and more as a team. As a coach, I play not my eleven best, but my best eleven.”

—*Knute Rockne*

team. Daniel Ochefu did it with a mop. Ryan Arcidiacono did it when he gave up the ball to Kris Jenkins for the winning shot.

Villanova’s team chaplain, Father Rob Hagan, referencing the Ochefu and Arcidiacono team-first moves, said, “It’s a wonderful model that we can use in education, in church, in politics; it applies across the board. There was a phrase being used by Coach [Wright] this year, as well as in past years, that ‘Our roles may be different but our status is the same.’ Whether you’re a manager, a walk-on, a starter, someone who’s going to score a lot of points, or someone who’s a practice player, everyone has a role to play. When everyone embraces the role and really does their best, that’s when we all win.’

“Saint Paul had something to say, and I passed it along to the team the Monday night before the championship game. He writes in his letter, ‘I can do all things through the One who strengthens me.’ You can expand that out to a community or a team—we can do all things through the One who strengthens us... It’s amazing what can be accomplished when we aren’t worried about who gets the credit.”³

That brings us back to Wright and his core values, his foundational principles: playing hard, playing together, playing smart, and playing with pride. Squeezed somewhere in there between core values two and

three—“playing together” and “playing smart”—is trust. As Wright explained, “Teammates playing together get to a place where they trust one another, the kind of trust developed through hours and hours of playing together and learning each other’s tendencies in various scenarios. When those situations pop up in a game, you know instinctively what the other fellow is going to do before he does it, and you can make the pass, or set the pick, or block out underneath at a certain spot because you both know what is coming next—and a word doesn’t have to be spoken.”⁴

In the early 1990s, I was part of such a team—though not one that dribbled basketballs and swished three-pointers through the net. I was a member of the very first Saturn Automobile Launch Team. This group was entrusted to be the public face of General Motors’ billion-dollar project to save America’s automobile industry.

Teamwork was the first and most important of the five core values upon which the success of Saturn depended. Trust was the second. The Saturn core values were: Teamwork, Trust and Respect for the Individual, Continuous Improvement, Commitment to Excel, and Commitment to Customer Enthusiasm.

At the Saturn manufacturing plant, workers had to learn every job performed within their team, not just their own. Roles were frequently switched to relieve boredom and build trust—everyone knew everyone else was working just as hard as they were. There were no weak links; everyone pulled on the same end of the rope, even when switching positions. It kept things fresh, and it kept workers highly efficient and productive. The Villanova Wildcats use the same team approach as did Saturn. Every player learns how to play every position. All of the same benefits Saturn found in its teamwork-first, core-values approach, apply to basketball as well as to auto assembly and to product distribution.



PHOTO: ANDREA BOOCHER/REMA NEWS PHOTO

Firemen and Other Rescue Workers – American Heroes on 9/11 and Every Day.

All for One and One for All

There are teams who train and work as if their lives depend on it, such as with the many New York City firefighters who risked it all while trying to rescue thousands of people trapped inside the towers of the World Trade Center on 9/11. These brave firefighters went into those burning, about-to-collapse towers as much to support one another as they did to rescue the people inside.

Many firefighters lost their lives that fateful late-summer day in September 2001. Yet, through the teamwork of thousands of civil servants, many lives were saved. In addition, the teamwork on display that day, and for the weeks that followed, gave the nation back its fighting spirit and showed the whole country the power of working together.

A Cornell University study showed that the core strength of the NYC firefighters is their ability to create self-managing, tightly coordinated teams. These teams carry out their tasks more quickly and effectively than work groups in other fields. They place a strong emphasis on maintaining open communication, holding individual members accountable for their own mistakes while learning from them, and encouraging one another.

When presenting the study's findings to several firefighter groups, Cornell professor Samuel B. Bacharach reported, "This is a unique self-managing environment, one that private-sector employers aspire to, but seldom, achieve."⁵

The success of firefighters is intricately tied to their ability and commitment to teamwork. At the site of an emergency, firefighters display their training and total dedication to the team and to working together without hesitation. Though we may not personally respond to a terrorist attack or a blazing inferno, there are critical lessons to be learned by studying those who do. Observing how firefighters integrate the team's goals, skills, and leadership training the moment they arrive on the scene of a disaster, we can clearly see the positive impact of true teamwork on the success of a mission.

Are you ready to be a team player?

Questions to Ponder

What is the most important team you belong to, and what is your role on that team? What could you do to be a better team member?

#teampayer | #greatertogether

*“Teamwork is the
ability to work together
toward a common vision”*

—Andrew Carnegie



Nova Nation: “The Best Fans in the Country...”

—Jay Wright, April 5, 2016



*Kris Jenkins – Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER 10. SWEET SIXTEEN

*“Education is the most powerful
weapon you can use to change
the world.”*

—Nelson Mandela

Be Smart

PART THREE OF JAY WRIGHT’S FOUR CORE VALUES MOTTO IS TO “PLAY SMART.” THAT INCLUDES BEING “BOOK SMART,” AS IN KNOWING THE PLAYBOOK INSIDE AND OUT. IT ALSO MEANS USING “STREET SMARTS”—OR, AS IT’S CALLED IN BASKETBALL, “COURT SMARTS”—WHEN PLAYING AND ADJUSTING ON THE RUN. THIS MEANS MAKING THE RIGHT DECISION AT THE RIGHT TIME, USING SKILLS NOT ALWAYS TAUGHT IN A PLAYBOOK OR FOUND IN A SCOUTING REPORT.

During his now-familiar 2009 leadership presentation, Wright dissected his four core values. Addressing the subject of playing smart, he said that being smart meant not being afraid to step out and make

“Always desire to learn something useful.”

—Sophocles

“Wisdom is always an overmatch for strength.”

—Phil Jackson

“Give me a smart idiot over a stupid genius any day.”

—Samuel Goldwyn

“Half of being smart is knowing what you are dumb about.”

—Solomon Short

a mistake. “You can do great things when you are willing to step out of your comfort zone,” Wright said. “Be smart about success... This is what I say to all of my guys about success—stay hungry and humble... You have to learn that part of being smart as a group is knowing how to handle success and remaining true to your mission.”¹

One of the smartest things Villanova forward Kris Jenkins ever did was listen to his mom. He listened a lot growing up, in large part because she knew so much about basketball—enough to coach him on such fundamentals as shooting, ball handling, defense, and of course, playing smart. Her savvy instruction on doing the little things well became the bedrock of his playing style.

Less than twenty-four hours after making the winning shot against North Carolina in the 2016 NCAA Tournament championship game, Jenkins went on ABC’s *Good Morning America*. He wasted no time telling the world that his mother, Felicia Jenkins, had been the key to jump-starting his basketball career—that she had taught him “a lot of the game.” Smart move, praising your mom on national television.

“She started with me when I was young, and she even coaches me on my shots still to this day,” Jenkins said.² So, thanks to his mom and Wright’s teaching, Jenkins predicted he’d be unguarded before the last play unfolded



Kris Jenkins Hugs Mom, Felicia Jenkins, Minutes after Making Game-Winning Shot.

in the championship game. Just before the final play began, he told teammate Arcidiacono he’d be open. As the seconds ticked off the clock, Jenkins came up just behind and to the side of Arcidiacono and yelled, “Ryan! Ryan!” to let the ball handler know he was open. Arcidiacono passed the ball to Jenkins, who in turn nailed the winning three-pointer as the buzzer sounded.

There are many dimensions to playing smart basketball. One of them is having presence of mind. This means knowing that when you are one of the options to shoot the ball in a particularly designed play,

and you are open, and you are feeling it, and there are less than two seconds to go in regulation, it's time to fire away. Jenkins did just that—with buckets of confidence and readiness. What's there to think about, except to do the smart thing, which you have already been coached on hundreds of times?

Kris' mom, Felicia, was very smart in how she helped her son develop as a basketball player. She made absolutely sure Kris understood the basics, especially the proper way to shoot a basketball. Even while his friends were bombing baskets from three-point land, his mom insisted that young Kris practice his shooting just a short distance from the basket. This commitment to skill over flash gave Kris a beautiful, fundamentally sound shooting stroke that would later earn him the nickname “Big Smoove.”

Felicia was very wise in other ways too. When Kris was a young teen she recognized that he needed a more stable environment in which to excel. It was then she made the most difficult choice a loving mother could make. She arranged with the family of another budding basketball player, Nate Britt, to adopt Kris and move him out of his South Carolina home and into their Maryland home.³ Nate and Kris became brothers—and, as it turns out, eventually opponents on college basketball's biggest stage. You see, Nate Britt was a backup guard on the North Carolina team Villanova defeated to win the national title. Small world.

Being “basketball smart” is also being mature enough to accept constructive criticism without flinching. Kris got plenty of that when he met Jay Wright at the same time Wright was recruiting Britt. The Villanova coach was impressed with Jenkins' many talents, but he had some doubts about Jenkins' weight—or excess weight—and was concerned about the high schooler's suitability to play Division I basketball. Jenkins, at six-foot-six, weighed about 280 pounds at the time.

According to *espn.com*, Jenkins said, “What really attracted me was just how [Wright] was really willing to take a chance on a kid who, coming out of high school, was just a fat kid. He gave me a plan that I thought could change my entire life—could not only make me the best basketball player, but the best person. I'm still in the process of continuing to get better, and so far it's been good to me.”⁴

Jenkins did end up at Villanova, a smart move for both him and Wright. Incidentally, by the time Jenkins was a junior gunning for a national title along with everyone else, he had lost a lot of weight. That was a smart move, too. Much lighter on his feet, he was able to race down the court fast enough to be in just the perfect spot at just the right moment for just the perfect pass that led to the game-winning shot.

Being smart is also about applying good judgment. It's not just about innate intelligence—it's not an IQ test. It is a test of how well you apply your intelligence and what you have learned through repeatedly stepping up and making smart choices—choices often made in a split second, with no time to analyze or ask questions. A high school diploma or college degree doesn't necessarily mean you are life smart or “basketball smart.” You can be “book smart” and “life dumb,” like the whiz kid who can explain everything there is to know about a smartphone, while he texts you driving at seventy miles an hour.

“Women somehow get portrayed as one type. You're either a feminist or you're not. You're a working woman or you're not. I'm raising two girls, and I say to them, 'I need you to be strong and soft. You can be smart and beautiful... You can be all of these things.'”

—Maria Shriver

“To me, throwback means I'm a smart player. I know how to play the game. I'm very skilled. I do a lot of things that other people don't do.”

—Kevin Love

“Technology is nothing. What’s important is that you have a faith in people, that they’re basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they’ll do wonderful things with them.”

—Steve Jobs

“We’re going to play very smart, and we’re not going to beat ourselves. If the other team is better than us, and they just out-execute us and play better, then we can live with that, but we’re going to play smart and give ourselves every opportunity to win the game.”

—Steve Spurrier

A rough equivalent of not being smart in basketball is being physically able to throw almost any pass imaginable or diagram plays until the cows come home, yet having a nasty habit of throwing no-look, behind-the-back cross-court passes that are easy pickings for an alert defense. This kind of grandstanding basketball play can only result in a coach’s angry bark at best, or a last-minute loss for your team at worst.

Wright wants his players to be intelligent about the game. He wants them to study scouting reports on an opponent before a game. He also wants them to possess situational awareness. That translates into recognizing what is happening on the court and having the cataloged recall to know what to do at each moment. In those last few seconds of the North Carolina game, Jenkins had the smarts, while trailing Arcidiacono over the midcourt line, to immediately recognize the Tar Heels weren’t covering him. He yelled out to Arcidiacono to give him the ball, and when he got it, all those early life shooting clinics from Mom took over.

Wright also wants his players to play smart in life. After the Wildcats had won the 2016 national championship, he warned his team that “if they use the championship as a badge to get favors from people because they won, it’s going to hurt them [in the long run].” Instead, he encouraged the team to use what

they had learned in overcoming difficult circumstances on the court to help them find success in the other aspects of their lives.

For those who don’t play basketball and want to learn how to be smarter in the workplace—things having to do with work performance, promotions, pay raises, and “ataboys” from the boss—guidance is available there as well. In her 2013 article, “*Five Smart Ways to Make Yourself Irreplaceable at Work*,” Savannah Marie mentions “be knowledgeable, not smart,” as one of her five points.⁵ By that, she means quoting Shakespeare or rambling on about Einstein’s theory of relativity is probably meaningless at work. No doubt, it’s also annoying. But knowing and understanding the inner workings of the office are the kind of “smarts” a worker needs.

I’ve been relatively book smart most of my life, but when it comes to smart at life, I have my moments. I remain a work in progress. If there’s a way to define how I play smart, it would be having the presence of mind to avoid embarrassing myself in front of others with careless acts or speech (learned behavior, trust me, as in learning from my youthful mistakes). It also means being willing to listen to that little alarm inside my head that tells me when I’m about to say or do something stupid, and I choose to stop.

At times, I have been disobedient to that little voice, but most of the time I manage to get by. If I were to set humility aside for a moment and pat myself on the back for doing something smart, I’d mention that time in the Springfield airport (see Chapter 1) when I treated a gate attendant with bundles of kindness and compliments just after she had dealt with an astonishingly rude passenger who was upset that our departure had been delayed because of mechanical issues. Out of my exchange with her, I got an unsolicited rebooking of a connection flight that allowed me to make it to a Villanova tournament game on time. Being smart has its rewards.



Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) Anti-Apartheid Revolutionary, Politician, Philanthropist, and President of South Africa (1994 to 1999).

Be a Chess Player in Your Life

Throughout history, there have been few leaders that have combined book smarts, life smarts, and streets smarts as effectively as Nelson Mandela. A South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, Mandela spent twenty-seven years in a South African prison. He went on to become the president of the country, serving from 1994 to 1999.

After being released from prison in 1990, Mandela expressed a sincere lack of bitterness toward his captors. A black man in a nation ruled by whites, Mandela masterfully brought together discordant factions on both sides of the aisle. Later in life, he also won over white South Africans with his charm and willingness to work together. Calling Mandela “smart” doesn’t tell the whole story.

“He was incredibly intelligent, very strategically astute, very measured, and incredibly disciplined,” David Black, a professor

of International Development Studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax told the *National Post*.⁶

Mandela biographer, John Carlin, in his book *Knowing Mandela*, described the global icon as “a chess player always five moves ahead of his opponent...He was as clever as he was virtuous, as cunning as he was bold.”⁷

Mandela was supremely smart in his use of symbolism. In 1995, when South Africa was hosting the World Cup of rugby, Mandela showed up wearing a Springboks jersey and cap. This was significant because even though the Springboks were the national team, the nation’s blacks saw them as representative of white-dictated apartheid. This was Mandela’s way of telling blacks and whites that he was a president for *all* South Africans. He was greeted with chants of “Nelson!” as reported by *National Post* writer Graeme Hamilton.⁸

Be intelligent about the game.

Question to Ponder

When was the last time you did something that wasn’t so smart, yet it taught you a lesson that made you smarter?

#besmarter | #brainprower



*Darryl Reynolds – Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER II. SWEET SIXTEEN

“There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. ‘Good pride’ represents our dignity and self-respect. ‘Bad pride’ is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance.”

—John C. Maxwell

Be Proud

WE NOW COME TO THE FOURTH PART OF JAY WRIGHT’S FOUR CORE VALUES MOTTO—“PLAY WITH PRIDE.” HE MEANS GOOD PRIDE, OF COURSE. THE CALL ON HIS PLAYERS TO EMBRACE HIS OVERALL PHILOSOPHY INCLUDES TAKING PRIDE IN PAST PLAYERS AND THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE VILLANOVA MEN’S BASKETBALL PROGRAM.

Villanova forward Darryl Reynolds embraces good pride, the one that is representative of dignity and self-respect, and the one that Villanova players adopt for the good of the program. It is a team-wide thing, strongly encouraged by Coach Jay Wright. In large part, having pride manifests itself in everyone on the team being keenly aware

*“Show class,
have pride, and
display character.*

*If you do,
winning takes
care of itself.”*

—Paul “Bear”
Bryant

*“Generosity
is giving more
than you can,
and pride is
taking less than
you need.”*

—Kahlil Gibran

*“The things that
have always been
important: to
be a good man,
to try to live my
life the way God
would have me,
to turn it over
to Him that His
will might be
worked in my
life, to do my
work without
looking back, to
give it all I’ve
got, and to take
pride in my work
as an honest
performer.”*

—Johnny Cash

of Wildcats players who came before them, and everyone making a real commitment to hold up their end of the bargain. It’s having pride in the program and the school’s legacy. It’s each team member doing what he can to connect the past to the present in a positive and meaningful manner.

Reynolds, a junior forward in 2015–16, happens to be one of the more outspoken players on the team when it comes to articulating the concept of “Villanova pride.” He sees it as a distinct privilege to play at Villanova and follow in the footsteps of the likes of Villanova’s Hank Siemiontkowski, Ed Pinckney, Kyle Lowry, Daniel Ochefu, and Ryan Arcidiacono—and dozens of others who have worn the blue and white.

“We play for the ones who came before us,” said Reynolds. “That game [the unforgettable 1985 NCAA Tournament championship win over heavily favored Georgetown] took place before any of us were born. Those guys laid the foundation for us to be where we are now. This [the 2016 final game] is for them, in many ways, because we have honor and respect for what they did and what they fought to make this program.”¹

This sort of legacy-inspired pride doesn’t just run skin-deep among the Wildcats. Knowing about Villanova Basketball history and what made past teams successful is, in a sense, part of the present-day playbook. Wright demands

this understanding in his players. Becoming walking encyclopedias of Villanova Basketball history and trivia is not necessarily a requirement—but in Villanova Basketball, honoring past players is the norm. A classic example came from Daniel Ochefu, postgame at the 2016 national championship, when he was asked on national TV what the victory meant to him. In his answer, he paid homage to some of the Villanova players who had come before him, such as Mouphtau Yarou, who had been on the team when Ochefu arrived in 2012, and against whom he often battled in practice.

The idea of good pride is tied to attitude (Chapter 5) and exemplified in the dozen categories that go into the team’s attitude charts. On these charts, points are awarded for hustle plays such as tap-backs, quick outlet passes, blocked shots, dives, charges, and deflections. Reynolds is practically an attitude-points all-American at Villanova, even though he averaged only about seventeen minutes a game in 2015–16. In 2016’s Final Four semifinal victory over Oklahoma, Reynolds led the team in attitude points per minute as the Wildcats blew the game open in the second half of what had been a fairly close game.

“Villanova Basketball is mostly the little things that aren’t in the [traditional] stat sheet that make the difference,” Reynolds said.² His postgame reward for his attitudinal show of pride? Not the game ball—something better. He got to choose which song would

*“Disciplining
yourself to do
what you know
is right and
important,
although
difficult, is
the high road
to pride,
self-esteem,
and personal
satisfaction.”*

—Margaret
Thatcher

*“Doing
something the
right way is
something I
take pride in.”*

—Frank Thomas

*“Take pride in
your work at all
times. Remem-
ber, respect for an
umpire is created
off the field as
well as on.”*

—Ford Frick

“The pride people take in their work transcends to their homes, their education, families, and communities.”

—Leonard Boswell

“No one has a greater asset for his business than a man’s pride in his work.”

—Hosea Ballou

“I take pride in everything I do. I don’t want to be handed anything. I want to earn it.”

—Evelyn Ashford

be played over the team’s film-review session highlighting attitude plays on the day before the Wildcats were to meet North Carolina for the championship.

Before heading to Houston for the Final Four, teammates Daniel Ochefu and Ryan Arcidiacono made a most remarkable gesture of Villanova school pride. As they were leaving the home court following the team’s last practice, Ochefu suggested the two starting seniors walk back out to midcourt. Once there, they got down on the floor and kissed the large blue-and-white V in the center of the floor. They knew it would be the last time they would ever practice on their home court.

Seeing this, Jay Wright had a team staffer take a photo of Arch and Ochefu kissing the V, which was then tweeted out. Asked about the gesture later, an emotional Wright, wearing shades, said, “I can’t...I can’t talk about it right now. That’s why I’m wearing sunglasses.”³

Of all the schools with major college basketball programs that need to tread softly around the subject of pride, Villanova arguably must tread the softest. Note John Maxwell’s quote at the beginning of this chapter. Maxwell could very well have been thinking about Saint Augustine of Hippo in how he couched that quote, balancing the good and the evil aspects of how pride is defined. In his teachings, Saint Augustine had very little good to say about pride. He was, of course, referring

to the ego-driven variety, the type of pride that can make one believe he is equal to God, or at least that he doesn’t need God.

Quoting from Ecclesiastes, Saint Augustine wrote about pride that is preoccupied with self. “Pride is the commencement of all sin because it was this which overthrew the devil, from whom arose the origin of sin; and afterward, when his malice and envy pursued man, who was yet standing in his uprightness, it subverted him in the same way in which he himself fell. For the serpent, in fact, only sought for the door of pride whereby to enter when he said, *‘Ye shall be as gods.’*”⁴

As far as we know, and with pretty much 100 percent certainty, no Villanova player under Wright has ever thought of himself as a god. Again, at Villanova, it’s pride in the program that is encouraged and embraced. It’s pride in how someone can make himself fit in and carry out his part with excellence. This kind of pride explains why Wright has always had an open door for any Villanova player, past or present, to drop by for a visit. “*Once a Wildcat, always a Wildcat,*” he often says.

Recall how several times earlier I mentioned Wright’s 2009 presentation on attitude and leadership. Wright touched on pride in that speech as well when he said, “It goes back to knowing and appreciating who and what came before you.” Said Wright, “The final part... is pride. That’s when your own people start to become the storytellers. New people working here don’t know where we came from—[all] they see are the Sweet 16s and the Final Fours.” Stories being passed from one player to another carry on the great traditions of the Villanova program.

Wright went on in that presentation to relate how two of his past players had recently been telling stories to underclassmen on the current team. He pointed out how Scotty Reynolds had been in the gym—on his own—working with freshmen on playing defense and how Reggie Redding had recently taken younger players to lunch to talk about the program.



Scotty Reynolds and Corey Fisher at 2009 Elite Eight.

“So they start telling the story,” Wright said, referring to Reynolds and Redding. “That’s where you develop that pride that the people in your organization, on your team—they realize they are who they are because of what they are a part of. And now they want to pass that on to the new people coming in, to understand, ‘You’re going to be great; you’re going to be a great student. You’re going to become a great young man, and you’re going to be a great basketball player because you are a part of Villanova and Villanova Basketball.’ That’s the part in taking pride in the name on the front of your jersey versus the name on the back.”⁵

Let’s look at this idea of pride more closely and how it plays away from the basketball court. The right kind of pride is attainable for everyone. Its greatest value is realized when you extend it beyond yourself, as in servant leadership. It’s supporting the success of the team or the members of the department in which you work—as a priority over catering to your own ego and desires.

Pride in yourself comes from having a desire to do your best for yourself and for others. It comes from an inner sense of your own abilities and directing those abilities to a good end. Pride based on vanity will get you nowhere. Pride based on doing your best for others

will give you an inner compass that will help you navigate toward the greater good. Success as a team can have a value that burns longer and brighter than anything you might do on your own.

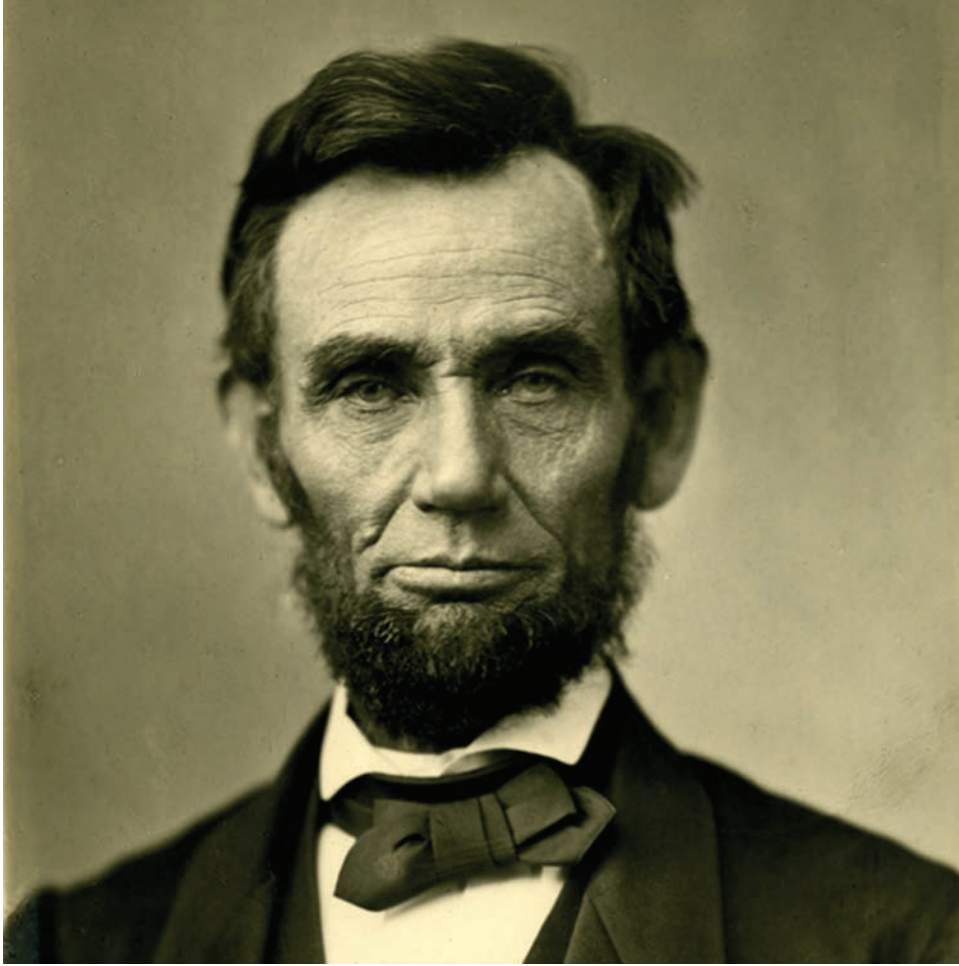
On the job, being proud of your work is doing the absolute best you can on every task. No coasting. Your reward comes from helping the organization attain its goals. Keep whatever pride you feel concerning your own accomplishments to yourself. No one likes a braggart.

After the 2016 national championship victory, Wright said about his team, “You’re like a parent when you’re a coach. I just couldn’t be prouder, couldn’t be happier to see [the players] enjoy this and fulfill their dreams. That’s what it’s all about for a coach, just to see their eyes, to see their satisfaction, their enjoyment. There’s no better feeling in the world for a coach or a parent.”⁶

Pride in Our Past Is Powerful

A sincere exercise of pride reveals itself when we pour ourselves into a task and will do almost anything it takes to make things right. That could mean working to restore a broken relationship because we know the whole is almost always better than the sum of its parts, even when it’s just two parts: two people, apart. It could mean finding a success formula that worked in basketball a few years ago and making it work again, right now. It could even mean bringing a nation back together from the precipice of destruction, as did Abraham Lincoln.

As the Civil War raged (1861–1865), closely coinciding with Lincoln’s own presidential tenure, the tall, bearded, sixteenth US president knew our country was falling apart. He nobly set out to fix the problem. He gave a 272-word speech at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, that soon became famous for its powerful message. It was most memorable for how it gave our nation a booster shot of confidence and pride.



Lincoln's Gettysburg Address Instilled Pride in Our Country.

In his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln didn't go for something new and unused in restoring America, he went for something old and reliable. He rebottled the language of pride in America that had been expressed by our founding fathers eighty-five years before Lincoln even took office. Lincoln scholar Harry V. Jaffa wrote, "The central idea of the American Founding—and indeed of constitutional government and the rule of law—was the equality of mankind,"⁷ which Lincoln spun into his own central idea of restoration. It was something borrowed, something used, and he applied it to America and Americans. It would be echoed in Jay Wright's *Once a Wildcat, Always a Wildcat* mantra about 150 years later.

Pride in our heritage is very powerful.

Questions to Ponder

How would you define the difference between "good pride" and "bad pride?" How do you exercise the good pride in your own life?

#beproud | #pride

"I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him."

—Abraham Lincoln



*Phil Booth – Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER
12.
SWEET
SIXTEEN

“Perseverance is a great element of success. If you only knock long enough and loud enough at the gate, you are sure to wake up somebody.”

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Be Perseverant

FEW FRESHMEN BECOME STARTERS AS SOON AS THEY GET TO COLLEGE. PHIL BOOTH JR. WAS NO EXCEPTION TO THAT RULE WHEN HE ARRIVED AT VILLANOVA IN 2014. HE HAD TO WAIT HIS TURN, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD BEEN A HOTLY RECRUITED POINT GUARD COMING OUT OF BALTIMORE’S MOUNT SAINT JOSEPH HIGH SCHOOL.

As a high school senior, Booth had been named the Baltimore Catholic League (BCL) Player of the Year. In his junior year, he had earned the BCL Defensive Player of the Year honors. Quite impressive.

“Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something, and that this thing must be attained.”

—Marie Curie

“Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.”

—John Quincy Adams

“By perseverance the snail reached the ark.”

—Charles Spurgeon

As a freshman at Villanova, Booth averaged about six points in just under fifteen minutes a game coming off the bench. He showed flashes of brilliance, shooting 49 percent from the field in Big East Conference play and 37 percent on three-pointers, with an assists-to-turnovers ratio of better than two-to-one. Booth would play in all thirty-six of Villanova’s games, but never got the full-time starting position.

Booth didn’t even get to finish a game that perhaps he should have—the 2015 NCAA Tournament game against North Carolina State. In the 71–68 loss for the Wildcats, Booth hit three of four three-point shots. Somewhat surprisingly to many, he was on the bench during crunch time, the last few minutes of the game. Coach Jay Wright opted to stick with starter Dylan Ennis, an upperclassman, who finished two of twelve shooting from the field while missing all six of his three-pointers. This included an open shot that would have given the Wildcats the lead with fifteen seconds left. “Phil never complained, never said a word,” Wright would say a year later.¹

That’s right: not a whimper from Booth. No quotes from him about being disgruntled showed up in the next day’s newspapers. His parents, Phil Sr. and Robin, had followed his season closely. At times, they must have felt they were right there on the bench with their son. They practically were, in fact, having

traveled to virtually all of Villanova’s games that 2014–15 season. One would guess it had to be particularly tough for Phil Sr. to watch—he had also starred in high school, in Philly, before going on to play at Coppin State. Young Phil was living out older Phil’s unfulfilled dream—playing for a Big Five school.

Despite his stellar high school play, Phil Jr.’s dreams of college-level stardom began on the bench. When Wright ran into Phil Sr. late in that first season, the coach assumed that Phil Jr.’s lack of minutes would be on his dad’s mind. Wright said to Phil’s dad, “Hey, you are the best parent in the world. Anybody else, with a kid as good as yours and only getting sixteen minutes a game [in Big East play], would have been complaining all year. He’s a great kid because of you and your wife, and you make sure you tell her that he’s going to be a hell of a basketball player.”²

Actually, Phil Sr., who had also played at the school of hard knocks, didn’t have an issue with his son’s playing minutes. He remarked, “To me, he plays a lot as a true freshman. And he earned it. He could have gone somewhere else and started, but I brought him up that way, to earn it.”³

Surely, many thought Booth would start as a sophomore. Wright even said as much in an off-season interview. But that didn’t happen either. Wright, it turns out, recruited Jalen Brunson, the number one high school point

“Energy and persistence conquer all things.”

—Benjamin Franklin

“Perseverance, secret of all triumphs.”

—Victor Hugo

“Adversity and perseverance and all these things can shape you. They can give you a value and a self-esteem that is priceless.”

—Scott Hamilton

“Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance.”

—Samuel Johnson

guard in the country. The coach had to go back on his word. Booth began the 2015–16 season on the bench again, with Wright now having a surplus of guards—too many deserving starters and not enough starting spots.

Booth's shooting percentages dropped off his sophomore year. However, he came up big in the NCAA Tournament. He scored ten points in the Final Four semifinal rout of Oklahoma and then a team-high twenty points in the NCAA championship win over North Carolina.

Booth made a critical jumper with about three minutes left that stopped a North Carolina run that had cut Villanova's lead from ten points to three. He then made a pair of free throws with thirty-five seconds left, touching off one of the most memorable last-minute, back-and-forth sequences in championship game history.

This time, with the clock running down in an NCAA Tournament game, Wright stuck with Booth down the stretch over the starter—in this case, Brunson. Booth's perseverance was vindicated. Note, too, that Booth's jumper with about three minutes left, the one that ended the Tar Heels' 7–0 surge, was the last field goal Villanova would score until Jenkins' shot for the ages.

“He was feeling it in this game,” Wright said of Booth. “We had a decision in the end. Do we go with the guy coming off the bench or Jalen Brunson, the starter, who had a great year? This time we went with Phil, and it worked out.”⁴

Booth's remarkable patience and perseverance in sticking it out his first two seasons in a bench role were rewarded with a team-high twenty-point performance in the championship game. That result was made even more noteworthy when it was later found he had been dealing with a bout of mononucleosis as well as an injured knee that would require postseason surgery. They don't give out the Red Badge

of Courage or the Purple Heart in college basketball, but Booth did get recognized when selected to the 2016 All-Final Four team. You could even say Booth was the tournament MVP—Most Vindicated by Perseverance.

Harold Jensen, one of the heroes of Villanova's 1985 championship team, had this advice for Booth after the game: “Cherish the moment, feel blessed, and have supreme confidence going forward. And then get back to work!”⁵

That's what someone who's a stickler for sticking it out, regardless of circumstances and sentiment, does every day: get back to work. Persevering is doing something despite adversity or delay in achieving success. It is a virtue that motivates a person to continue trying despite opposition, setbacks, and failures.

Jay Wright and his Wildcats had to persevere through six straight seasons of not being able to make it beyond the NCAA Tournament's first weekend. The most recent early exit was in 2015.

“As soon as we lost the game against NC State [in 2015], we said, ‘Hey, we've got to own this.’ We lost the game,” Wright said. “We didn't realize we'd be talking about it this much. So during the season, everything that we did, there was always an afterthought, if we lost a game, someone would say, ‘Well, it doesn't matter because all you have to do is

“I do not think that there is any other quality so essential to success of any kind as the quality of perseverance. It overcomes almost everything, even nature.”

—John D. Rockefeller

“A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.”

—Christopher Reeve

“To persevere, trusting in what hopes he has, is courage in a man.”

—Euripides

get to the second weekend anyway.’ If we won the Big East Championship, people would say, ‘Well, that doesn’t matter. You’ve got to get to the second weekend.’”⁶

Most people shy away from adversity, but champions who have mastered their lives thrive on it. Perseverance is a virtue we can choose to embrace, even if we don’t really feel it at the time. The best way to incorporate a virtue into your life is to simply act virtuously. Strength of will, determination, and being proactive are key ingredients of perseverance. You don’t have to increase strength of will or determination to move forward. You just act.

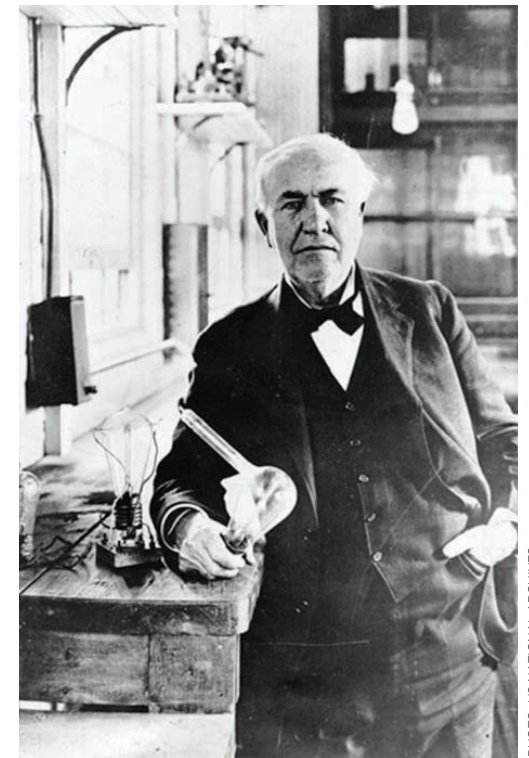
Oh, you don’t want to put in a few extra hours to complete that project at work and make it your best handiwork—so you clock out right at five and settle for just getting by? Shame on you. Or your boss is grating on you, and so you want to give it up—quit and go home, and go look for another job? Not a chance for anyone who claims to embrace endurance or has the willingness to see a challenge through to the end. Or how about that weekend golf game with your buds? You are three holes down at the turn with ten bucks a hole riding on it, and you reach for your wallet to show your surrender? C’mon!

Let’s Try That One More Time

Just think if Thomas Edison, one of our country’s greatest inventors, had given up trying to create the first incandescent light bulb after the first seven or eight hundred tries. We might still be reading our novels by candlelight—or by moonlight on a clear night. It has long been reported that it took Edison a thousand unsuccessful attempts before he could get the light bulb to work. That number might very well be hyperbole, and besides, who was counting? Was it exactly one thousand tries before he found success? The exact number doesn’t matter. What does matter is that Edison was a relentless inventor despite

having been told by teachers when growing up that he was too stupid to learn anything.

Part of Edison’s exceptional skill as an inventor wasn’t just in his willingness to try different things over and over and over until he got them right; it also was his enthusiasm to continue generating new ideas. This was done even after some of his early work ended up exploited by others—with Edison not sharing in the profits from the sales of devices based on his work. He could have just said to heck with it, believing that such inventive work required too much time for him to consider starting from scratch with another new idea.



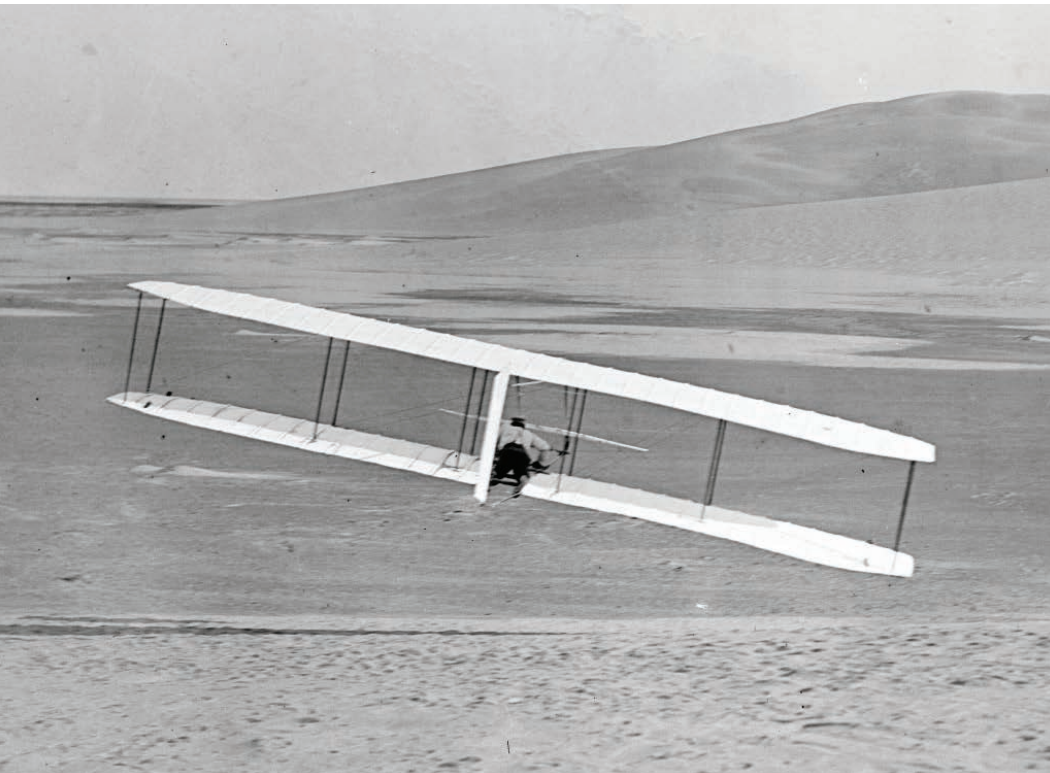
Thomas Edison (1847–1931) – Referred to as “America’s Greatest Inventor.”

PHOTO: US NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Edison’s other inventions, requiring thousands of hours of trial and error, were surely mixed with bouts of frustration and discouragement. These inventions included the phonograph, the motion picture camera, batteries for electric-powered cars, a stock ticker, and a mechanical vote recorder that some critics at first saw as a threat to the democratic process. All told, the prolific and, yes, persevering Edison held 1,093 US patents in his name.⁷

Then there were the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville. About the turn of the twentieth century, they were among the few men of that time who believed that powered flight was possible. They left their bicycle shop in Ohio for months at a time to go to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. There, the brothers relentlessly built and tested

variations of a flying device. They started with gliders and worked their way to an aircraft that could successfully fly under its own power while carrying a human.



ATTRIBUTED TO WILBUR WRIGHT AND/OR ORVILLE WRIGHT / OTHER

The Wright Brothers, Orville (1871–1948) and Wilbur (1867–1912) – Aviation Pioneers Credited with Inventing, Building, and Flying the World’s First Successful Airplane.

Time after time, the Wright brothers tested and tweaked—and then tried again and tweaked some more. They kept going back to North Carolina year after year, determined to find a way to conquer the mysteries of aerodynamics. News traveled slowly in those days, but when word eventually got out about what the Wright brothers were doing, critics, cynics, and scoffers came out of the woodwork to belittle their efforts, claiming man would never fly. Wilbur and Orville had

enough obstacles of their own to deal with, such as bad weather, lack of finances, and lugging their equipment back and forth each year between 1900 and 1903. Thankfully, they ignored the critics.

They never gave up. On December 17, 1903, with Orville lying on his stomach at the controls, they fired up the Wright Flyer. It ambled down the launching track they had built, and the aircraft climbed off the ground and flew 120 feet, staying airborne for twelve seconds. Powered, manned flight was now a reality.⁸

Another great example of perseverance was actor Christopher Reeve. He was severely injured in an equestrian accident and was left a quadriplegic, only to return to acting and also to become a prominent activist. He founded the Christopher Reeve Foundation, which is dedicated to funding innovative research, curing spinal cord injury, and improving the quality of life for people living with paralysis.

Perhaps the most famous person who exemplified perseverance was Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth US president. Lincoln was a failure serving in the military (demoted from captain to private); he also failed as a businessman, was an unsuccessful attorney, and lost numerous political races before he finally won the presidency.

Abraham Lincoln is well-known for his determination and persistence in the face of difficulty. “His long-time friend Joseph Gillespie attributed it to a balanced type of strength, saying, ‘Mr. Lincoln was capable of immense physical and mental labor. His mind and body were in perfect harmony.’

“His law partner, William H. Herndon, expressed it this way: ‘Mr. Lincoln was a peculiar man; he was intensely thoughtful, persistent, fearless, and tireless in thinking. When he got after a thought, fact, principle, question, he ran it down to the fibers of the tap root, dug it out, and held it up before him for an analysis, and when he thus

formed an opinion, no man could overthrow it; he was in this particular without an equal.”¹⁰

Villanova has also produced its share of persevering heroes, such as 2012 graduate and emergency medical technician, Erin Mack. She is featured on Villanova’s “Ignite Change. Go Nova” web page. In 2011, Mack’s childhood best friend and an uncle were both given a cancer diagnosis. This prompted Mack to join the fight against cancer.⁹

A week after graduation, Mack set out on a seventy-day, four-thousand-mile charity bike ride from Baltimore to San Francisco. It was called the “4K for Cancer,” and it raised more than \$1 million to support cancer patients and their families. If the ride itself didn’t involve perseverance enough, along the way, Mack stopped in several cities where she took part in various cancer outreach programs, performing such duties as visiting hospitals and cooking dinners for cancer patients and their families.

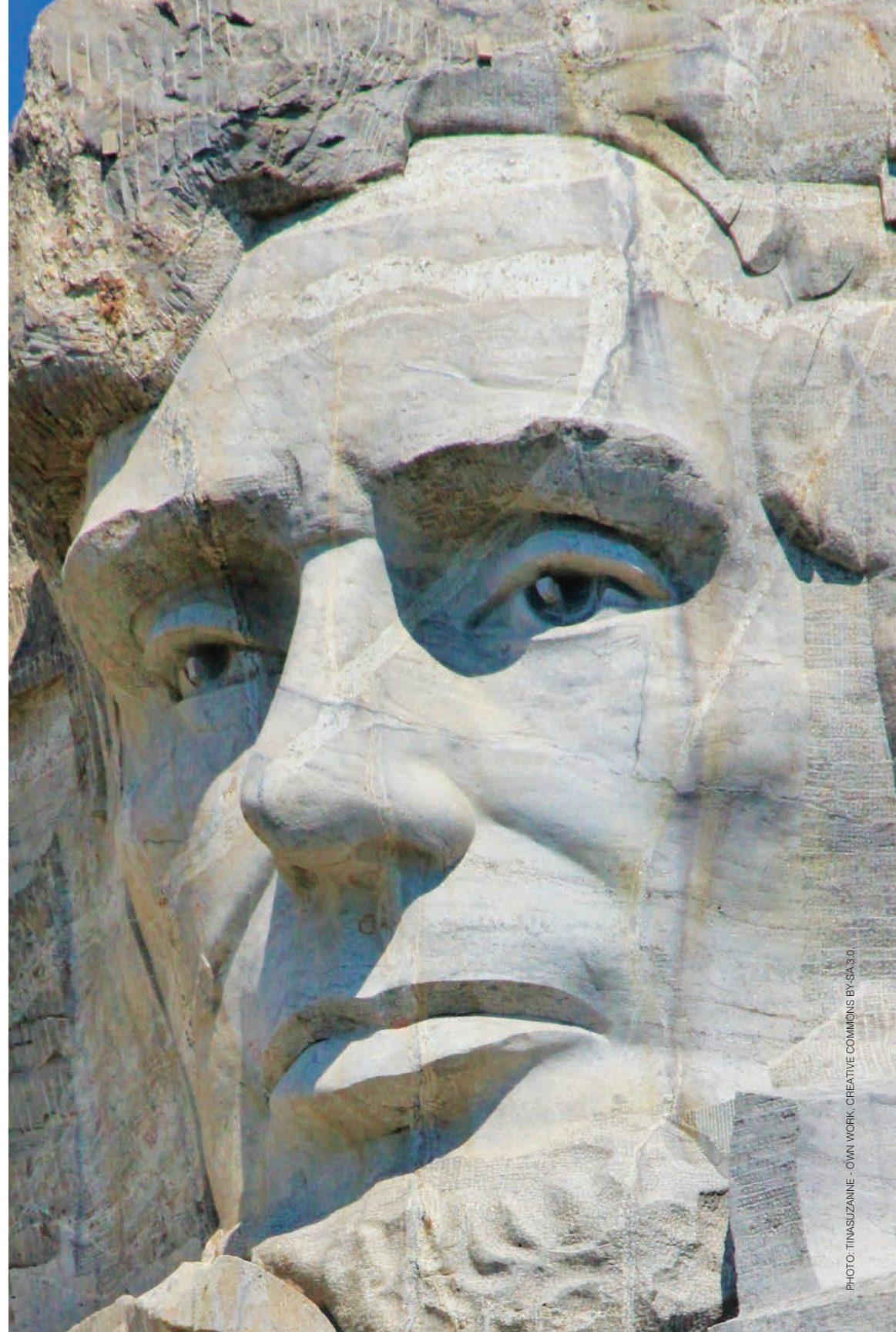
Perseverance is a powerful force.

Questions to Ponder

When in your life have you been forced to persevere well beyond the norm? What do you remember you did in those times to succeed?

#beperserverant | #perseverance

Right: Abraham Lincoln Memorialized on Mount Rushmore.





*Jalen Brunson – Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER
13.
SWEET
SIXTEEN

*“I do the very best I know how, the
very best I can, and I mean to keep
on doing so until the end.”*

—Abraham Lincoln

Be Your Best

STRIVING TO BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE IS CONTAGIOUS. AT LEAST IT SHOULD BE, ASSUMING YOU ARE PART OF A FUNCTIONAL TEAM. WHEN OTHERS SEE YOU WORKING AS HARD AS YOU CAN AND WITH A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE, IT INSPIRES THEM TO DO THE SAME. THIS STUFF RUBS OFF.

If you are shooting 70 percent from the free-throw line, but you know you can be making 80 percent, commit to shooting a hundred practice foul shots a day. Be willing to seek out and solicit guidance and encouragement from someone more skilled than you. Want to get better at golf or tennis? How about badminton, or even chess? Play with someone better than you every chance you get. Pick his or

“A problem is a chance for you to do your best.”

—Duke Ellington

“Better a little which is well done, than a great deal imperfectly.”

—Plato

“The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today.”

—H. Jackson Brown Jr.

“You must accept that you might fail; then, if you do your best and still don’t win, at least you can be satisfied that you’ve tried.”

—Rosalynn Carter

her brain. Being the best isn’t just doing; it’s learning. Be a sponge: *soak up excellence.*

For more than twenty years, the US Army had the recruiting slogan *“Be all you can be.”* That’s a good way to get this message across. Strive to excel. You can already do fifty push-ups? Why not seventy-five? You hit eighteen of twenty-five free throws in practice yesterday? How about twenty tomorrow, or twenty-two? What will it take for you to get there? Then, what? Never stop trying to be the best you. This is the Jay Wright way at Villanova; strive to improve every day.

In 2014–15, Villanova got knocked out of the NCAA Tournament in their second game, making it six straight years without getting past the tournament’s first weekend. Cynics called it a lost season. Not Wright. He didn’t see the season as a lost cause. His players worked hard all season to be the best they could be, and they were improving week by week. Each day they focused on doing things a little bit better than the day before. By season’s end, they were playing their best basketball. They just happened to lose that game to a hot North Carolina State team, so it was bounce-back time a year later in 2015–16.

This brings us to Jalen Brunson, the indefatigable point guard for the Villanova Wildcats. If ever Coach Jay Wright had a player weaned to be the best that he can be, it was Brunson. In large part that’s because of Jalen’s dad. Rick

Brunson played nine seasons in the NBA after starring at Temple University. In his nine seasons in the NBA, Rick Brunson played for fourteen teams—multiple times each for four of them: the Trail Blazers, Knicks, Bulls, and Clippers.

Dad expected the best out of his son at all times, and his son embraced the challenge. Jalen loved basketball, as did his dad. It was clear from an early age that Jalen had a gift for the game that would likely earn him a major college basketball scholarship and, perhaps, a career in the NBA. Rick was determined to help Jalen reach his goal—a career in professional basketball.

Somewhere in that chaotic, topsy-turvy world of being a journeyman hoopster, hanging on to hope more than a rim post-dunk, the elder Brunson took it upon himself to be a relentlessly tough coach for his son. While often criticized for his strict style, Rick used this approach to make sure young Jalen would be a supremely skilled, well-rounded basketball talent.¹

Rick took on the role of a hardcore Marine Corps drill instructor, riding and sometimes scolding his son for perceived mistakes and lack of effort. Essentially, Dad was Jalen’s own live-in Bobby Knight, the legendary basketball coach known for his strict approach (and chair throwing). Rick was available 24-7 for constructive criticism, which often came disguised as harsh discipline.

Jalen Brunson took it all in. When his dad told him to shoot one hundred right-handed lay-ups, followed by one hundred left-handed lay-ups, nonstop, Jalen complied. If he wanted to be the best, he had to bust it. So the story goes that Dad busted Jalen’s chops over and over in order to keep his kid moving forward and advancing his game. No pain, no gain.

It wasn’t just the physical skills, either. Rick also insisted Jalen keep his head screwed on right. He wanted him to know *when* to shoot and

“We have to do the best we can. This is our sacred human responsibility.”

—Albert Einstein

“Always do your best. What you plant now, you will harvest later.”

—Og Mandino

“Doing the best at this moment puts you in the best place for the next moment.”

—Oprah Winfrey

when to pass, and how to balance the two. According to *Sports Illustrated*, one day in a pickup game, Jalen was gunning the ball a bit much; he should have been getting the ball to his teammates more. Seeing this, an apoplectic Rick Brunson walked out onto the court and chewed out his son, telling Jalen, “None of these people came here to watch you play by yourself. Pass the ball, or get out of the gym.”²

If you want to be the best, you must compete and think like the best. In basketball, the best is what’s best for the team, no question.

Whenever Jalen grew frustrated with trying to execute one of his dad’s demanding drills, *Sports Illustrated* reports that Rick might walk away, turning back just long enough to utter phrases such as, “You don’t want to be the best player in the country. You don’t want to be great!” Actually, he was yelling, not uttering. Jalen would stay and finish the drill on his own, then walk home.³

Jalen wasn’t a wallflower through all this, though. At times he and his father went at it nose to nose. Neither backed down. “I’d roll my eyes, give him attitude,” Jalen said. “He constantly told me, ‘If you don’t want this, let me know, and I’ll stop.’ But I never said stop. I wanted it.”

So while the younger Brunson could have backed away from all this, he never did. In fact, he thrived on it, continually striving to



*Jalen Brunson and Teammates Continually Strive to Be Their Best
Final Four Semifinal vs. Oklahoma – 2016*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

“It’s fun to be on the edge. I think you do your best work when you take chances, when you’re not safe, when you’re not in the middle of the road—at least for me, anyway.”

—Danny DeVito

“My father taught me not to overthink things, that nothing will ever be perfect, so just keep moving and do your best.”

—Scott Eastwood

“Perfection is impossible; just strive to do your best.”

—Angela Watson

be his best. Jalen molded himself, with his father’s tenacious guidance, into the nation’s top-rated point guard recruit by the time he was a senior at Stevenson High School, in Lincolnshire, Illinois, near Chicago.

Some onlookers who witnessed Rick’s manner probably squirmed, thinking this was some sort of abuse. Perhaps they were tempted to intervene, not realizing that this is often what the route to excellence looks like. In the case of the Brunsons, some might say the end seemed to justify the means. How far are you willing to go to be the best?

Jalen Brunson was an exceptional point guard who aspired to be even better. He had already made it through a boot camp much longer and likely more intense than anything Jay Wright would dish out. Coach Wright was smitten. Fortunately for Villanova fans, his relentless recruiting of Jalen was rewarded.

I can empathize with what Jalen went through with his dad. My father had his moments too, as a source of “encouragement” that I often interpreted as harsh criticism. It was “for your own good,” Dad said, but that’s not how I saw it at the time. There were times when he pushed me beyond my tolerance levels.

Dad corrected me a lot—mostly about how I spoke. I would make grammatical mistakes or express opinions or beliefs that he felt weren’t well-reasoned out. He came across as a

contrarian. If I had an idea, it was best that I not talk about it around him unless I had already thought out all the pros and cons. He was a stickler for thinking before doing or speaking.

I believe I now understand what was going on. Dad was an internal auditor much of his career. He was tasked with improving a massive organization’s operations. It was a job that required a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluating and improving operational effectiveness. Dad truly wanted me to have a disciplined, always improving approach to life, and he tried to teach me the only way he knew how—through persistent reinforcement.

As it turned out, this “disciplined” approach helped me be a critical thinker who could carry an idea a lot further than most (hence this book). When I first read the Brunsons’ story, my “aha!” moment came in realizing my dad’s discipline was because he loved me and wanted me to go far in life. Please remember this if you had or have an overbearing dad. Most likely, he’s that way because he loves you and wants you to be the absolute best you can be.

Celebrate Continuous Improvement

Being the best you can be, and dedicating yourself to continuous improvement, ties directly into Coach Wright’s philosophy. He encourages his players to make every day better than the day before in terms of developing attitude, skills, team play, and execution. This concept of continuous improvement and the commitment to excellence were also at the heart of Saturn Corporation’s Culture and Management Training Program. These core values were taught to dealership employees in the 1990s just before the launch of Saturn automobiles. The old way of selling cars through sales tactics based on trickery, deceit, and dishonesty was over. Indifference from service and parts personnel was to be a thing of the past.



SATURN®

You might ask what Saturn's core values have to do with Villanova Basketball? Apparently, quite a bit. Not only did I arrive at Saturn as a Villanova graduate who understood these core values, I was hired as a trainer to teach them at the Saturn dealerships. This is no coincidence, nor is it intended to sound like some pompous "great minds think alike" declaration. Clearly, this is a set of core

values that have stood the test of time and are as applicable today as they have been for centuries.

Saturn's "new way" of forging a values-based corporate strategy was based on many of the same philosophies I had learned at Villanova and during my continuing education in the Human Potential Movement. This stuff works, and apparently, it resonates across eras and cultures. When you approach a new mission, task, or basketball opponent, you should do it with the expectation that you will excel. Lesson One: Don't give up. As long as you stay hungry, determined to excel, the very least that will happen is that others will see what you are doing, and your commitment to excellence will be a model for them to follow.

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen Covey says the best approach to learning something is to

approach a subject as if you must soon teach it to others.⁴ You thus become both student and teacher-in-training at the same time. By taking this approach, you learn deeply. Learning in this manner ensures the material sticks with you as it becomes ingrained. As an added benefit, you are later able to teach what you've learned to others.

Any discussion of continuous improvement and a commitment to excel must include W. Edwards Deming,⁵ who lived from 1900 to 1993. To say Deming is synonymous with those terms is not an overstatement; they define the body of work he achieved over a lifetime. An engineer by trade as well as a statistician, scholar, teacher, author, and global business expert, Deming has been called "the father of the third wave of the industrial revolution."

Deming not only researched and taught on being the best, he also consulted with major corporations and nations on the matter of continual quality improvement. His most notable accomplishment was helping rebuild Japan after the devastating end to World War II (think Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

Deming is described on The W. Edwards Deming Institute's website (www.deming.com) as the "architect" of Japan's remarkable post-World War II transformation. He played a major role in turning the familiar phrase "Made in Japan" from a source of ridicule and laughter to a perception of worldwide respect for Japan's innovative, high-quality products.

A generation later, Deming, then in his eighties, was reintroduced to America, where he played a significant role in helping the US auto industry make a resurgence.

Deming's legacy of business and quality acumen in the United States and abroad could be summed up as "continually improve." The founders of Saturn can vouch for his great influence. When the company sent its "Team of Ninety-Nine" to uncover and report back

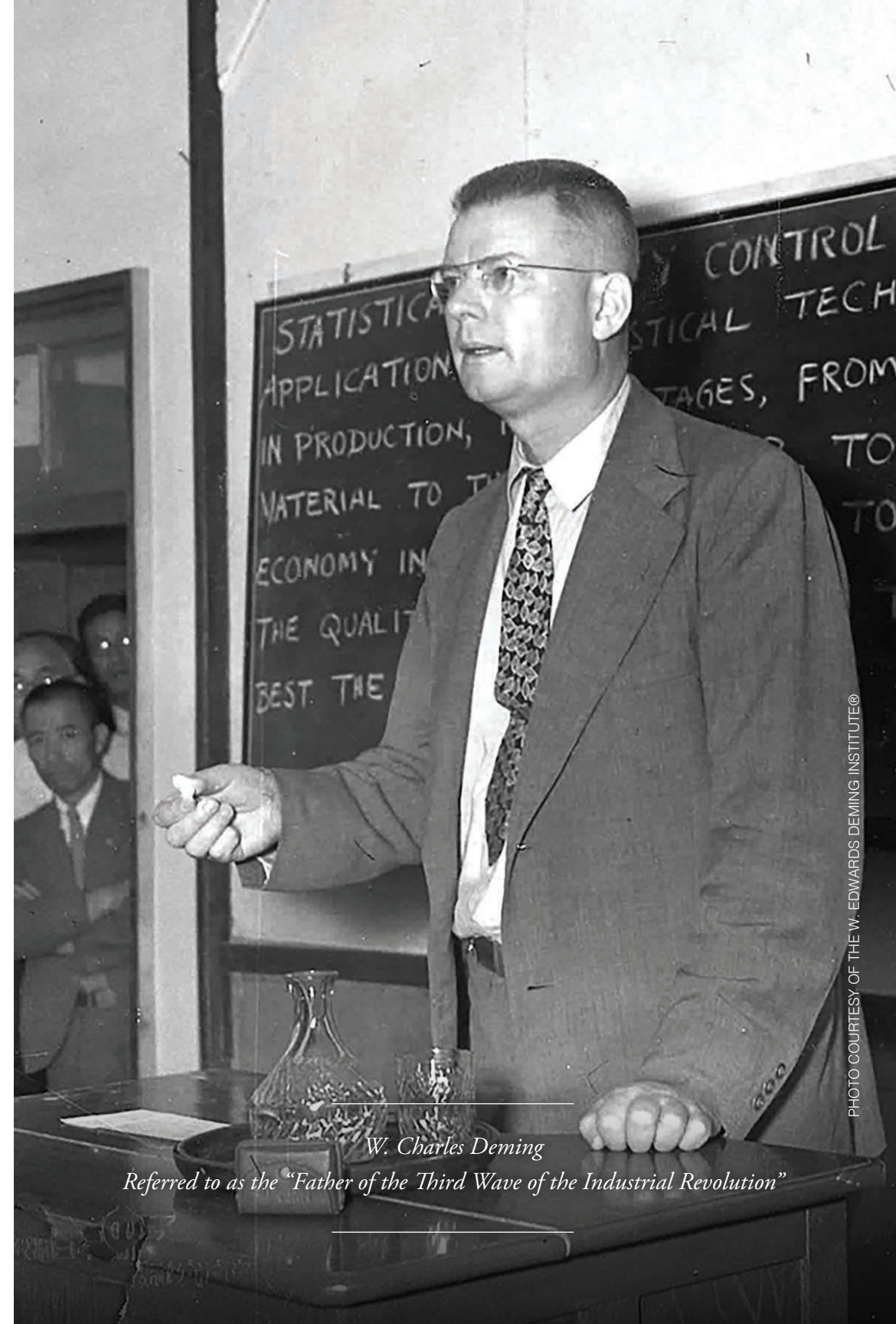
on the best of the best practices and processes found in industries around the world, they were surprised to find that the man behind Japan's astonishing bounce back from the end of World War II was an American: Deming.

Continually improve. Get a little bit better every day.

Questions to Ponder

What is one thing that you're good at but would like to get better at doing? What would it take for you to get there?

#beyourbest | #continuousimprovement



W. Charles Deming
Referred to as the "Father of the Third Wave of the Industrial Revolution"

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE W. EDWARDS DEMING INSTITUTE®



Mikal Bridges — Villanova Wildcats
2016 NCAA National Champions

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER 14. SWEET SIXTEEN

*“I believe luck is preparation
meeting opportunity.
If you hadn’t been prepared when
the opportunity came along, you
wouldn’t have been lucky.”*

—Oprah Winfrey

Be Prepared

SAY IT AGAIN, PROUDLY: BE PREPARED! IT IS THE MOTTO OF THE BOY SCOUTS. IT IS ALSO THE CALLING CARD OF VILLANOVA GUARD/FORWARD MIKAL BRIDGES. IN 2015–16 HE NEARLY PERFECTED HIS ROLE AS THE WILDCATS’ MASTER OF DEFENSE OFF THE BENCH. HE ACCOMPLISHED THIS THROUGH INTENSE PREPARATION, WITH PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE, AND ENTHUSIASM.

Bridges has had lots of practice when it comes to preparedness. He redshirted as a freshman. That’s why he didn’t get into any games during his freshman year. All he could focus on during the 2014–15 season was preparation. (What else could he do?) He prepared his teammates by posing as an opposing player, and he prepared himself

“Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.”

—Ben Franklin

“If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time.”

—Steve Jobs

“Be Prepared... the meaning of the motto is that a scout must prepare himself by previous thinking out and practicing how to act on any accident or emergency so that he is never taken by surprise.”

—Robert Baden-Powell

for whatever would come his way when his redshirt came off. This preparation paid off in what turned out to be the 2015–16 championship season.

In basketball, there’s mental, emotional, and physical conditioning. Can you go full throttle for forty minutes? There’s also game-strategy preparation. It’s more than planning; it’s preparing. These are two different things, but they go hand-in-hand. Planning is “heads-on”; preparing is “hands-on.” In the case of Bridges, hands-on sometimes means diving to the floor when there’s a loose ball with his name on it.

During his redshirt year as a Villanova freshman, Bridges was asked what he saw himself doing the next year. He replied, “My body on the floor from diving, playing hard on defense, running the floor, and playing hard all the time. Coach tells me not to worry about being perfect. Just work hard, and everything will come through.”

It came through for Bridges in the 2015–16 season, most noticeably during the NCAA Tournament regional final game against Kansas. In twenty-six minutes of action off the bench, the rangy six-foot-seven Bridges—who plays like a seven-footer, with a wingspan almost that wide—came up with five steals.

In the closing moments of the nail-biting 64–59 victory over the Jayhawks, he was diving on the floor for loose balls. With less



Mikal Bridges Strikes Pose Reminiscent of 1985 Championship Game Victory.

than fifteen seconds left, teammate Ryan Arcidiacono slapped the ball away from a Kansas player. Bridges dove to the floor, grabbed the loose ball, and looked up at the game clock as a time-out was called.

With his body spread across the floor and his forearms grasping the ball, Bridges had unwittingly struck a pose like the one Dwayne McClain made as the clock ran out and Villanova clinched the 1985 championship game against Georgetown. Over the last thirty-four seconds of the Kansas game, Bridges made two of his game-high five steals, helping seal the victory for the now Final Four-bound Wildcats.

“I give him the MVP ball today. In the biggest game of our career, he’s in the game down the stretch getting those defensive stops,” teammate and captain Daniel Ochefu said of Bridges.¹

To be prepared in basketball means knowing exactly what to do in each of dozens of game-time circumstances before they happen, reacting correctly without time to stop and contemplate. Here’s an academic

“I always had a philosophy that I got from my father. He used to say, ‘Listen. God gave to you the gift to play football. This is your gift from God. If you take care of your health, if you are in good shape all the time, with your gift from God no one will stop you, but you must be prepared.’”

—Pelé

“It is well to be prepared for life as it is, but it is better to be prepared to make life better than it is.”

—Sargent Shriver

analogy: it’s like walking into the classroom on the day of your final examination, fully confident and relaxed because you have spent countless hours thoroughly studying the class material. You know you can handle any test question, including any curve balls the professor is going to throw at you. No stone has been left unturned in your preparation.

To the untrained eye, a basketball game at full speed can be perceived as a steady succession of random events in which players, particularly those on defense, don’t know what’s coming next. The truth is, basketball, even at full speed, is anything but random or “made up as you go.” A succession of random events? Hardly.

Presumably, if the coach has done his or her job, teams are prepared to handle almost every contingency imaginable. Whether it’s dealing with a steal and pushing the ball up the floor for a lay-up, or dealing with a tricky defense constantly switching off, or even facing a tied game when you have just 4.7 seconds left and ninety-four feet to go with a national championship at stake, nothing is left to chance. Champions come prepared.

“We practice all those situations,” Wright said. “We practice what happens when we turn the ball over down the stretch. We practice what happens if we miss foul shots. We practice how we are going to react when things aren’t going our way. So, when we get into a game, these guys know how to respond to it.”²

Perhaps the best kind of preparation is practicing how to deal with adversity, both mentally and strategically. Jay Wright frequently preaches to his players about practicing for (read *preparing* for) adverse situations. Essentially, his message is, “We practice to create habits to prepare for adversity.” Adversity is when the “stuff” hits the fan.

If you are adequately prepared, you have an idea of what the “stuff” might look like before it happens, and part of the preparation is realizing it’s going to look different each time you encounter it. It could entail losing a teammate to an injury, a couple of particularly bad calls by the officials, or an opponent going on a 10–0 run that could make your head spin. If you are truly prepared, none of those scenarios makes a dent in your psyche. “Next play!” as Wright would say. Move on and make the best of what is to come.

“We practice the most difficult situations,” Arcidiacono said. “Anytime we turn the ball over in practice, the other team gets five points. We’re used to coming back and battling and making it ugly. It’s a mentality about this program with each guy on this team.”³

Again, in terms of preparing for adversity, let’s go back to Villanova in the 1985 NCAA Tournament and its championship game against the powerful Georgetown Hoyas. The Wildcats were to face a dominant, Patrick Ewing–led team with enough firepower at both ends of the court to blow out opponents.

“I don’t believe in team motivation. I believe in getting a team prepared so it knows it will have the necessary confidence when it steps on a field and be prepared to play a good game.”

—Tom Landry

“You have to be prepared to take a spill.”

—Shaun White

“The young must be prepared to experience innumerable disappointments and yet not fail.”

—Ellen Key

“Always be prepared to start.”

—Joe Montana

Wildcats coach Rollie Massimino had his team well prepared in a manner rarely seen in sports. It wasn't just the Xs and Os game plan; it was Massimino's specific charge to his team. He told them that sometime during the game—there was no way to know when—the Hoyas would likely rip off a bunch of points. The trick was to expect it and then get beyond it; just another order of business. The 1985 Wildcats did exactly that; they never panicked, and they pulled off the biggest upset ever in NCAA Tournament championship game history. No luck involved—just the right kind of preparation.



PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941)
Founder of The UK Boy Scouts and inspiration
for the US Boy Scouts Association.

Prepare Your Mind and Your Body

The Boy Scout motto, “Be prepared,” is broken down into two components—body and mind—which is consistent with our discussion so far in this chapter. To me, being prepared means having the presence of mind to react positively when things don't go my way.

Jay Wright often uses the word “adversity,” but at this point I will use the word “challenge,” because the subject I want to talk about now is golf. In

reality, bad golf shots don't constitute “adversity”—not unless you are playing alone, your shot hits a tree, a limb falls on you, knocking you out, leaving you too injured to get off the golf course under your own power. Now, that's “adversity.”

When I say “challenges,” I mean things like hitting a shot that ends up in a sand trap—or what is officially known as a bunker. For most people, the first reaction when hitting a ball into the sand is to utter a few choice words while a cloud of negativity settles over their brain. The situation begins to deteriorate or maybe even become profane. However, I know that when it comes to golf, I can't afford the luxury of a negative thought. Maybe professional golfer Phil Mickelson can; I can't.

Being prepared for things like golf balls in sand traps is the fifteenth club in my bag (golf rules limit golfers to fourteen clubs). This isn't rocket science. Being prepared is reminding myself before I go out to play a round of golf that I will likely encounter hazards on the course (a sand trap or water feature falls within the category of “hazard”). Acknowledging this possibility is a start to being prepared for such circumstances. Like it or not, you must deal with them.

This is where I think like Jay Wright. But, where he says, “Next play,” I say, “Next shot.” Forget about the last shot; focus on the next one. Now's the time to convince myself I'm going to blast out of the trap and get into a nice position on the green (if not in the cup). I resolve to do this even before I tee off on the first hole—to be prepared to treat every hazard-bound shot as an opportunity to hit the next ball better than I ever have from such a position. What else can I do? No mulligans allowed.

If I hit the ball into the sand, I say to myself, “*Fantastic! This gives me a chance to have the greatest sand shot of my life.*” In this way, I am tricking my mind into making my body do just that: make a great sand shot. In doing so, my body relaxes; there is no longer the sort of

tension that anger or frustration can produce. Remember, a relaxed body with a relaxed grip, as any golf pro will tell you, is key to making good shots. Best of all, it's more fun to play with this mental approach.

“Be prepared” encompasses being mentally prepared. It is something you can control, whatever the setting—the basketball court, the golf course, the classroom, the office, the family dinner table. Be prepared for things that don't go (or get said) the way you want them to go.

Being prepared is also making good use of your time while “waiting in the wings.” Whether you are a bench player, an understudy in a Broadway play, or a vice president with CEO aspirations, you should not be just waiting in the wings, twiddling your thumbs. You should be working in the wings, preparing for that next opportunity. Clear out any thoughts of being entitled. Be determined to earn it. That is what prepares you.

The epitome of preparation at Villanova is what Wright calls the “Wildcat Minute.” It comes at the end of practice, when players are tired, all the better to simulate late-game conditions. Wright puts sixty seconds on the clock and dictates the scenario to run. It's starters versus the practice team, with the opposition not only knowing each play as well as the starters, but also given plenty of latitude in terms of physicality and fouling. At the end of each play, Wright slices more time off the clock for the next play or scenario so players get accustomed to experiencing the sand of time running out in the game. This is done repeatedly throughout the season, from start to finish.⁴

Prepare for Your Magic Moment

The winning play for Villanova in the 2016 NCAA title game started with 4.7 seconds left; it was the one in which Kris Jenkins hit the

twenty-nine footer at the buzzer to win the game. It's called Nova, and it's a full-court play that leads to several shooting options, the last one being Arcidiacono dribbling the ball over midcourt and dishing to the trailing Jenkins for the shot.

Wright didn't draw up the play on the palm of his hand during the time-out before the play. He simply called “Nova” in the huddle. Every Wildcat knew that was to be the play without Wright even having to say the word. Nova—it was a play the Wildcats had prepared for in practice during the Wildcat Minute hundreds of times!

Being thoroughly prepared was why Ochefu had the presence of mind to grab that mop and wipe up the wet spot exactly where he knew Arcidiacono would be making his pivot to break free from a defender. Being prepared allowed Arcidiacono to be in position to make the right choice of what to do next, to know which options the play allowed, and to plan for a multitude of contingencies—depending on how he and others were defended. Being prepared allowed him to see that the best option was to pass to Jenkins, the pass that would win the game.

Be prepared!

Question to Ponder

Think back to a particular time or task that you went into knowing you were well prepared. What was it that made you so well prepared in that instance?

#beprepared | #beaboy Scout



The Bench Mob (white shirts, L to R) – Kevin Rafferty, Henry Lowe, and Patrick Farrell – Villanova Wildcats 2016 NCAA National Champions

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER 15. SWEET SIXTEEN

“I know of no single formula for success. But over the years I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm, and their inspiration to work together.”

—Queen Elizabeth II

Be Enthusiastic

THERE HAS BEEN A LOT TO BE EXCITED ABOUT WITH THE VILLANOVA MEN’S BASKETBALL PROGRAM IN RECENT YEARS. THAT WAS EVEN BEFORE COACH JAY WRIGHT’S TEAM WON THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP IN 2016. EXCITEMENT BEGINS WITH ENTHUSIASM, AND FOR THE WILDCATS THAT SPARK OF ENTHUSIASM HAS OFTEN EMANATED FROM ITS BENCH PLAYERS. EVEN WHEN THEY DON’T SEE ANY ACTION, THEY ARE PLENTY ACTIVE.

In recent years, Villanova’s Henry Lowe, Patrick Farrell, and Kevin Rafferty—three walk-on players (not on basketball scholarships)—grabbed national attention with their expressed enthusiasm, culminating in the 2016 national championship when they were seniors.



*Will D. Cat – Mascot – The Spirit of the Wildcats
Embodied in all Villanova Athletic Teams.*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

Collectively, they became known across Nova Nation as the “Bench Mob.” One of their roles was to fire up their teammates and Villanova fans with bench-area antics at opportune times. Imagine them shooting imaginary arrows into the air with imaginary bows, or other demonstrations of enthusiasm gone wild. This was particularly needed in their freshman year, the 2012–13 season, when the Wildcats played so poorly the first half of the year. Anything to rouse the enthusiasm of the fans helped the mood of everyone involved.

It seemed to work! Their excitement and spirit were contagious. As the 2012–13 season rolled on, the more enthusiasm the Bench Mob displayed, the more enthusiasm the fans displayed; the team caught the spirit of enthusiasm and started winning more games.

At the beginning of the following 2013–14 season, Coach Wright asked the now sophomore Bench Mob members to take on another role. He wanted them to share the Villanova culture with the incoming freshman players, Josh Hart, Kris Jenkins, and Darryl Reynolds. It turned out the Bench Mob were just as successful in their new roles as they had been the previous year. They relished their new responsibility and grew with it over the years and through the championship season.

“For us, it’s really about carrying the culture of the program around,” Patrick Farrell said. “It’s about instilling the culture of playing hard, playing together, playing smart, and playing with pride. That’s really what we do on a daily basis—try to hammer it into the younger guys’ brains so the culture lasts forever, and it just gets passed on.”¹

“They [the Bench Mob] have, no doubt, the hardest job on this team, because they know they’re not going to go into the game, they’re not going to score twenty, they’re not going to make the game winning play,” said Josh Hart, now a starter and scholarship player. “But they are embracing a role as Villanova Basketball players that are going to be a spark, that’s going to motivate you, fire you up.”²



PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

Eric Paschall – Redshirt Sophomore – 2016.

The three walk-ons who eventually came to comprise the Bench Mob didn't join the program expecting to garner national attention for their sideline energy. They came knowing their role was to challenge the scholarship players in practice, pushing them and even shoving on occasion to get them prepared for the next opponent.

The role of firing up their teammates isn't just for the court. It also comes into play between practices as well, as the walk-ons share dorm space with the players on scholarship. They are accepted by everyone on the team as equals, bearing gifts of enthusiasm—and sometimes constructive criticism which they have earned the right to express.

“Sometimes when players don't bring it on a certain day,” Farrell said, “Coach Wright really does want us to try and expose them, so they can see it, like, ‘Today, I didn't bring it. Tomorrow I gotta come back even harder to make up for yesterday.’ That's where we come into play the most—[with] our off-court actions more than our on-court actions.”³

Not to be forgotten on Villanova's 2016 National Championship team are three players who wore red shirts over their blue and whites:

Eric Paschall, Donte DiVencenzo, and Tim Delaney.

Eric Paschall was not eligible to play in 2015–16 after transferring from Fordham. But he was allowed to practice, and he did it consistently with enthusiasm. Eric used his six-foot-seven, 260-pound body and incredible talent to pose relentless challenges for Wildcats starters trying to bang inside.

As a highly skilled player, this nearly invisible role was a huge change for Paschall. He had averaged thirty-one minutes a game as a freshman at Fordham and was named the Atlantic Ten Rookie of the Year. “Just being here is a blessing,” Paschall said of Villanova. “Playing against these dudes every day; pushing them to their limits while trying to make myself better at the same time has been a blessing.”⁴

Donte DiVencenzo played eight games in the 2015–16 season before being sidelined by an injury. His energy, enthusiasm, and skills in those eight games gave Nova Nation hopes for great things to come. Donte recovered from his injury and was a key part of the team's game day preparations late in the season and through the NCAA Tournament.



PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

Donte DiVencenzo - Redshirt Freshman – 2016.

Nova Nation fans got their first glimpse of DiVencenzo's enthusiasm when he won the slam-dunk contest at Villanova's "Hoops Mania" in 2015. He caught a pass off the side of the backboard and threw down a windmill dunk that generated a roar of enthusiastic response from the crowd.

Tim Delaney had his first season at Villanova derailed by surgery on both hips. He continued to provide enthusiastic support for the team throughout the year, despite spending much of it on crutches. He knew the value of enthusiasm, even when he wasn't on the court.



PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Dale Carnegie (1888-1955) Author and Speaker.

Make Enthusiasm a Habit

Dale Carnegie, who lived from 1888 to 1955, loved writing, lecturing, and espousing self-improvement principles. It made him famous and successful. Salesmanship and interpersonal skills were central to his creed of self-improvement. His resounding motivational and inspirational message lives on in his classic best-selling book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It was originally published in 1937, and eighty years later it remains one of the most popular books of all time.⁵

Carnegie built much of his success on his own enthusiastic nature. The early popularity of the book was due as much to his enthusiastic speeches about the book, as it was on the content itself. More than fifteen million copies have been sold because Carnegie's work delivers an essential message that success is achievable by any person—regardless of their background.

Dozens of books with a similar success premise have been written and published in the decades since Carnegie's death. However, Carnegie's book is generally regarded as revolutionary because of how he identified a list of specific core values needed for success. Enthusiasm was high on the list.

One of Carnegie's core directives was that we can change other people's behavior, presumably for the better, by how we behave toward them. According to Carnegie, enthusiasm is one of the key ingredients to effective behavior and influencing others. Among his many famous, still-timely quotes: "Flaming enthusiasm, backed up by horse sense and persistence, is the quality that most frequently makes for success."

Being enthusiastic isn't just in what you say or how you say it; it's more in how you show it. For instance, take Jay Wright. He embodies enthusiasm, not just in how he coaches his team but in how he has advanced his coaching career. This is a guy who went from selling ticket packages to sporting events to coaching at the highest level of college basketball because he was determined

"There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty, that makes human nature rise above itself, in acts of bravery and heroism."

—Alexander Hamilton

"Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm."

—Winston Churchill

"A mediocre idea that generates enthusiasm will go further than a great idea that inspires no one."

—Mary Kay Ash

“The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm.”

—Aldous Huxley

“Enthusiasm is excitement with inspiration, motivation, and a pinch of creativity.”

—Bo Bennett

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Enthusiasm is the most important thing in life.”

—Tennessee Williams

to do it. He was excited to do it—he was enthused.

At the University of Rochester, Wright would get up at 5:00 a.m. to perform three jobs: assistant intramural director, assistant varsity men’s basketball coach, and head junior varsity men’s basketball coach. Then he’d go out recruiting at night. “I’d be out recruiting and worried if I had referees for the floor hockey game set up,” Wright said. “So I’d be in the gym calling back to the student volunteer assistants in intramurals saying, ‘Do we have officials for floor hockey?’ or ‘Is co-ed basketball set up?’...It was a good time in my life; I enjoyed it, but it was literally three jobs at once.”⁶

One job requires ample enthusiasm as well, especially if that one job happens to be head coach of the Villanova men’s basketball team. Early in his tenure as head coach, Wright got caught up during one of his drills and took off after a loose ball, diving to the floor to catch it before it went any farther astray. It was one of those moments when everything and everyone stopped, aghast, wondering if the forty-ish coach was going to make it up off the floor intact. After a few seconds, Wright got up, and everyone laughed and clapped. “We knew he meant business,” said Billy Lange, at the time an assistant under Wright.⁷

Enthusiasm also means exceeding expectations. That was one of the calling cards when I worked for Saturn as a trainer in the 1990s,

teaching the company’s core values to car dealership employees on the West Coast. One of Saturn’s five core values was “Commitment to customer enthusiasm.”

For Saturn, enthusiasm was brought to life by exceeding customer expectations—in any way possible. In order to experience the true notion of “customer,” it must expand beyond just the retail customer. A true customer must include anyone you interact with during the day—anywhere.

A customer is also your coworker as well as anyone else you encounter, whether it’s the bellhop at the hotel or the mail carrier who brings a package to the door. You should go out of your way to do or say something nice to everyone you meet, every day. Be extra considerate because doing this is a demonstration of enthusiasm for the other person, the “customer.”

Saturn broke down every interface between two people into “moments of truth.” On the job, that could entail opening the door to the store for an arriving customer. Away from work, this might be the initial exchange between you and a server. At each decisive moment, a person has an expectation depending on the circumstance. Saturn taught only three things can happen at these moments of truth: the expectation is met, it’s not met, or it’s exceeded. If the customer coming through that front door is greeted by a lovely aroma, some nice music, along with

“If you have enthusiasm, you have a very dynamic, effective companion to travel with you on the road to Somewhere.”

—Loretta Young

“If you have zest and enthusiasm, you attract zest and enthusiasm. Life does give back in kind.”

—Norman Vincent Peale

“Flaming enthusiasm, backed up by horse sense and persistence, is the quality that most frequently makes for success.”

—Dale Carnegie

a polite offer of assistance, expectations are exceeded and a positive response is guaranteed. If expectations are merely met, or worse, not met, an opportunity has been lost, and the customer may leave with a bad experience. Thus, Saturn recommended exceeding expectations at every opportunity, thereby creating enthusiastic customers.

It was legendary football coach Vince Lombardi who once said, “Winning is a habit.” It was Saturn, and now Michael London, saying, “Make Creating Enthusiasm a Habit.” Exceed expectations.

One of Jay Wright’s messages at Villanova is encouraging team members to do more for one another than the recipient might expect. This could mean spotting, unsolicited, for a teammate who’s lifting weights. It could mean offering to help with a class project that has the other guy stymied.

To really succeed in life, you should try to exceed the expectations of everyone in everything you do—and do so without expecting a reward. When you do this, people whose expectations are exceeded will be happy. In all likelihood, they will also respond in a positive way toward you. Thus, exceeding expectations puts enthusiasm in the air, creating the consummate win-win result.

If you have ever hunted for a job (who hasn’t?), you probably know all about enthusiasm, not just in being persistent in your job search but in showing enthusiasm during the interview process. In looking through job listings, you often see enthusiasm (or passion) mentioned in the job description. Take note: according to the US Department of Labor, enthusiasm is a soft skill critical for getting a job: “When employers look at prospective candidates, beyond skills, experience, and training, they look for those who demonstrate enthusiasm—those they believe will complete assigned tasks in an upbeat and cooperative manner. All other things being equal, a candidate who can demonstrate a positive attitude and eagerness to tackle the job will have an advantage.”⁸



ENTHUSIASM

May The Force Be With You.

Back to the enthusiasm-is-contagious premise: that describes Rick Drayton, a member of the Villanova class of 2014, and one of the Villanovans featured in the university’s program, “Ignite Change. Go Nova.” When Drayton first arrived at the school, he wasn’t sure he belonged—he had been accepted at many other schools and was having second thoughts about Villanova.

However, after he attended “Welcome to Nova” skits put on by upperclassmen during orientation week, Drayton was sold on the idea that he had come to the right place. His fervor for the school—his enthusiasm—was ignited and boiled over. Pumped up to be part of Villanova, he started signing up for various clubs and activities.

Along the way, Drayton created and led the Senior Class Gift Committee’s social media efforts, informing and motivating fellow students to make contributions to the school. It worked; he convinced 840 seniors to contribute a record \$37,400 to Villanova to be used for educational benefits.⁹

Enthusiasm doesn’t happen by accident.
You have the privilege to make it happen,
and when you do, enjoy the ride!

Question to Ponder

What activity in your life would benefit by bringing a higher level of enthusiasm?

#beenthusiastic | #passionateplayer

The Celebration Begins!





*Coaches (L to R) Associate Head Coach Baker Dunleavy,
Assistant Coaches Ashely Howard and Kyle Neprune.
Villanova Wildcats – 2016 NCAA National Champions*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER
16.
SWEET
SIXTEEN

*“Never confuse motion
with action.”*

—Benjamin Franklin

Be Focused

COLLEGE BASKETBALL PLAYERS HAVE MANY OBLIGATIONS AND DISTRACTIONS THAT OTHER STUDENTS DON'T: LONG PRACTICES, TEAM MEETINGS, MEDIA INTERVIEWS, EXUBERANT FANS, THE OCCASIONAL INJURY AND REHAB, HOSTILE CROWDS AT AWAY GAMES, GLAD-HANDING BOOSTERS, UNSCRUPULOUS AGENTS, FREQUENT TRAVEL, AND MUCH MORE.

Then there are the potential distractions all students must deal with, basketball players included: noisy neighbors, late-night parties, loud music, texting and tweeting at all hours, snapchatting, the next social media happening, and on and on it goes.

However, when it comes time for team practice sessions or a Wildcats game, every player must be able to concentrate on fundamentals, opposing-team tendencies, their own team's Xs and Os, a seemingly endless number of in-game scenarios, and everything the coaches have told them in the last fifteen minutes. Lack of focus, or even a brief loss of it, can be detrimental to the team's chances of success.

This chaotic mix of priorities and distractions can be overwhelming for a young man in his late teens or early twenties operating in a universe that's pulling him in all sorts of directions, stretching him in ways he might never have thought possible. Helping him keep his head in the game and attuned to the task at hand is the job of the assistant coaches.

An assistant coach's role is to be a two-way conduit between the head coach and players—conveying and breaking down the head coach's instructions into digestible morsels for the players. On the other side of the equation, it's being a sounding board, showing a willingness to empathize with players, and helping them stay focused on what's most important.

At Villanova, during the championship season, those assistants included Associate Head Coach Baker Dunleavy, plus Assistant Coaches Ashley Howard and Kyle Neptune.

Villanova's assistant coaches help players to stay properly focused. They stress to players the development of good habits so that maintaining focus on doing things the right (and Wright) way become second nature. "We're just trying to create habits that will allow us to be successful in the most difficult situations," Wildcats Assistant Coach Ashley Howard said.¹

Additionally, a sign on the wall reminds Villanova players before they step onto the practice floor that they are building specific habits necessary to prepare for any situation.

"Every day it's about reinforcing those habits, paying attention to detail...making sure you talk and communicate on defense," Howard said. "It's fun; you take a freshman who you're constantly talking to about small details every day, so when he becomes a junior, hopefully he's in a position now where he's teaching that [to the new] freshman, 'This is how we do things here.'"

"One of the great parts about coaching is how much effect you have on the guys' lives and just teaching them day-to-day outside of the games," Baker Dunleavy said. "The most important thing going into the game is where your players' heads are, in terms of are they confident, are they aggressive, do they know what they're doing, and are they going to play hard."²

Villanova's assistant coaches take turns watching and breaking down hours of tape of upcoming opponents. Then the trick is passing it on to the players without overloading them.

"You know so much about the team [being scouted], you know them inside out, but the challenge is not what you know but what you can get your players to know," Assistant Coach Kyle Neptune said.³

When it comes to keeping the players focused, the assistant coaches take their cue from Wright. "Coach Wright is constantly focusing on the details," Howard said. "He's a basketball purist. I've never seen a coach who pays so

"People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully."

—Steve Jobs

"To be everywhere is to be nowhere."

—Seneca

"Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus."

—Alexander Graham Bell

much attention to just the technique of his players, shooting, individual stuff.”⁴

Wright teaches his team to be focused on the present. He constantly reminds his players that they can’t do anything about what has already happened. They can’t go back and make a missed shot go in the basket or have a referee make a different call. What they can control is their ability to focus on being fully present in the now, to do the best next thing. That is why the Wildcats continually remind themselves to be focused in the present by saying to themselves and one another, “Next play.”

Staying Focused Wins the Day

To be focused is to concentrate and direct one’s complete attention to a situation or task. It is not normal for the brain to focus intensely on one thing for a long period of time. The mind is distracted by wandering thoughts and a multitude of interruptive signals coming into its environment.

Being focused in today’s world gets harder every day. Phone calls, message notifications, weather alerts, and e-mails compete for our attention. Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and more provide us an endless number of opportunities to look up from what we are doing. To maximize your success, you must learn how to avoid unnecessary distractions and focus on what is important. Keep your eye on the ball, not on your smartphone.

Staying focused at the workplace is critical. Develop good habits. Try starting each day by writing down a list of goals you need to accomplish. Then set aside blocks of time to focus on tasks needed to complete your goals. To get things done you must resist the

temptation to check e-mails, texts, and social media. You might even have to turn your phone off—you do have voicemail, right? The texts will still be there, right?

Being focused on a task and result isn’t just an individual thing. It can involve national leadership and an entire nation. On December 7, 1941, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) had to get America focused on a task of utmost urgency, and he had to get it done in a matter of hours. Early that morning Hawaiian time, the Japanese had launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor with an assault from the air that lasted almost two hours. It resulted in the deaths of 2,335 US military personnel and 68 civilians. The attack also wounded 1,143 others, both military and civilian. Eight battleships docked at Pearl Harbor were sunk or damaged.⁵ The US mainland was now vulnerable to attack.



Franklin D. Roosevelt Delivers Speech to the Nation.

A day later, speaking before Congress in an address broadcast via radio to the entire nation, Roosevelt called December 7 a “date which will live in infamy.” Roosevelt’s historic speech was measured but impassioned and inspirational, leading to an immediate declaration of war against Japan being passed by Congress. That was soon followed by a similar declaration against Nazi Germany and Italy when those two countries announced they would join their Japanese ally in waging war against the United States.⁶



PHOTO: US NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower (1890–1969), the 34th President of the United States, Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe.

While the attack on Pearl Harbor had enraged Americans, FDR's brilliant "Day of Infamy" speech united Americans. It rallied the full focus of Congress, which acted without hesitation to bring the United States into World War II with a unified response.

As it turned out, World War II, in a sense, gave us Dwight D. Eisenhower ("Ike"), who in 1953 would become the thirty-fourth president of the United States. Before becoming president, Ike served in the US Army, rising to the rank of five-star general and becoming the

Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe during World War II.

As a commanding general, Eisenhower had to make difficult decisions, one after another. To do this effectively, he devised a system for organizing tasks and determining where his focus should be directed. What he created gave the world his renowned Eisenhower Decision Principle, a simple yet effective system that prioritizes tasks by urgency and importance. Eisenhower's innovative organizational tool still resonates. It is the basis for the Focus Matrix, a task-management system that is taught in business schools today. Download-

able smartphone apps and desktop applications are available online.⁷

Eisenhower's penchant for bold initiative and his ability to focus on a task were also evident in the late 1950s when the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*, the first man-made satellite. The *Sputnik* launch shocked, and to some degree terrified, much of America; suddenly

"I just stay focused, and I always think about gymnastics. I am just doing what I always do... working really hard and pushing myself to the maximum and keeping myself motivated."

—Aly Raisman

"Don't focus on what went wrong. Focus on what to do next."

—Dennis Waitley

"I try to stay focused on my creativity."

—Christina Aguilera

“Most people have no idea of the giant capacity we can immediately command when we focus all of our resources on mastering a single area of our lives.”

—Tony Robbins

“Skating taught me to set a goal and to block out other things and just focus on this one thing.”

—Katarina Witt

“Always remember, your focus determines your reality.”

—George Lucas

“Stay focused instead of getting offended or off track by others.”

—John Maxwell

there was a deep fear that we were now vulnerable to a Soviet nuclear attack that could come from space.

Eisenhower, by then the US president, responded decisively and swiftly. In 1958, he established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Here, the best scientists of the country would focus on a plan to prepare the United States to move forward into the Space Age.⁸

Focus on the Right Things

Having focus and setting goals are complementary tasks. To be focused, we must first have a defined goal, either short-term or long-term, that gives our focus purpose. To achieve those goals, it is essential we stay focused in order to finish the task at hand. So, setting goals and developing focus go hand-in-hand and are both essential to success.

Long-term goals should be established in each facet of a person’s life. This includes setting goals for physical health, financial wealth, spiritual well-being, social relationships, home life, and family life. These initial long-term goals should create a crystal-clear picture of one’s future life. Subsequently, short-term goals provide the requisite stepping stones or map that will guide us toward the long-term goals.

In a work or business environment, goal setting allows individuals and teams to be focused on achieving the company’s planned objectives. Employees should spend more time on tasks that are relevant to achieving goals and less time on activities that are not goal related.

It’s also important to have the right goals. Winning the NCAA National Championship is the primary goal of most college basketball programs. Not at Villanova. You may recall that after the Wildcats won the 2016 national title, the NFL’s Philadelphia Eagles asked Wright to give some pointers on how to win a championship. “Our goal wasn’t to win a championship,” he told the Eagles. “Our goal was to be pure and committed to each other in our process. If the result is a championship, great. But first we’ve got to be true to playing hard with great effort and playing for each other, being intelligent players. Doing that was really what our goals were, and then the championship was a result of that.”⁹

The trip to Houston for the April 2016 Final Four became another great example of Wildcats focus. Wright had learned from his previous trip to the 2009 Final Four that the distractions can be overwhelming. In 2016, he led his team as if they were on a business trip with a mission. Visits with family and friends were limited. The team went in and out of the hotel through a back elevator to avoid the hoopla in the lobby. The team was so focused they didn’t even know Vice President Joe Biden and former President George Bush attended the games.

Focus with a “next play” attitude was critical for the Wildcats in the last five seconds of the national championship game. North Carolina’s Marcus Paige hit an incredible circus-style, double-pump three-pointer to tie the game with 4.7 seconds left. Instead of panicking or bemoaning their situation, the ‘Cats simply said to one another, “Next play.” They did not dwell on the enormity of what had just occurred nor the possibility of an overtime period. Instead, they

focused on what they could control: the next play. What was that next play? Nova.

From the baseline, with the full length of the court to go, Kris Jenkins inbounded the ball to Arcidiacono, who in turn hustled the ball to midcourt. From there, Arcidiacono used a screen set by Ochefu and passed the ball back to the trailing Jenkins, who then hit the shot as the buzzer sounded, winning the game. It was a play Villanova had focused on hundreds of times in practice. Focus pays dividends!

At crunch time, winning requires focus and execution.

Questions to Ponder

On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your ability to focus on a task or project that will take at least two hours to complete? What steps might you incorporate to improve your performance?

#befocused | #eyeontheball

*“I have two
kinds of problems,
the urgent and the important.*

*The urgent are not important,
and the important are
never urgent.”*

—Dwight D. Eisenhower



Head Coach Jay Wright Instills Confidence in Team Members Jalen Brunson and Josh Hart

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

“Confidence is going after Moby Dick in a rowboat and taking tartar sauce with you.”

—Zig Ziglar

CHAPTER 17. SWEET SIXTEEN

Be Confident

FOR MANY PEOPLE, CONFIDENCE IS FRAGILE. IT CAN BE HERE ONE MINUTE, GONE THE NEXT. THERE ARE THINGS ABOUT BASKETBALL THAT CAN SHAKE AN ALL-AMERICAN PLAYER’S CONFIDENCE; ALL IT TAKES IS ONE PLAY, A MATTER OF SECONDS IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES. IT COULD BE AN EMBARRASSING AIR BALL ON AN OPEN JUMPER, OR A BADLY OVERTHROWN PASS ON A TWO-ON-ONE FAST BREAK, OR MAKING A SWITCH ON DEFENSE ONLY TO HAVE THE OTHER GUY BLOW PAST YOU FOR AN EASY LAY-UP.

One moment you believe in yourself, the next you aren’t so sure. You look toward the bench and at your coach, the crestfallen look in your eyes telling him you expect to be yanked out of the game.

“One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation.”

—Arthur Ashe

“It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.”

—Sir Edmund Hillary

“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”

—Helen Keller

Jay Wright is not like most other coaches. He’s intense, he’s driven, and he demands excellence from his Villanova players. However, he doesn’t show a jittery trigger finger when it comes to taking players out of the game. Miss a shot? Well, make the next one. If you have the shot, and you’re open, take the shot. That’s what he wants you to do; that’s the Wright way at Villanova. His confidence breeds confidence among his players, and it shows at all the right times.

The ultimate show of confidence, at least for the 2016 national champions? That had to be Kris Jenkins’ winning three-point shot at the buzzer. “I think every shot is going in, so that one was no different,” a smiling Jenkins told CBS announcer Jim Nantz in a postgame interview during the trophy presentation.

Of the key points and familiar phrases Wright emphasizes, “next play” is one of the most important. It’s a reminder to his team that regardless of what just happened, good or bad, the only thing that matters is what comes next. The only thing you should be thinking about is making the best of the next play, making it successful, being confident. Got the open shot? Take it. Make it.

“We use the expression ‘next play,’” Wright says. “Adversity is going to strike when you compete, and those players and teams that

handle it well are usually successful. We talk to our guys about being positive during a game.”¹

Wright wants his players to play aggressively. It’s not okay to be reckless; that’s not in Wright’s playbook. However, being aggressive and confident are hallmarks of all Villanova teams. On offense, that means taking the open shot without fear. The Wildcats have a saying to remind themselves of Wright’s directive: “*Shoot ’em up and sleep in the streets.*”

As Wright explains, “To be a great shooter, you have to be willing to keep shooting, even on a night when, if you don’t make them, no one’s going to let you come into their house. They’re going to make you sleep in the streets, you were so bad. If you’re going to be a great shooter, you can’t fear sleeping in the streets. We talk about that all the time.”²

Aggression with discretion is the Wright recipe. Here’s the rationale: by not being hesitant, a Wildcat with an open shot can get it off before a defender arrives to get in his face.

On the night of April 4, 2016, at NRG Stadium in Houston, that emphasis on believing and being confident came to bear for the Wildcats in the greatest NCAA Tournament championship game ever played. As it turned out, there would be no sleeping in the streets.

Confidence Is Built in Incremental Steps

Confidence is the self-assurance that accompanies a person’s belief that he or she can accomplish a particular feat. By being confident, you increase your ability to succeed in life.

“Confidence is a habit that can be developed by acting as if you already had the confidence you desire to have.”

—Brian Tracy

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sail. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

—Mark Twain

Confidence goes hand-in-hand with preparation. True confidence comes from having a skill and practicing an activity over and over until you have it down cold. You know exactly how to do it and what it will take to be successful. You don't even really have to think about the situation. Thinking too much about what you're doing may make you nervous, and nervousness cancels out confidence.

If you are about to give a speech, even if using a teleprompter, practice it numerous times. Get accustomed to speaking the words, to pronouncing them correctly. Learn where to insert voice inflections so it all becomes natural. An actor rehearses his or her lines repeatedly so that when on stage, or in front of the camera, the lines are second nature. For musicians who have an upcoming recital, thorough preparation gives them the confidence to get in front of an audience and perform flawlessly. As competence grows, so does confidence—on the basketball court and in life.

Confidence is key in the business world, too. In the book, *Confidence for Dummies*, authors Kate Burton and Brinley Platts write that confident people earn more money on the job. This is in keeping with the premise that confident people are more successful than others in terms of job performance. Better job performance presumably leads to promotions and higher pay. Set the goal for your next promotion or pay raise and work toward it, confidently.³

Certified life coach Barrie Davenport says, “One of the main obstacles to financial success is low self-confidence. Low confidence makes us doubt our abilities and judgment and prevents us from taking calculated risks, setting ambitious goals, and acting on them. At work, people who suffer with this problem often engage in subconscious behaviors that undermine their success, making them less likely to ask for or get promotions, raises, and even jobs.”⁴

Confidence doesn't happen by accident; it's not random. Often, it's the result of hard work with incremental success steps that provide building blocks for self-confidence, which then becomes a habit. You know you are confident when you confront a task or challenge relative to your career or other interests, and you know you have the skills, knowledge, and abilities to handle it successfully. You have confidence when your self-esteem is on a firm foundation, and you are prepared for whatever you face. That's what builds confidence.

One of the most significant actualizations of confidence occurred when US President John F. Kennedy (JFK) gave his 1962, “We Choose to Go to The Moon,” speech before a crowd at Rice University in Houston, Texas. It came at a time when the US space program was still in its infancy. NASA was just a few years old, and it had only been several months since astronaut John Glenn had become the first American to orbit Earth. That feat and putting a man on the moon were thousands of miles apart in scope—238,738 miles to be exact—but Kennedy, a bold visionary, was confident America could do it, could put a man on the Moon before anyone else, and could accomplish it by the end of the decade.⁵

Kennedy's speech at Rice encouraged Americans to believe in themselves, in their potential, and in their great capacity for success. His inspirational belief was contagious and convincing. It wasn't just in *what* he said, but also in *how* he said it. Kennedy was every bit as stirring as the best motivational speakers of the twenty-first century.



PHOTO: US NATIONAL ARCHIVES

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917–1963), the 35th President of the United States Addresses US Congress.

We didn't just believe JFK because we wanted to, we believed what he said to be true because we believed that he believed it. And he did.

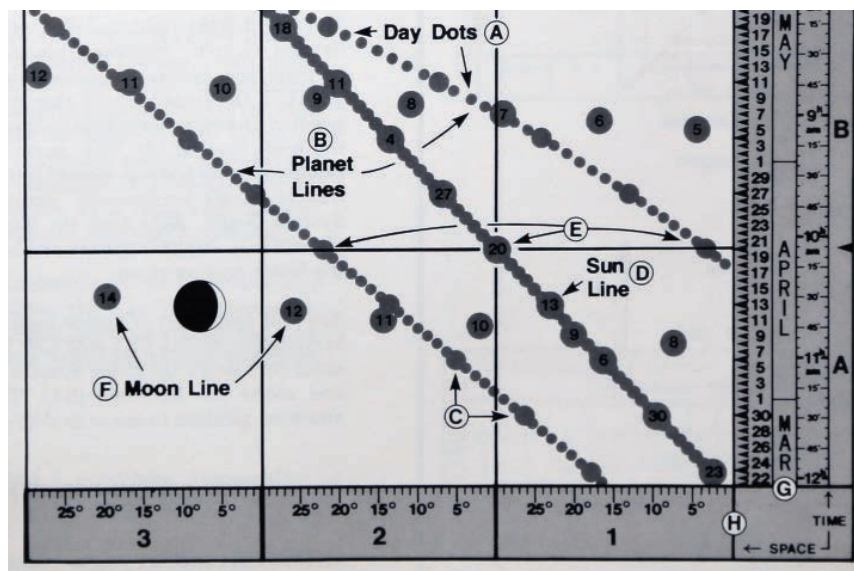
Kennedy's 1962 speech in Houston was not the first time he had talked about going to the moon. He had broached the subject in a speech before Congress on May 25, 1961, barely a month after Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had become the first man, period, to orbit the Earth. At that time, in spring 1961, Americans perceived that they were losing the space race to the Soviets, and it took the energetic, charismatic Kennedy to begin to turn the race around.⁶

Kennedy's ambitious plan to get an American safely to the moon and back by the end of the 1960s gave direction and a deadline to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Apollo program. This required the expansion of NASA's Space Task Group into a Manned Spacecraft Center, and Houston, Texas, was chosen as the site. It's a small world, after all.

Confidence Will Take You to the Top

Houston, Texas—that's obviously the site of great things, including a unique connection that resonates with Villanova Basketball fans. The Wildcats played there in two NCAA Tournament Final Fours (1971 and 2016). In that sense, let me say, "Houston, you're a special place."

Personally, Villanova's playing for a national championship two times in NASA's home of Houston, where JFK gave his "We Choose to Go to The Moon" speech, has had special meaning for me; it's my own cosmic connection of sorts. All but one company I have worked for over a significant period has had the sun or moon pictured on its company logo. The only exception was my Saturn affiliation, which also had a celestial graphic on its corporate symbol. In addition, the first book I wrote was an instructional guide for a map of Earth's view of space that I helped develop and patent (US4251930A). That high school mechanical drawing class had an astronomical payoff.



Map of Earth's View of Space - Instructional Guidebook Illustration.



True Confidence: "I think every shot I take is going in."

Kris Jenkins, April 4, 2016

Both times my alma mater had made it to a Houston "Space City" Final Four, I saw a confluence of events and circumstances uncanny to me.

Some might call it coincidence; I call it a connection with destiny. That much I have confidence in saying.

By beating Oklahoma as soundly as they did in the national semi-final that Final Four Saturday in Houston (95–51), the Wildcats' confidence was off the charts when they got to Monday night's game against North Carolina. They would then need every ounce of confidence they could squeeze into those two-plus hours to beat the vaunted and favored Tar Heels.

There are several moments that stick out in that game where the Wildcats' collective confidence would be tested to see if it could pass muster. One of those times came just five minutes into the game when Kris Jenkins picked up his second foul. This sent him to the bench so he wouldn't get into more serious foul trouble with so much of the game left to be played.

Jenkins would briefly return to the game in the first half, just long enough to hit a couple of jump shots. Wright then opted to put him back on the bench so as not to risk a third foul with a half still to play. Later, Jenkins would say that while on the bench, instead of pouting, he thought of the time he would come off the bench and hit important shots to help his team. Obviously, in his confidence, Jenkins was prophetic.

As the Wildcats headed to the locker room for halftime, the upperclassmen took over, not even allowing Wright to enter. The halftime fire-them-up speech would instead come from Ryan Arcidiacono and fellow senior Daniel Ochefu. Both confidently lit into their teammates, at full volume, beseeching them to suck it up and play Villanova Basketball, complete with twenty minutes of relentless

defense and rebounding. This impromptu halftime session reignited the confidence of the Wildcats, giving their teammates the boost that would hopefully spark a second-half turnaround.

Mission accomplished! The Wildcats roared back in the second half to eventually take the lead and then win the game at the buzzer on Jenkins' clutch three-pointer. It was a winning play that went the length of the court in just 4.7 seconds, as the Wildcats ran their Nova play to perfection. No one out of place, no bobbled ball handling, no errant passes, no poor shooting. It was confidence, getting the job done at the most crucial of moments.

And Wright? He was a paragon of confidence as the Villanova celebration moved back to the team's hotel. When it came time for him to step to the podium so he could address the joyous throng of players, school officials, family members, students, alumni, other fans, and who knows who else, the head coach held up a piece of paper and said,

“I showed the guys how confident I was in them. I had my [victory] speech written up before the game.”

Question to Ponder

What do you see as the most important factor before you set out to do or accomplish something that you know will require a large measure of personal confidence?

#beconfident | #hittheshot



CONFIDENCE

Victory written before the game.



*Phil Booth and Mikal Bridges
Appreciating the Moment*

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

*“There is no
greater difference
between men than
between grateful and
ungrateful people.”*

—R. H. Blyth

CHAPTER
18.
SWEET
SIXTEEN

Be Appreciative

VILLANOVA COACH JAY WRIGHT'S PRIORITY WITH A NEW PLAYER IS NOT PUTTING A BALL IN HIS HANDS. IT'S PUTTING A MINDSET IN HIS HEAD—AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE THAT BEGINS WITH BEING THANKFUL FOR ALL THE WILDCATS PLAYERS WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE HIM. WRIGHT WANTS NEW TEAM MEMBERS TO COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING THAT THEY ARE BLESSED WITH A VILLANOVA LEGACY KNOWN FOR EXCELLENCE, SUCCESS, SPORTSMANSHIP, AND HUMILITY.

Villanova players are taught to always give credit where credit is due; this should be a habit. This is not about forcing someone to say something they don't believe in; it's more a reminder to keep their eyes and

ears open so they will always be aware of the contribution of others. Basketball is not a one-person game. Neither is life.

Villanova Basketball is not just about the five players on the floor, the other players on the roster, the coaches, or all the other people who contribute to the program in some sort of administrative or supporting role; it's also about the parents of the players. Senior Night is a tradition for most college sports teams, but the Villanova men's basketball program under Wright does it quite a bit differently. Parents, not players, are the focus of the festivities on Senior Night. They are shown genuine gratitude acknowledging that no one player, and not even one Wildcats team, can do it all on their own.

A player giving credit to a teammate for helping on a particular play during the course of a game, or for an entire season, isn't all that uncommon in college basketball. What is uncommon is an entire roster of players who do this all the time. In postgame press conferences, Villanova players are specific and thoughtful in their praise of one another, proof that they are paying attention to and appreciative of the actions of others around them. This distribution of credit is contagious. It starts with the coach.

After Villanova won the 2016 NCAA championship game, Wright expressed deep gratitude during the postgame celebration at the team hotel:

"First, there are a lot of MVPs [Most Valuable Players]. First and foremost is God. We are all blessed to be part of this Augustinian community that fosters these kinds of student-athletes...Only Villanovans would understand this; God was speaking through Father Rob [Hagan] in his pregame homily. It was the biggest game of the year, and we needed the best homily ever from Father Rob, and he delivered. It was big-time—we believed we couldn't lose.

"Probably most important, the real MVPs are the parents of these players. If you are around any of these parents, give 'em some love because they raised humble, characterized young men, and they are the easiest team in the world to coach. This is a true team of unselfish, humble, coachable young men, and we are really, really proud of these guys. [Turning to the fans] You guys were so loud...[at the games]. The Nova Nation are the best fans in the country, and they deserve the best team in the country—and here they are."¹

Wright's mention of Father Rob Hagan wasn't a stretch at all. The team chaplain has long been perhaps the program's staunchest advocate of showing heartfelt gratitude—not just thinking about it, but speaking it out. It's meaningful for the recipients of such praise to hear it; it's music to their ears, especially against the crescendo backdrop of a national championship game.

Prior to that Monday night championship game against North Carolina, Hagan gave a homily to the team in which he spoke of what can be accomplished when members of a community, or team, aren't concerned about who gets the credit. This was referenced earlier in Chapter 9 on the topic of team play. In an interview not long after the Wildcats had won the 2016 national championship, Father Rob said, "So much of our

"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

—John F. Kennedy

"Make it a habit to tell people thank you. To express your appreciation, sincerely and without the expectation of anything in return. Truly appreciate those around you, and you'll soon find many others around you. Truly appreciate life, and you'll find that you have more of it."

—Ralph Marston

“By taking the time to stop and appreciate who you are and what you’ve achieved—and perhaps learned through a few mistakes, stumbles, and losses—you actually can enhance everything about you. Self-acknowledgment and appreciation are what give you the insights and awareness to move forward toward higher goals and accomplishments.”

—Jack Canfield

“Appreciation is the highest form of prayer, for it acknowledges the presence of good wherever you shine the light of your thankful thoughts.”

—Alan Cohen

lives, our job, our family, our situations, we feel like ‘I’ve gotta do this, I’ve gotta fix this, I’ve gotta be the best at this. You know, I’ve gotta be the one who solves this problem.’ And often it’s about what we can do with our collective strength—the spirit within us, the spirit among us, the good people that God puts in our path. It’s incredible what can be accomplished when no one is concerned about who gets the credit. Give all the praise and glory to the One above, and take the strength that is offered to us, and see what we can accomplish with the strength within us.”²

In showing appreciation for one another while not concerning themselves with who gets the credit, the Villanova players receive a lesson that should stick with them for life. It’s not just the humility aspect, but it’s also the proactive part of giving praise to someone else, showing sincere appreciation.

Father Rob added, “Being an Augustinian priest, not having any kids of my own, it gives me great joy and pride to see a student, a friend, someone that you’ve kind of worked with and watched grow, discover for [himself] some real truths that [he] can now apply in [his] life. It gives you a lot of satisfaction seeing [him] carry it on to maybe the next generation.”³

An example of demonstrated appreciation Wright sets for his players can be seen and

heard in press conferences or interviews following a Villanova game. Wright typically expresses gratitude for their opponents first—and then for his players. Wright says he is grateful for the challenge opponents offer his team. He also teaches players to be grateful for one another.

Below is a sampling of what some Villanova players had to say after the national championship game.

Daniel Ochefu: “This is really just amazing to be able to share this moment with my brothers, my teammates, my coaches, our families out here, all you guys out here, the Nova Nation.”⁴ He also said, “Dreams have come true tonight. I want to thank God, our families, our coaches, and all our teammates that we’ve played with before. We play for those that came before us. *Go ‘Cats! Go ‘Cats!*”⁵

Kris Jenkins: “I am so honored to be part of this team...When you don’t care who gets the credit, like everyone on this team, it’s amazing what can happen for you.”⁶

Ryan Arcidiacono: “It wasn’t about one person in particular getting the credit. To the very last second of the game—that’s a play we work on every single day in practice, early morning and late evenings... the commitment level of our team to stay together and play Villanova Basketball for

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing: it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.”

—Voltaire

“Next to excellence is the appreciation of it.”

—William Makepeace Thackeray

“If not shown appreciation, it gets to you.”

—Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

“I’ve always felt that with true talent, and a commitment to hard work, it is possible to achieve an enduring respect and appreciation. In other words, I don’t take my fans for granted.”

—John Fogerty

forty minutes, that's what we've done all year...Thank you. We loved your support throughout the year. Thank you."⁷

Villanova Basketball's culture of appreciation overflow is typically manifested in many other ways, and not just after a big win or a national championship. Team members go out of their way throughout the school year to be friendly and accommodating to other students around campus—the students love their Wildcats, and the team loves the students back.

Along with that, at the end of every game, Villanova players and coaches join the student section to sing the school's fight song while waving Vs to one another. These acts and signs of mutual appreciation go a long way in keeping players accountable to one another and to the rest of the student body while sustaining the fan support showed to them in return. There are no ivory towers on the Villanova campus.

Appreciation Is a Wonderful Thing

People who carry with them an ever-ready dose of appreciation are more socially adept, they don't let stress wear them down, and they are more physically and emotionally fit. This holds true as much in the workplace and family dynamic as it does on the basketball court, in the locker room, or around campus.

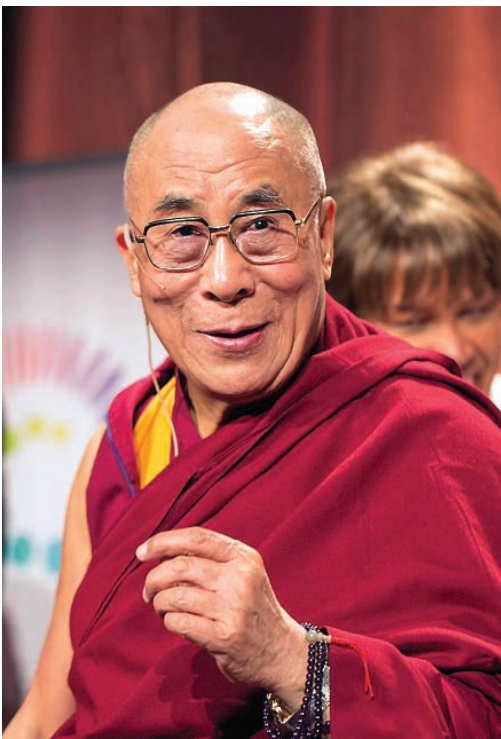
Gallup, Inc., is a research-based global performance-management consulting company. They surveyed millions of employees worldwide and found that “individuals who receive regular recognition and praise increase their productivity, stay with their organization longer, have better safety records, and receive higher satisfaction scores from their customers.”⁸

For a lesson in true gratitude, consider the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. When the *Mayflower* set sail from England for America, there were 102 Pilgrims and approximately thirty crewmen on board. During the two-month journey across the Atlantic Ocean, one person died (although a baby was born). However, by the time that first winter in a new land was over, more than half of the people who had made the trip had died.⁹

Few would argue that the Pilgrims faced severe hardships and difficulties—including deadly illness and brutal weather conditions—just to survive. Yet, despite having to bury loved ones and rebuild their lives from the ground up, they set aside a special time after their first harvest to show their appreciation for the new life they had been given. Out of that was born the Thanksgiving tradition that remains an American staple nearly four hundred years later.

Note: This part of the book is being written just after the Thanksgiving holidays. At our celebratory dinner, my sister asked each family member to share something for which they were thankful. The caveat was it had to be something that no one else already knew (to keep us all from saying we loved our mom and dad, etc.). When it came to my turn, I said, “I am glad we moved to Norwalk in 1969.” This surprised everyone, even me. It was well known I had previously thought moving had been devastating for the family as it inevitably resulted in us living in various parts of the country, far apart from one another. I explained to my family that in writing this book, “I have come to realize there were many silver linings in the move to Connecticut. Among them, it put me at Villanova and set me on an incredible journey that I've just come to fully appreciate.”

Sometimes it can take a long time to appreciate silver linings and other blessings in our lives. For example, I did not see that mechanical drawing class I took in Norwalk's Central Catholic High School as foundational to my entrepreneurial success until decades later. Maybe the lesson here is that silver linings may not show up right away, but



The Dalai Lama Embodies Gratitude.

they usually do. So, don't waste time grousing about adversities. Keep a positive attitude and just keep moving forward toward success.

Born in remote Tibet on a straw mat in a farmer's cowshed, the fourth Dalai Lama rose from extremely humble origins to a position of worldwide spiritual influence. His remarkable story of success is mixed with humility and a hearty dose of gratitude. The Dalai Lama once said, "When you practice gratefulness, there is a sense of respect toward

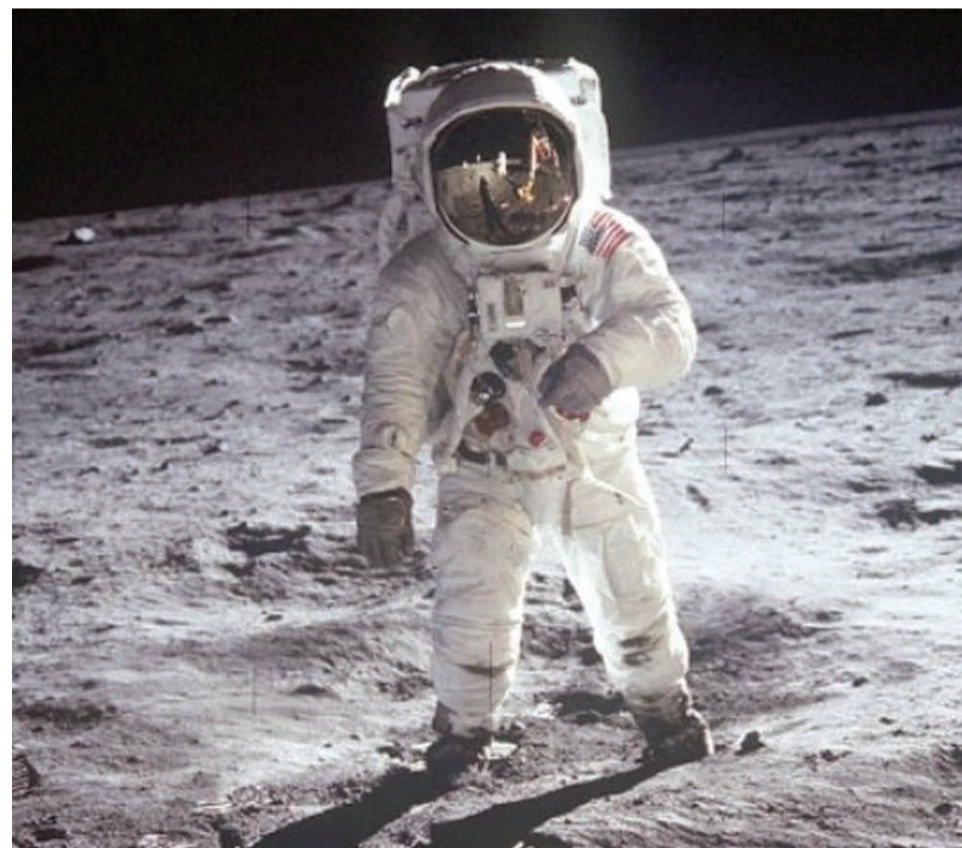
others."¹⁰ Due in large part to his gracious manner, the Dalai Lama is one of the most popular leaders in the world.

In terms of advice to all mankind, the Dalai Lama said: "Every day, think as you wake up, today I am fortunate to be alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others; to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. I am going to have kind thoughts toward others, I am not going to get angry or think badly about others. I am going to benefit others as much as I can."¹¹

Saint Augustine of Hippo, whose legacy is firmly entrenched in the history of Villanova University (as outlined earlier in this book), espoused having a spirit of appreciation regardless of our lot in life at any given time.

Augustine tells us, "Now, let us acknowledge the wonder of our physical incarnation—that we are here, in these particular bodies, at this particular time, in these particular circumstances. May we never take for granted the gift of our individuality."¹²

Then there's Neil Armstrong, the US astronaut who in July 1969 became the first man to walk on the moon. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his historic moonwalk, Armstrong wrote a letter of appreciation to the Johnson Space Center's Extravehicular Mobility Unit. They were the engineering team who had built the spacesuit that kept Armstrong alive and safe in the unknown, potentially



Neil Armstrong Thanked the Spacesuit Designers on the 25th Anniversary of the First Moonwalk.

hostile environment of the moon. In his letter, Armstrong wrote, “The true beauty [of the spacesuit] was that it worked. It was tough, reliable, and almost cuddly. To all of you who made it all that it was, I send a quarter century’s worth of thanks and congratulations.”¹³

An Explosion of Gratitude

Villanova’s post-championship celebration at the team hotel, the Royal Sonesta Houston Galleria, was where it all came together for me. I say this not just from the standpoint of my being there in person to soak up all the exuberance of the moment. This is where I came to a vivid awareness of how everything about this, going all the way back to 1971 and Villanova’s first trip to Houston my freshman year, was interconnected.

This was no accident or convergence of random events. In my mind, this was how it was supposed to end, and I believe I was meant to be standing in the middle of it. Even the sight of a new piccolo girl at the hotel celebration was validation for me that this was real—and the tears flowed from my eyes. (If this had been a dream, it would have been the same piccolo girl as the year before, the one crying.)

The scene plays over and over in my head, like a loop: Father Peter Donohue, O.S.A., the university president flashing the V-for-Villanova-victory sign on stage as the band plays the fight song. Moments later he introduces Coach Wright and the team as “the 2016 basketball champions!” Wright spoke first followed by Ochefu, Jenkins, and then Arcidiacono. The cheerleaders were in front of the stage, firing up the fans that were packed into the team’s hotel ballroom chanting over and over, “*Let’s go, Nova!*”¹⁴

Perhaps the most compelling moment of appreciation that night took place at the arena a few hours earlier. In the immediate aftermath of



*Wildcats Co-Captains Ryan Arcidiacono and Daniel Ochefu
2016 NCAA National Champions*



Villanova National Championship Team Honored at White House.

Jenkins' winning shot, Wright hugged Arcidiacono by the neck and speaking into his ear, said, "I love you. You brought this program back for me. I'll never forget that—ever." (I discovered this poignant moment a month or so after the game while researching this book.)

Appreciation? Yes, I was one of the team's many fans for whom the players expressed their appreciation. But much more than that, I was appreciative of the opportunity—no, make that the privilege—to be there, in person, with my two nephews, basking in the excitement as if I were in a dream. Yet, it wasn't a dream. This was real, and I had people I loved to share it with me. On top of that I was living a moment that most college basketball fans across America never get to experience. The thrill of victory? Now I get it. I've now tasted it at the highest level, and it is exhilaration squared. This book is written in

appreciation of everyone who trained, sacrificed, and worked to make this incredibly wonderful event a reality.

Two days later, back in Philadelphia, the Wildcats and untold thousands of fans lined the streets, showing their mutual appreciation during a parade in the city to honor the newly-crowned NCAA National Champions. At the rally for the team in front of City Hall, Arcidiacono gave a heartfelt farewell to the crowd, saying, "Thank you, Philadelphia. Thank you, Nova Nation. Your support throughout the year has been incredible. We're going out as National Champions, and we love you for everything. *Go 'Cats!*"

There was still more to come, including a visit to the White House. In between the parade and the White House visit, the Wildcats were feted at an awards ceremony in front of a crowd of more than sixteen hundred spectators at the Villanova Pavilion. Ochefu was given Villanova's Attitude Award for the second season in a row and shared the Villanova Basketball Award with Arcidiacono.

It was a fitting end for the two seniors who had been the linchpins in Villanova's battle back from the precipice. "The Redemption Class" had done their job. And for that, Wright and the entire Villanova community are eternally grateful.

Questions to Ponder

Think of someone who has done something for you for which you've never been fully appreciative. If you had the chance now, what would you say to that person? Why not do it now?

#beappreciative | #thankful



*Rescue and Emergency Personnel Cheer
President George W. Bush, Sept. 14, 2001*

PHOTO: US NATIONAL ARCHIVES

CHAPTER 19. SWEET SIXTEEN

*“The best way to find
yourself is to lose yourself in
the service of others.”*

—Mahatma Gandhi

Be of Service

BARELY A WEEK AFTER VILLANOVA WON THE 2016 NCAA MEN’S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP, SENIORS RYAN ARCIDIACONO AND DANIEL OCHEFU SQUEEZED INTO A TINY PLAYHOUSE IN THE BASEMENT PLAYROOM OF ANDREW AND ANNIE DAVIS’ SUBURBAN PHILADELPHIA HOME. ARCIDIACONO AND OCHEFU WERE THERE TO SURPRISE THE DAVIS’ FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON, BLAISE, WHO EARLIER IN THE YEAR HAD BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH EWING’S SARCOMA, A RARE FORM OF BONE CANCER.

Young Blaise had already been through multiple rounds of chemotherapy, and surgery awaited him a month later. He was already a big basketball fan and loved cheering on the blue and white. Blaise was thrilled by the two players’ surprise visit—as were his parents. They

*“I slept and
dreamt that life
was joy. I awoke
and saw that
life was service.
I acted and,
behold, service
was joy.”*

—Rabindranath
Tagore

*“Always render
more and better
service than
is expected of
you, no matter
what your task
may be.”*

—Og Mandino

*“I have always
told anyone who
would listen that
I was available
for more public
service.”*

—Shirley Temple

*“Our rewards
will always be in
exact proportion
to our service.”*

—Earl
Nightingale

had no idea Arcidiacono and Ochefu were coming to their home. The secret visit had been set up by family friend Tim Moore, a contractor who had turned the Davis’ basement into a playroom for Blaise and his little sister, Lucy.

Moore had asked the family not to peek at the playroom until he was finished with his extensive makeover. The ceremonial unveiling of Moore’s handiwork was topped off by the presence of the two Wildcats champions, who were as thrilled to be there as the Davis family was to have them. That included Mom and Dad, both of whom have degrees from Villanova.

“A week ago, they’re on national television winning the biggest game ever, and then here they are, sitting in my basement,” Andrew Davis said. “[Villanova coach] Jay [Wright] always says, ‘Stay hungry and humble.’ This has been the most humbling experience.”¹

Arcidiacono and Ochefu were humbled as well, and they made it a point between them to not make a big deal out of their visit, hoping to keep it a secret. However, word of their surprise visit on Blaise’s behalf eventually leaked out—as well it should have. Annie Davis, who grew up going to Villanova games with her dad, told *espn.com*, “They literally did this to meet a four-year-old who loves watching basketball. To see Blaise looking at

his little playhouse, and then see those guys squeezed inside—that’s a memory that will last a lifetime. That’s a story that needs to be told.”

Having a good servant’s heart and putting it to selfless use in the form of community service is common at Villanova, and that includes the men’s basketball team. Service is a core part of the university’s overall mission. Getting out into the community and helping others through use of a servant’s heart is as important to Wright, and what he envisions for his players’ futures, as winning basketball games and national championships.

Wright strives to groom his young men to be leaders, albeit ones aligned with servant-leadership principles. Recall Wright’s leadership presentation remarks, “We want every young man to come in and excel as an athlete, learn to excel as a student, and learn to excel as a man that *lives for others*. . . It is very simple, and it has nothing to do with winning and losing.” Wright continued, “Last season—going to the Final Four. . . everyone looked at that as a successful season. But that didn’t really mean anything to us. Believe it or not, whether we go to the Final Four or not, I don’t really care. I care about our mission. Everything else will take care of itself.”²

Here’s the kicker: Wright spoke those words in 2009, seven years before the Wildcats would win the 2016 national title by beating North Carolina in the championship game. It’s a lot easier to say a national championship doesn’t matter much when you’ve just won an NCAA crown. However, saying that when you’ve come close-but-no-cigar, knowing you will begin the next season back at square one and still without a national title on your record, rings of authenticity.

Wright says team success is measured as much off the court as it is on the hardwood. In being willing, cheerful participants in acts of service, as with Arcidiacono and Ochefu visiting Blaise Davis and his family, Wildcats players are fulfilling a greater mission that permeates Villanova University.

“Our society has put so much emphasis on celebrity and making money that, to many people, the only dream worth having in college basketball is to make it to the NBA,” Wright said. “[A college basketball player] having a dream of getting a great education and serving others doesn’t register with a lot of people.



Villanova Hosts Annual Special Olympics Event.

“Every day we want them to play harder than their opponent, every day we want them to play smart [understand the game], and every day we want them to play for the Villanova name on their shirt—to play together for something, a cause bigger than them. And that’s how we want them to live their life. Work along with others—don’t be a loner. Learn to make life about other people, not about yourself.”³

The Villanova community does this very well, student-athletes included. In 2016, Villanova University was honored to receive its second Big East Conference Presidents’ Award. This award is

presented annually to the Big East member school that has excelled at the highest level in academics, athletics, and citizenship—which pretty much covers all-around collegiate excellence.

The winner of the award is determined by a selection committee comprised of athletic and academic administrators representing each

Big East member institution. “The Big East Presidents’ Award was created to recognize the full scope of student-athlete achievement, and we offer our congratulations to the Villanova Wildcats for their exceptional performance this past year in the classroom, in competition, and in the community,” Big East commissioner Val Ackerman said. “We commend Father Peter Donohue [University President], Mark Jackson [Director of Athletics], and Villanova’s coaches, administrators, and faculty for their commitment to a complete collegiate experience and lifetime success for the extraordinary young people who represent Villanova on surfaces of play.”⁴

During the 2015–16 school year, Villanova student-athletes performed a total of 3,123 hours of community service, a school record for monitored community-service hours. This included the annual *Saint Thomas of Villanova Celebration* that involved more than four hundred student-athletes, coaches, and athletic staff volunteering their hours at 135 service sites throughout the Villanova area and greater Philadelphia. The venues included local parishes, elementary schools, nonprofit organizations, homes for adults with disabilities, and parks.⁵

All twenty-four of Villanova’s varsity sports teams are represented by student-athletes who volunteer as workers for the annual *Special Olympics Pennsylvania Fall Festival*. This event has been held on the Villanova campus for

“Earn your success based on service to others, not at the expense of others.”

—H. Jackson Brown Jr.

“Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.”

—Muhammad Ali

“We are all here to be of service to those who can’t be of service to themselves.”

—Dionne Warwick

“The thing that lies at the foundation of positive change, the way I see it, is service to a fellow human being.”

—Lech Wałęsa

“The most important service to others is service to those who are not like yourself.”

—J. Irwin Miller

“Find out how much God has given you and from it take what you need: the remainder is needed by others.”

—Saint Augustine

twenty-eight years and is the world’s largest such festival run by students. The festival supports a wonderful organization that provides year-round sports training and competition for more than twenty thousand children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

In November 2016, Villanova student-athletes took part in the annual *Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week* held at Villanova, donating and packing meals. Other community-oriented events that have involved Villanova student-athletes include a *Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service* and a gathering of Philadelphia area youth on campus in support of former First Lady Michelle Obama’s “*Let’s Move!*” initiative.

At the 2016 Big East basketball tournament in New York City, Wildcats’ Patrick Farrell, Henry Lowe, and Kevin Rafferty (aka the Bench Mob) joined others from around the league at East Harlem’s Boys and Girls Club as part of the Big East Conference’s annual “*Serves Youth*” initiative.

Villanova student-athletes’ immersion in what is essentially a year-round commitment to community service suggests they are taking their cues from university President Rev. Peter M. Donohue. Father Peter’s welcome statement on the university’s website mentions how the school’s educational experience is rooted in “service to others” right alongside a “collaborative pursuit of knowledge.” All this,

he says, embodies a commitment to the Augustinian ideals of *veritas, unitas, caritas*—truth, unity, and love.

“What sets Villanova University apart,” Father Peter goes on to say in his welcoming note, “is our Augustinian Catholic intellectual tradition, which is the cornerstone of an academic community in which students learn to think critically, act compassionately, and succeed while serving others. Villanova prepares students to become ethical leaders who create positive change everywhere life takes them.”⁶

The proof is in the alumni, such as Martin Ganda, a 2007 Villanova alumnus who grew up in poverty in Zimbabwe. Ganda earned a scholarship to Villanova, where he held down a job and sent money home while majoring in mathematics and economics. In this sense, he was paying it forward, having been helped himself by a Pennsylvania girl with whom he had a pen-pal relationship while he was growing up in Zimbabwe. The girl would send Ganda some of her babysitting money to help him cover his school fees and books, as well as help him buy food.⁷

Eventually to become an analyst with Goldman Sachs, Ganda is also a founder of the nonprofit *Seeds of Africa Foundation*, which provides financial assistance to needy students in his home country. In preparing to build a knowledge center that would provide educational resources, Ganda enlisted the assistance of four Villanova mechanical engineering students to design a photovoltaic system that would be compatible with the knowledge center’s power requirements. Ganda said, “I’m where I am because someone believed in me.”

Speaking of Villanova engineers, faculty and students from the Department of Mechanical Engineering, in collaboration with the *Golden West Humanitarian Foundation*, have been developing a low-cost explosive ordnance disposal robot. It has been designed for use in countries like Cambodia, where thousands of residents have been killed or severely wounded by unexploded ordnance, such as those

left behind from the Vietnam War. As of late 2016, the university was searching for donors to help bring the low-cost device to market.⁸

Acts of Service Big and Small

Being of service is not hard to define or explain. It means putting others before ourselves and helping those in need. Payment should not be accepted or solicited. A servant's heart is a willingness to give up time and money to help someone less fortunate and not to expect anything in return. That includes not seeking attention for the work completed. What do you want, a medal? Recall the story that opened this chapter about Arcidiacono and Ochefu paying a surprise visit to cancer-stricken Blaise Davis. The two players really wanted their selfless gesture to be kept secret; they weren't doing it for the glory or accolades.

Service begins with your family and friends. Start with the small stuff—opening doors, carrying packages, doing chores—offering to help before being asked, and doing it with a cheerful attitude, with nothing expected in return. After taking small steps of service with family and friends, consider stepping out into the community. Volunteer at a homeless shelter or be on the lookout for an organization that works with children with special needs. See if there's anything you can do. Also, if you live in a city with a chamber of commerce, chances are it will have a list of local nonprofits in need of volunteers. No doubt one of the nonprofits will have a mission aligned with your own skills and interests.

My own generation has a special hero when it comes to community service; I bring you again to John F. Kennedy, the thirty-fifth president of the United States. I was eight years old when Kennedy took the oath of office on January 20, 1961. As part of his inaugural address, Kennedy challenged all Americans to make a sincere



"My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."
— John F. Kennedy, Inauguration Speech, January 20, 1961.

commitment to public service when he said, "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Kennedy, the first Catholic president, inspired service for the country as a mission all citizens should accept and act upon.

Kennedy entered the presidency in difficult times. The threat of communism and the Cold War's proliferation of nuclear weaponry had put a dark cloud over America. This prompted Kennedy to have the country focus on improving international relations and helping the world's impoverished. To put action behind his words, Kennedy



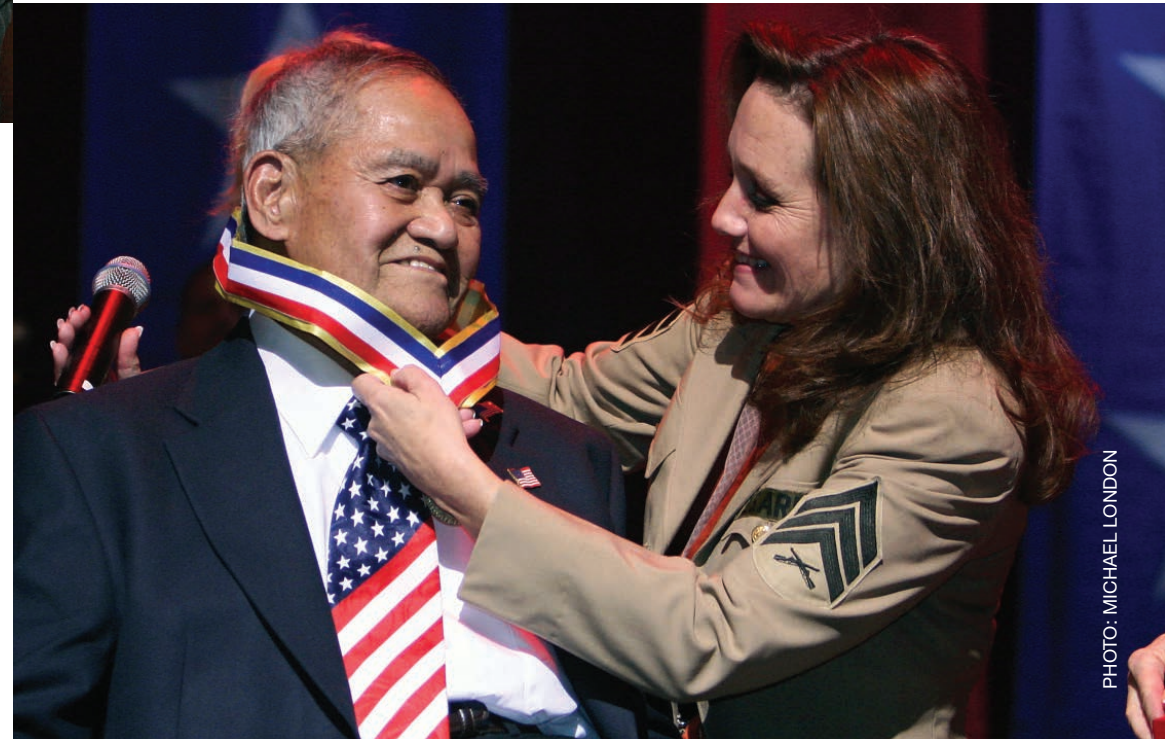
Tony Orlando Honors Veterans Year-Round.

issued an executive order establishing the Peace Corps. His new “army” would be comprised of civilians volunteering their time and skills to assist underdeveloped nations in any way feasible.¹⁰ Through 2015, more than 200,000 Americans have passed through and worked within the ranks of the Peace Corps, serving in 141 countries.¹¹

Of course, when it comes to service for one’s country, I am again reminded of Sen. John McCain, whose years as a POW in Vietnam were touched on earlier in this book. McCain was among the POWs welcomed home to America on New Year’s Day 1973 during a special celebration at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas. Among the entertainers performing that day before seventy thousand people, including nearly six hundred POWs, was singer and Branson,

Missouri-based entertainer, Tony Orlando. That day Orlando sang his memorable pop hit song “*Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree.*”

Orlando’s classic tune has since become the standard song used by Americans to welcome veterans home. The yellow ribbon is now an iconic symbol of hope and freedom that honors all of our country’s servicemen and servicewomen. Orlando’s dedication to veterans has also led to the week-long Veterans Homecoming Celebration in Branson. It is a community-wide effort held every year starting on November 5 to honor all veterans. Thanks to Orlando’s song and his community service-minded nature, Branson is now recognized by many as the Veterans Homecoming Capital of the United States. Honoring those who serve is an important service in and of itself.



Veteran Receives Tony Orlando Yellow Ribbon Medal of Freedom Award from Mimi Lennon of the Lennon Sisters.



Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910–1997) Founded the Missionaries of Charity to Give “Wholehearted Free Service to the Poorest of the Poor.”

If ever there was a model for service of the highest order, it was surely Mother Teresa of Calcutta who ministered to and cared for the poorest of the poor for more than fifty years. In 1950 she founded the Missionaries of Charity, a Roman Catholic organization that by 2012 counted more than forty-five hundred sisters (Catholic nuns) and was active in more than 130 countries. They run homes for people dying of disease, in addition to operating soup kitchens, orphanages, and schools, among other services. Members must follow vows of chastity, poverty, obedience, and wholehearted service to the poorest of the poor.

Few of us can claim the depth of service for which Mother Teresa devoted most of her life, but being of service is not a competition. No one is keeping score. It’s what is in your heart and what you choose to give of yourself that matters.

In my eyes and in his own way, my dad was a beacon of light for others. He retired when he was in his fifties, his last position being director of internal auditing for General Dynamics, a global aerospace and defense company that at the time was one of the largest defense contractors in the world.



“Love One Another.”

Dad.

Not long after Dad retired, he went to work as a volunteer at Saint Vincent de Paul’s Thrift Shop in St. Louis. There, he helped set up an improved accounting system and spent a lot of time sorting through incoming donations to determine how they could be used by families in need. Dad retired in a comfortable



St. Thomas of Villanova Portrait.

financial state. I suppose he could have gone back to playing golf, which he had given up to raise a family and put me and my sisters through school. But he didn't. Instead, among other pursuits, he spent time at a workbench fixing toys or fans, or cleaning faux jewelry, all so he could bring joy and dignity to the lives of others. He also had a hand in setting up an accounting system and raising money for a Christian Brothers high school in a challenged St. Louis, Missouri, neighborhood.

Seeing what my dad did, both in providing for our family and in providing for others, touched me deeply. It made me think about the importance of life and what each of us can do to make life better for others. He inspired each family member to discover for themselves that it really is better to give than to receive.

I am thankful for the education I got at Villanova, an education as much about values, faith, and service, as it was about academics. Villanova's commitment of service to others takes me back to the roots of the school: the founding philosophy based on the works, writings, and wisdom of Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas of Villanova.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Augustine was a self-absorbed sinner during the first part of his life before he was transformed. In his later years, he immersed himself in God's teachings, dedicating himself to abiding by the principles of truth, unity, love, and dedicated service to others—the foundation on which Villanova University rests today.

Then there's Saint Thomas of Villanova, who lived about a thousand years after Augustine. In retrospect, Thomas' life bore similarities to the one Mother Teresa would live hundreds of years later. Thomas was known as "the father of the poor" for his efforts in starting social programs that benefited those in need. Not only did he start boarding schools and provide dowries for girls from poor families, but he also fed the hungry and gave the homeless a place to sleep—things he chided the church for not doing enough of at the time.

Saint Thomas of Villanova's ideals are reflected in the words, "Just as a large hospital, the world is full of needy and poor people...Open your eyes, and wherever you look, you will see a multitude of people who need your help."¹²

The needs of the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and others in need of a hand up are the concern of Villanova University and those who have called it home at one time or another over the years.

Hear the voice of the poor.

Questions to Ponder

Chances are, in addition to whatever community service or volunteerism you have already done, you have thought of performing additional service work on behalf of others—service work that is aligned with your own personal or career interests. What type of volunteer work would that be, and what would it take for you to pursue such service now?

#beofservice | #carefortheneedy



St. Thomas of Villanova Distributing Alms to the Poor
by Bartolomé-Esteban Murillo, c. 1678, Oil on Canvas.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS OF SEVILLE, SEVILLE, SPAIN

*“To fall in love with God is
the greatest romance; to seek him
the greatest adventure;
to find him, the greatest
human achievement.”*

—Saint Augustine of Hippo

CHAPTER
20.
SWEET
SIXTEEN

Be Loving

SAINT THOMAS OF VILLANOVA, WHO LIVED FROM 1486–1555, DIDN'T JUST PREACH A THEOLOGY OF LOVE, HE LIVED IT AND ACTED ON IT. HIS ACTS OF SERVICE AND GENEROSITY HAVE ALREADY BEEN MENTIONED IN THIS BOOK. MORE THAN ANYTHING, IT WAS HIS LOVE FOR GOD, HIS INTERNALIZATION OF GOD'S LOVE TOWARD HIM, AND HIS LOVE FOR HIS FELLOW MAN THAT FORMED THE CORNERSTONE OF A PHILOSOPHY THAT STILL GUIDES VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY.

Thomas didn't just feed the poor and provide them a home or a bed for the night; he loved them in spirit as much as he did in works. He

once said: “Rejoice, then, you poor people; shout for joy, you needy ones; because even if the world holds you in contempt you are highly valued by your Lord God and the angels.”

On Villanova’s official website it says, “His love of the poor extended to all creation. Thomas’ teachings, scholarship, and special concern for the impoverished inspire Villanova’s mission of seeking wisdom, love, and justice.”¹

Love is all around, just like it says in the title of the popular 1960s song by The Troggs that has since been covered by other popular artists such as R.E.M. Then there’s John Lennon who wrote “All You Need Is Love.”

There are many kinds of love—the love between parents and children, between husbands and wives, among extended-family members, and the love between friends. There’s also the kind of love people have for things nonhuman—such as a pet, a job (hopefully), a hobby, and even certain kinds of food (pizza and brownies come to mind).

Few things matter if you don’t have love. Without love, selfishness, rudeness, arrogance, pride, hatred, and violence occupy the room. Saint Paul says it best in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, 13 (NIV): “*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. . . And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.*” For good measure, turn to 1 John 3:18 (NIV): “*Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*”

Another of Villanova University’s inspirations, Saint Augustine of Hippo said that it is in our love of God that we find permanent and enduring happiness without the fear of loss that erodes our



Saint Augustine of Hippo Wrote More Than 100 Books.

happiness.² This may be interpreted to mean that the mutual love between God and us acts as an eternal safety net. Regardless of our circumstances in life—including the loss of a loved one or a cherished possession—our ultimate happiness is based on the security we have in our relationship to God; it is never shaken. In that sense, love truly

never fails.

Finally, from Augustine's Love Sermon

“Once and for all, I give you this one short command: love, and do what you will. If you hold your peace, hold your peace out of love. If you cry out, cry out in love. If you correct someone, correct them out of love. If you spare them, spare them out of love. Let the root of love be in you; nothing can spring from it but good.”³

Father Bill Atkinson, O.S.A., was all about love. He spoke a lot about it, and he even had a Villanova University connection that we'll get to later. Father Atkinson loved life, and he enjoyed people, even though he could have lived out much of his life in sorrow and bitterness had he so chosen.

You see, at the time he was ordained into the Augustinian Order, Bill Atkinson was believed to be the first quadriplegic priest in the nearly two-thousand-year history of the Catholic Church. Obviously, he was a very special person, both before and after the accident.

It was on February 22, 1965—George Washington's birthday—that Bill Atkinson, nineteen at the time, and three of his buddies were enjoying a day out on a snow-covered hill. They were speeding downhill on a toboggan, enjoying the camaraderie in the clear, cold air when tragedy struck. The toboggan went out of control, and they crashed into a tree, breaking Bill's neck.⁴

When he came out of his coma, Bill Atkinson found himself in a hospital bed, unable to feel his body. He was eventually told he would probably never walk again, let alone be able to use his arms. The effect on him mentally was another issue, and that's where Atkinson's story becomes such an inspiration.



*Father Bill Atkinson, O.S.A.
Father Bill Inspired Everyone around Him.*

“Love is the joy of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the gods.”

—Plato

“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

—Jesus Christ

“Love will draw an elephant through a keyhole.”

—Samuel Richardson

Not only would he go on to become a priest, but Father Atkinson would also teach for many years at a Catholic high school in a Philadelphia suburb, providing counsel and inspiration to untold thousands of students. He later coauthored a book, *Green Bananas: The Wisdom of Father Bill Atkinson*, so titled because he would not buy green bananas from the store out of concern he might not live long enough to see them ripen. As we all know, it takes only a few days for bananas to turn from green to ripe yellow.



Father Bill Atkinson—A Man of Compassion with a Sense of Humor and Zeal for Life.

COURTESY OF THE AUGUSTINIAN

Despite living most of his life in a quadriplegic state that easily could have killed his spirit and desire to live, Father Atkinson was steadfast in promoting love, especially love of one's neighbor as expressed in the Ten Commandments. Father Atkinson radiated love.

He has said:

“Love God by loving your neighbor.”

“‘Give and receive love,’ is the big Christian message, the rest is just buildings and ceremonies.”

“Love is our pipeline to the divine, and God’s waiting for us to get that one of these days...And, he’s being very patient with us!”

“All of your anger is just going to make you sick. Give in to God’s love; you’ll be surprised what appears in your life.”⁵

Father Bill’s link to Villanova Basketball came through a family friend, Rob Hagan. A close friendship had developed between Rob and Father Bill. Rob was truly impacted by Bill’s incredible response of love, joy, and compassion to his misfortune. It was Father Bill who inspired Rob to leave his life as a successful lawyer behind to become ordained in the Augustinian order.

Bill’s witness of Christlikeness and temperance, coupled with a zest for life, was the impetus that brought Rob Hagan to enter the

“The art of love is largely the art of persistence.”

—Albert Ellis

“The best thing to hold on to in life is each other.”

—Audrey Hepburn

“Love is the ultimate expression of the will to live.”

—Tom Wolfe

“All your life, you will be faced with a choice. You can choose love or hate. I choose love.”

—Johnny Cash

priesthood, and become Father Rob—to Villanova’s great fortune.

With no Father Rob as team chaplain at Villanova, there is no key figure to recruit future star player Daniel Ochefu. In addition, Father Rob wouldn’t have given the powerful pregame homily that Coach Jay Wright insisted was pivotal to the Wildcats winning their second national championship.

Note: I am writing this segment less than a week before Christmas, the time of year *It’s a Wonderful Life* is playing on TV—the movie in which Jimmy Stewart’s character, George Bailey, gets to see how life would have unfolded differently if he had never been born. The consequences are, to say the least, eye-opening.

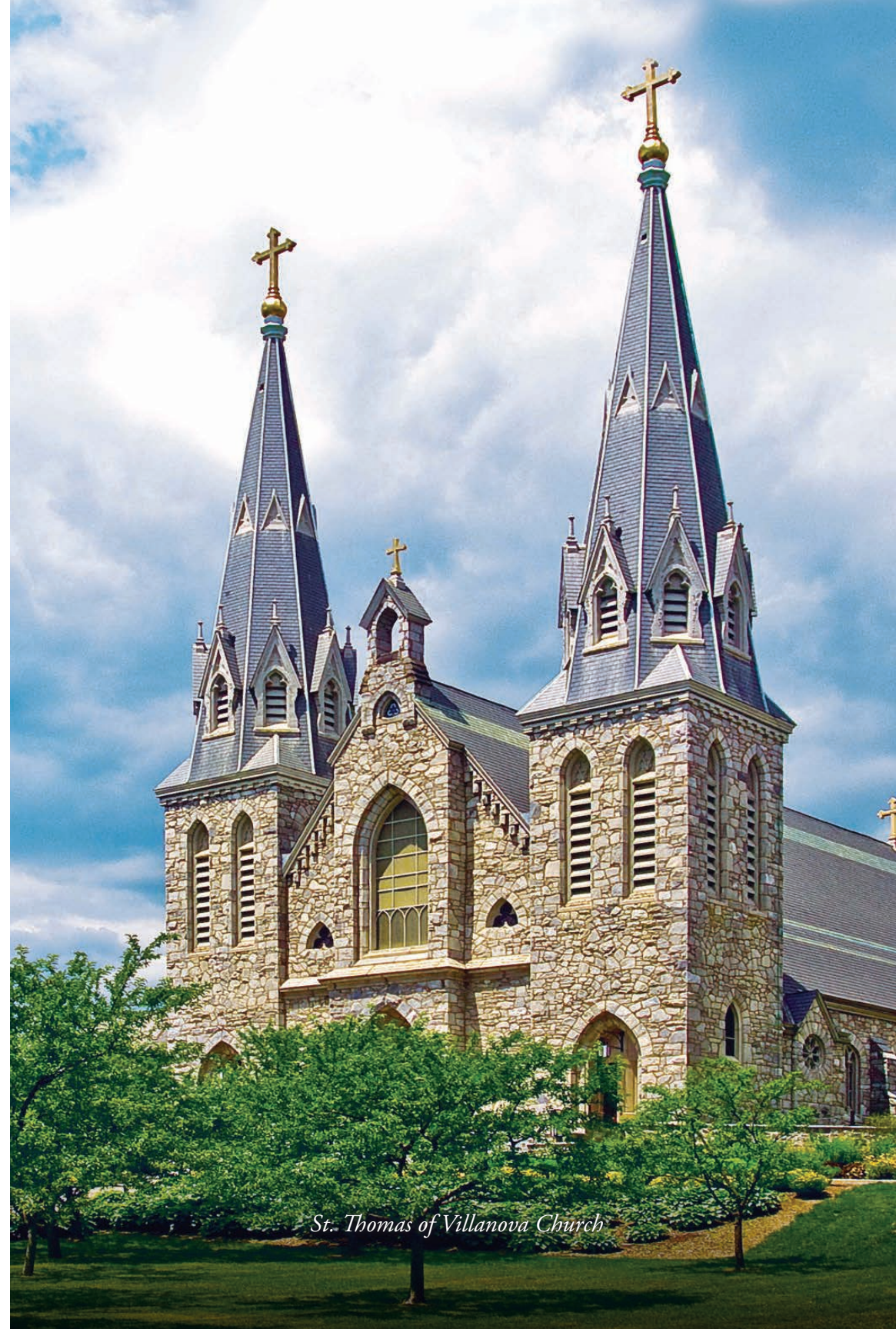
“Through the help of his family and his Augustinian brothers, and a lot of prayer and a lot of good doctoring...Bill was able to make it out [of the hospital and rehab] about a year and a half after that [accident]—he wasn’t expected to make it through the night,” Father Rob said. “He spent his whole life in a wheelchair, and he taught for thirty-plus years at Monsignor Bonner High School with spirit and a twinkle in his eye and joy in his heart, and he had a wonderful life.”⁶

Thanks in part to Father Bill Atkinson, Father Rob is who he is now. And perhaps no college basketball team in America has a chaplain whose love for the program and its players runs as deep as Father Rob’s—and it’s mutual.

A side note: A movement to canonize Father Bill Atkinson is underway. Father Rob Hagan has been instrumental in this effort.

On the tenth anniversary of Father Bill’s death, Father Rob led the homily during a service at St. Thomas of Villanova Church.

For more information on the effort to canonize Father Bill, visit



St. Thomas of Villanova Church

Love Truly Is All Around

While Father Atkinson's influence on Villanova Basketball requires a connecting of the dots, there was once a wheelchair-bound man who did have a direct influence on Villanova Basketball. His name was Jake Nevin, the school's longtime athletic trainer. In his seventies and ravaged by Lou Gehrig's disease, Nevin was bench-side when the Rollie Massimino-coached Wildcats beat Georgetown to win the 1985 national title.

Nevin loved that team, and they loved him. All season long, Nevin had boldly told them they were going to win the national title, even though Villanova was far from being a top-ten team that season. In fact, the Wildcats barely made it into the NCAA Tournament with ten losses. Hardly able to move at all, Nevin accompanied the team to Lexington, Kentucky, for the Final Four. He essentially willed himself to live long enough to see his beloved Wildcats win the title that he had long predicted.⁷

"Jake had a spiritual quality that glowed and radiated," former Villanova player Bill Powers said. "Talking to Jake was like talking to a favorite uncle, the Irish cop on the corner, or your parish priest. He was an earthly little saint who looked like a leprechaun and spoke like a wise man."⁸

Late in the 1985 championship game, sophomore guard Harold Jensen was preparing to shoot a critical free throw. Before he went to the foul line, he walked over to Nevin on the sideline, leaned over, kissed the elderly man's bald head and said, "This one is for you." Jake watched Jensen hit the shot and his beloved team go on to win the national championship. Before Nevin's passing, Villanova honored



PHOTO: COURTESY OF VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Jake Nevin

*Beloved Villanova Athletic Trainer
(1910 - December 10, 1985).*



PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

Villanova Basketball Team Sharing the Love after Championship Victory.

him by changing the name of the “Villanova Field House” to the “Jake Nevin Field House.”

Villanova’s victory in 1985 was an emotional ride for its fans. It still speaks to Nova Nation fans a generation later who got swept up by the Wildcats’ run to the title in 2016—fans such as Chris Lane, a blogger for *vuhoops.com*.

Chris said, “I heard Jim Nantz yell, ‘*Jenkins for the championship!*’ and squealed like a little kid on Christmas morning. I heard Ryan Fannon yell, ‘*Cats Win It All!*’ and I saw the Villanova Pavilion move into anarchy, and that’s when I lost it.

“I mentally and emotionally broke down. I cried and started laughing like a maniac, so bad that the taxi driver actually pulled over and made sure I was OK. He was probably frightened. I would have been too.

“But what I realized was that I freaking love this school, this program, and everybody else who feels the same way I do. Which, based on this weekend, is pretty much everybody. And there’s nothing more rewarding than seeing the people you love see their dreams come true.”

Love is a virtue represented in human kindness, compassion, and affection. Like other virtues, love can be learned and incorporated into our lives on many levels, and it can be expressed in many ways. It can even be presented in simple measure, as when the Wildcats players expressed love toward their teammates, the program, and the school. Josh Hart showed love in thanking God in the aftermath of the victory over North Carolina in the title game. Ochefu showed love on behalf of past team members, naming them from the stage during the postgame hotel celebration. He reminded everyone in attendance, “*We play for those who came before us.*”

There is brotherly love, and there is familial love, and I’m grateful for both. The motto for my family, courtesy of Mom and Dad, is “*Love one another.*” My mom has been the love glue for our family, which now numbers forty-six (with two more on the way), branching off through several generations. My parents always encouraged all of us kids and our respective families to learn to love one another and to stand by one another, even when circumstances and geography separated us.

We have all lived in various parts of the country,

“Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.”

—Mother Teresa

“Love is the absence of judgment.”

—the fourteenth Dalai Lama

“The giving of love is an education in itself.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

from the East Coast to the West Coast. Nevertheless, our parents wanted us to be bonded—all of us—which is why they began organizing (and paying for) family reunions, starting out with Mom and Dad, their five kids, and my sister’s husbands. The first reunion was in Virgin Gorda, British Virgin Islands, with subsequent locales to



Author's Mom Welcomes 32nd Member of Family with Team T-shirt. (Henry's Mom Accepts Shirt.)

include various destinations in Mexico.

One year, everyone was invited, including the “so many” children of my sisters—the grandkids. Family “team” T-shirts were created and numbered beginning with number one for Dad, number two for

Mom, and continuing all the way down to the youngest grandchild (at the time), two-year-old Jack at number twenty-three. The roster has since doubled. As the family grew, each additional child and spouse have received numbered T-shirts upon entry to the clan. It is a ritual of love that everyone looks forward to—especially dear Mom, who starts talking about ordering a shirt as soon as word breaks of a “new arrival” to the family. I think she even helped prompt a new arrival when she asked my niece’s then-boyfriend what size shirt he takes. A proposal occurred just days later.

A mom’s love is never-ending. As of this writing, my mother is eighty-eight years old and still looking out for her only son and firstborn. When I sent her the first few chapters of this book electronically in rough unedited form, she sent back the pages, printed out and filled with her editing marks and suggestions. Mom wanted to be sure her son made a great impression on whoever might read the book she helped me write. :)

That’s what loving moms do.

Isn’t love grand?

Question to Ponder

When you think of someone you love, who comes to mind and why?

#beloving | #love



Ryan Arcidiacono Waves Victory Net

PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

CHAPTER 21.

Wrapping It All Up

THERE YOU HAVE IT. SIXTEEN VALUES CHAPTERS, EACH FOCUSED ON A VALUE REFLECTED BY THE 2016 VILLANOVA MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM. CALL THEM THE "SWEET SIXTEEN." THE HARD PART WASN'T IDENTIFYING A LONG LIST OF VALUES DISPLAYED BY THE WILDCATS IN THEIR CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON. NOR WAS IT DIFFICULT LOCATING STORIES AND EXAMPLES CONNECTING WILDCATS' VALUES TO HEROES OF INTERNATIONAL RENOWN. THE CHALLENGE WAS NARROWING THESE MULTIPLE VALUES DOWN INTO THIS TIDY LIST OF SIXTEEN.

There is something in this book for everybody, and everything in this book, once pieced together, has a spot in somebody's life. Maybe that somebody is you.

Here's one big thing to remember—Villanova Coach Jay Wright's stated mission is to develop young men of high moral character who embrace these values in a manner that says they are worthy of being called Villanova University student-athletes. Wright is serious about this—defining success on his own terms.

I'm confident that if Wright were coaching basketball at certain national basketball power-house programs, and he said something like, "Our goal is not to win the national championship," he would instantly see a roomful of raised eyebrows accompanied by horrified gasps all around. Most likely, he would also be out of a job before his head next hit a pillow. However, Wright is adamant about staying true to his values.

In so many words, Wright says that we are not to concern ourselves with what the outside world says or thinks—we can't really control how others will respond. Instead, we should focus on what we can control, starting with our attitude and how we set our personal values.

Imagine living your life in the same way that Wright's Wildcats play basketball for Villanova. They strive to always play forty minutes of Villanova Basketball—more than forty if the game goes into overtime—and treat each moment as the right time and place to exercise their core values. In terms of basketball, court awareness is not just knowing where the ball, your teammates, and the opposing players are at any given moment. It's being aware of who you are, what you stand for, and how you will act in the heat of the moment when the chips don't fall your way. Do the same in your life—be focused on doing what's right, being careful to surround yourself with things and people who will support your attitudes, values, and dreams. Seek out support; you can't do it all on your own.

If you haven't already done so, familiarize yourself with these values and recalibrate your life to integrate them into your daily actions and

aspirations. If you base your life on these sixteen values, great things will happen. Approach life with the "Wright" attitude.

Having the right attitude is the first step on the ladder to success. It's a choice we have every day. There are days in basketball that your shots just won't go in. So it is in our own lives as well, regardless of what we do or what our business card says. What we can control is our attitude. Once we do, then everything else starts to fall into place.

Our challenge is to wake up every day with a great attitude and hold on to it for the next fifteen to sixteen hours. An ability to control our attitude might be our best attribute. If you can have confidence in your attitude, then from there you can build great expectations into your life. Yes, "stuff" happens; how you handle it, even when it hits the fan, is what matters. Are you prepared to live each day, and every moment, with a positive attitude?

Be the Best of Whatever You Are

Throughout much of this book, specifically the sixteen values chapters, I have sprinkled in several stories involving people with Villanova connections—including alumni with inspirational stories of their own. In that respect, perhaps I've saved the best for last—a story about a man who reflects the values that have permeated Villanova's history, its people, and its legacy.

George Raveling, Villanova alumnus, class of 1960, is a former Wildcats basketball player who was once an assistant coach for the Villanova men's basketball team. He has led and lived a remarkable life, not just on the basketball court and sidelines, but also on the front lines of American history.



George Raveling – Villanova Alum, Illustrious College Basketball Player, Coach, and Public Speaker. Member - Basketball Hall of Fame.

ty-nine, Raveling was still working for Nike as its Global Basketball Sports-Marketing Director. By the way, among his recruits while a Villanova assistant was Howard Porter, the all-American who would help lead the Wildcats to the Final Four in 1971, my freshman year. (Without Raveling, there'd be no Howard Porter at Villanova, probably no Final Four double-overtime victory in 1971, and most likely, no *Win in Your Life* book.)

From a college basketball standpoint, Raveling is a fascinating man—a go-to guy for media in need of a prominent coach willing to talk openly and candidly about any topic of the game they care to discuss.

Raveling is best known as a college basketball coach and one of the first black men to coach a Division 1 team. After spending six seasons as an assistant coach at Villanova, followed by three seasons at Maryland, Raveling served as head coach at Washington State for eleven seasons, at Iowa for three seasons, and finally at Southern Cal for eight seasons before hanging it up after the 1993–94 season. He was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in 2015.

As of 2016, at the ripe young age of seven-

Raveling's basketball career is just a part of his incredible life, which also included an up-close-and-personal connection with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Raveling owns something historic of Dr. King's that is probably worth millions of dollars, and King gave it to him willingly. (Pretty amazing the connections between Villanovans and Martin Luther King Jr., isn't it?) The exchange occurred on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The date was August 28, 1963. The occasion was what would become known as King's landmark, "I Have a Dream," speech. He was the last speaker that day among a succession of great leaders addressing a crowd of over two hundred thousand people. They were gathered for the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*, a seminal event of the Civil Rights movement.

The six-foot-four Raveling and a friend had been spotted walking around the National Mall by event organizers who had asked them to work security. This put Raveling just a few feet away from King as he gave his speech. When King finished and stepped away from the podium, Raveling asked the Civil Rights leader if he could have his personal copy of the typewritten speech. King gave it to Raveling, who folded it up, stuffed it in a pocket, and took an extraordinary piece of history home with him.¹

Raveling has long been a fan of public speaking—he had attended several of King's speeches in the 1950s before King was a household name. Today, Raveling is a well-regarded speaker himself. In 2016, he gave the commencement address at Villanova, beginning his speech with a reference to his arrival at the school in September 1956, a suitcase and Army duffel bag in hand, stepping off a Greyhound bus at the intersection of Lancaster and Ithan Avenues—the same spot where my dad would drop me off fourteen years later.

"Villanova took me from where I was, to where I needed to be," Raveling said to the Villanova graduates in 2016. "It clothed me with

knowledge, wisdom, character, commitment, and strategies, and then wrapped me with confidence, persistence, self-awareness, curiosity, and passion. This wonderful institution sent me off in pursuit of excellence. For some of you, Villanova will have a similar application. You just don't know it yet."

Raveling continued his commencement speech by outlining five life lessons that he described as foundational for personal success. In short, these were: "make every day your masterpiece," "be accountable to yourself...never second-guess yourself," "construct a personal development plan," "surround yourself with as many extraordinary people as possible," and "create a lasting legacy for yourself."²

After relating his five life lessons, Raveling ended his address by reciting the following verse:

"If you can't be a pine on top of the hill, be a scrub in the valley. But be the best little scrub on the side of the hill. Be a bush if you can't be a tree. If you can't be a highway, be a trail. If you can't be the sun, be a star. Because it isn't by size that you win or you lose, be the best of whatever you are."

Raveling drew this verse from the conclusion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Street Sweeper Speech."

As you will recall, in Chapter 6 we covered the "Street Sweeper Speech" as a key element in the arc of history that went from Saint Augustine through Martin Luther King Jr. to Father Rob and finally to Daniel Ochefu. This is the story where Ochefu swept the Wildcats to the championship by embodying King's "Street Sweeper" when he mopped the floor.

Now, amazingly, words from the "Street Sweeper Speech" have found their way to Villanova again, arriving in the 2016 commencement

address. This time they took a different route. Instead of going from Dr. King to Father Rob to Villanova, they went from Dr. King to Villanova via famous alumnus, George Raveling. In essence, the arc from Augustine to Villanova was created anew—using the same story—this time with a different messenger.

The fact that basketball legend George Raveling was chosen to give Villanova's commencement address the same year the Wildcats won the NCAA Men's Basketball Championship is an uncanny coincidence. The fact that Raveling chose words from the "Street Sweeper Speech" to end his remarks seems more than coincidental.

Coincidence? Destiny? Divine intervention? You decide.

Before you do, consider one more fact: King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28, which, in fact, is the annual feast day of Saint Augustine.

It would be impossible to go back through this book and choose the most important values presented, since each is as unique in application as we are as individuals. For me, one way I tied these together for enhanced meaning and relevance was to pull out several themes that emerged after collecting this material.

To that end, the following six themes jumped out to me. Perhaps you have isolated some others of your own. If so, I would love to hear your story, your experiences, as well as the conclusions you have drawn from this book. My email: mlondon@wininyourlife.com

1. Maintain a positive attitude. This includes the ability and willingness to consciously change your attitude for the better as circumstances dictate. A perception of poor officiating in a game can be a source of discouragement, as can someone you deem less qualified getting the promotion at work you thought was a slam

dunk. Scenarios like these could put a serious crimp in your attitude if you let them. It's up to each of us to develop a reliable mental path to keep from reacting to external events with a negative response. Saying "attitude" or "next play" is Coach Wright's way to keep his players on track. "Where's the silver lining?" is mine. What's yours?

2. It's all about family, not just the individual. Players' parents get the red carpet treatment at Villanova. Wright has said that in recruiting players he keeps a close eye on recruits' families in terms of things like character and home life; he knows what kind of players he wants off the court as well as on. Also, there's the tradition of honoring the parents more than the players on Senior Night. Notice, too, the key roles parents have played in the lives of their sons as told here: Kris Jenkins' mom tirelessly teaching him hoops tips; Josh Hart's dad turning on the headlights for some after-dark basketball; and Daniel Ochefu's mom wanting her son to be a priest. There are more such examples in the book. Bottom line, honor your family.

3. Racial harmony can grow on a foundation of core values.

Until now, this really has not been singled out as an overarching theme in this book, nor does it need to be. But in the many scenarios and stories presented, it is clearly evident that at Villanova University, race is not an issue. The obvious story here is the one linking Ryan Arcidiacono (white) and Daniel Ochefu (black), who arrived at Villanova after a poor 2011–12 season. Together they became the two main building blocks on which Coach Wright rebuilt the Villanova Basketball program. Arcidiacono and Ochefu share the core values that Wright established for the program, and their compatibility as teammates was crucial to the Wildcats winning the national title in 2016. Perhaps a values-based philosophy would help us all get along better.

4. Always be working to get a little bit better. At Villanova, there is a strong, shared sense that you practice and compete with an expectation of excellence—not necessarily perfection. It should be one of your goals to get better, in everything you do, every day. By adopting

the concept of continuous improvement you will improve in all areas of your life, even if only one small step at a time. Life is a long journey. Small steps add up. One day you could be struggling to learn the basics of picking on a guitar, but if you stick with it every day, and log your 10,000 hours, you could be a rock star—in any endeavor in life. Several chapters touch on this spirit, espousing values that are part of this equation; they include Chapter 7 ("Be Hungry"), Chapter 12 ("Be Perseverant"), Chapter 13 ("Be the Best"), Chapter 15 ("Be Enthusiastic"), and Chapter 17 ("Be Confident").

5. Live fully in a community. To thrive in a community you have to be an active part, and that is a concept that is nourished and celebrated at Villanova. Among the basketball players themselves, that means all players are treated as equals regardless of their scoring averages, minutes played per game, or how many stars were beside their names when they were being recruited. In the bigger picture, basketball players are encouraged and expected to mingle with other students around campus. In return, the program gets a huge boost from a student body avid to support them through thick and thin. Welcome to Nova Nation, which Team Chaplain Father Rob Hagan has described as everyone involved with the university becoming friends for life. It's a community experience that stretches beyond the bounds of the campus and everyone's particular class year. Feel free to join Nova Nation by cheering for the blue and the white. Of course, you are also encouraged to find a new community closer to you or choose now to spend more time with a group to which you already belong.

6. Inspiration is an essential ingredient to winning in your life.

Inspirational lessons for winning in our lives can come from many places. In this book, we can find them in the wise sayings of some of history's greatest thinkers and in the "behind the headlines" look at the Villanova Wildcats' path to the national championship. The Wildcats' playbook for winning comes largely from the coaching style and philosophy of Jay Wright. Like each Wildcat player under his tutelage, Wright is informed and inspired by the academic principles,

culture, and ethics of Villanova. The university's foundation, in turn, is based on the ethics and teachings of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, all of which are found in the ultimate playbook, the Bible. Therein is plenty of inspiration to go around.

The 2016 championship run of the Villanova Wildcats inspired me to write this book. This process has awakened me to the many ways my experiences at Villanova University have informed and inspired my entire life. My deepest hope and desire is that these pages can be an inspiration to you—as you, too, pursue a life of winning.

A Proven Path for Integrating Values into Your Life

The sixteen values presented and dissected in this book cover a lot of ground. There's a lot to think about, and integrating even half of them into your lifestyle could be overwhelming. Where do you start, and how can you get anything done in your life if you are constantly preoccupied with becoming a better person by turning any or all of these values into new habits?

It's a good thing that we have a friend who's an expert in the self-improvement business, someone with strong Philadelphia ties, even though he's been dead for more than two hundred years. I'm speaking of one of America's founding fathers and one of our nation's most brilliant minds and innovators: Benjamin Franklin.

Franklin wasn't much of a basketball fan; Dr. James Naismith didn't invent the game until 101 years after Franklin's death. Nor did Ben ever crack a book at Villanova University; the Order of Saint Augustine founded the school in 1842, fifty-two years after Franklin's passing. But, yes, he can help with some instructions he left behind



Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) Founding Father of the United States, Author, Printer, Political Theorist, Politician, Freemason, Postmaster, Scientist, Inventor, Civic Activist, Statesman, and Diplomat.

for a case just like ours. Otherwise, how can we learn to become better, more successful people when presented with a long list of desired values that we just can't stuff in all at once?

Franklin and Philadelphia go together like ham and eggs—or steak and cheese (with a nod and a wink to your favorite steak and cheese eatery). He wasn't born in the City of Brotherly Love, but he got there almost as fast as he could, running away from his Boston home at age seventeen, mainly because of an older brother who mistreated him. Young Ben made his way to Philadelphia, where in the years to



Franklin's Return to Philadelphia - Painted by J.L.G. Ferris (1785).

come, even before he became a founding father of the United States, he staked out a highly successful career as a polymath (a person of wide-ranging knowledge). He was highly skilled as an author, printer, scientist, inventor, statesman, diplomat, postmaster, and politician, among other things. His inventions included the lightning rod, bifocals, and the Franklin stove.

None of this came easy for Ben Franklin. His early life was filled with failure. The turning point for him came when he devised a thirteen-week plan to improve his life. He came up with thirteen virtues (values) and dedicated himself to focusing on adding one virtue a week to his life. Much of what he penned to paper was based on a variety of books he had read, as well as conversations he had with learned people willing to help young Ben find answers.

Franklin created a chart on which he would track his day-to-day success in adhering to that week's virtue. If he lapsed in exhibiting the virtue of the week at any point during the day, he noted that on his chart, with marks indicating failure. For the second week, he would add a second virtue and keep a week's worth of daily tallies for both the new virtue as well as the first week's virtue. He continued adding one virtue a week and keeping score for all the virtues undertaken to that point. By the thirteenth week, he was focusing on all thirteen virtues, which included temperance, silence, frugality, sincerity, moderation, cleanliness, and humility, as well as a half dozen others.

At the end of the thirteen weeks, Franklin would start over and go all the way through another thirteen weeks, cycling through his complete values regimen four times over the course of a year. Franklin's goal was to make it through those thirteen weeks without a black mark anywhere on his chart.

Soon the virtues became second nature to him, although it took him several years before he could complete a thirteen-week cycle without any marks. One thing that kept him going was seeing his cycle-to-cycle improvement, with the chart marks diminishing over time. The sight of progress is always an incentive to keep going. Using this system, Franklin became one of the most successful men of all time. If there had been TV beer ads in Franklin's day, he might have retired the award for *Most Interesting Man in the World*.

I am not suggesting that you follow Franklin's strategy of virtues and start focusing on a different virtue each week for the next sixteen weeks—nor am I discouraging you from doing something along those lines, either. Practicing and eventually making these virtues a part of your own improvement program won't guarantee you'll win a national championship or become one of the architects of a nation's birth, but there's no question you can improve your life. With

persistence, a positive attitude, and an embrace of the values presented in this book, new doors will open for you. This could lead to new levels of success in whatever you do, whether personally or professionally.

While he readily admitted in his autobiography that he never reached moral perfection, Franklin strongly believed his virtue-acquisition system led directly to personal happiness and success. Franklin also wrote of his desire to have his wisdom passed down into posterity: “I hope, therefore, that some of my descendants may follow the example and reap the benefit.”³

Between Saint Augustine of Hippo, Saint Thomas of Villanova, Jay Wright, and Ben Franklin of Philadelphia (by way of Boston), we have four mentors whose works have left us with ample clues to finding the high road to integrity and strong moral values. Follow these clues carefully and enjoy reaping the fruits of success that lie ahead.

*“There’s nothing
more rewarding than seeing
the people you love see their
dreams come true.”*

—Chris Lane, *vuhoops.com*

Living Life

THIS EPILOGUE WAS ALMOST NAMED “LIVING LIFE LARGE,” BUT IN THE END, I CHOSE TO KEEP IT SIMPLE. I DIDN’T WANT TO DISTURB THE ORDERLY BALANCE OF PLANETARY ORBITS IN OUR SOLAR SYSTEM OR TO THROW MY OWN WORLD OUT OF KILTER BY VIOLATING THE SPIRIT OF “BE HUMBLE” (CHAPTER 6).

I am concluding this book with two stories of my own for three main reasons: one, I like to tell stories, and they come out best when I’m talking about firsthand experiences; two, other than the few autobiographical snippets I’ve shared, much of this book has been pegged to other people’s stories and the life lessons emanating from them, and I think it fitting to end this book with stories of my own; and three,



*Chinese Assembly Hall, Hoi An, Vietnam
(Note Ornate Lanterns.)*



Author's Typical Annual Winter Adventure Travel Map.

Here goes...

Traveling the world on your own can put you in the face of adversity far more than sitting at home on the couch. I should know. For one thing, traveling solo to far-off places means there is no travel companion around to help bail you out of sticky situations.

I have spent a total of more than sixty months—the equivalent of five-plus years—over the last twenty years by myself, traveling through Russia, Europe, the southern half of China and all over Southeast Asia. I have encountered all kinds of adversity: missed travel connections, unruly hotel-room neighbors, bed bugs, stolen backpacks, terrible food, Montezuma's revenge, a drunken sore-loser swinging a pool cue at my head, lost luggage, quarters with no air conditioning at an overcrowded border crossing in triple-digit heat, unrelentingly bloodthirsty mosquitoes, and so on and so forth. You get the idea. But I wouldn't trade any of these "adventures" for anything.

However, the question of "Where is the silver lining in this mess?" has gone through my head many times when snafus with transportation, lodging, meals, and communication, not to mention physical

what's the use of endorsing and explaining more than a dozen of life's virtues if I'm not willing to be transparent about my own experiences relative to some of these values?

Here I focus on two stories that I have pulled out of my grab bag of life experiences. My hope is they will demonstrate how a "look for the silver lining" approach can lead to wonderful things happening in one's life.



Fishing Nets Offshore Hôi An in the South China Sea.



Hoi An Waterfront – A UNESCO Protected Heritage Site.

discomfort and/or illness, have presented challenges during travel to remote, foreign destinations. While “looking for the silver lining” has been my primary go-to mental mantra when facing travel challenges, I will often change things up, just for variety’s sake, by rewording the question. Other versions come out as “How can I make lemonade out of these lemons?” or, in more cerebral moments, “Where are seeds of opportunity in this adversity?”

I begin the first tale of one of my memorable overseas trips in the town of Hoi An, a port city on the central east coast of Vietnam. It was here that I experienced one of the recurring themes of this book—the one about finding seeds of an equal or greater opportunity in every adversity.

From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, Hoi An was a primary trading port for ships traveling between China and India on one of the most incredible trade routes in the history of the world. Hoi An

was really just a small hamlet that grew up alongside a river that feeds into the South China Sea. Since it is located about a mile inland, it was protected from the big storms that blew in from the open water.

Ships sailing along the trade route would use the river port for protection as well as for trading. Over time, as boats got bigger and bigger, they were no longer able to get into the port. The waterway wasn’t deep enough to accommodate them. Instead, these bigger boats moved their port stop about thirty miles to the north to a place called Danang, which later became a focal point of the Vietnam War. If you’ve seen the movie *Good Morning, Vietnam* starring Robin Williams, you probably remember his character’s clever use of the name “Danang” in one of his on-air riffs as a disc jockey.

As decades passed, more and more of the trade moved to the Danang port, and Hoi An became a sleepy little riverside town left to languish, almost frozen in time. This downturn for local commerce

ended up to be good news in the end. Hôi An got missed during the war. It was overlooked—out of sight, out of mind.

There were only a few small skirmishes in Hôi An. The little riverside town survived the Vietnam War almost entirely intact. This included most of the old buildings and ornate temples, plus a bridge more than four hundred years old that was a gift from Japan. The whole area is now a protected UNESCO Heritage site.

Hôi An is not only a treasured place; it is filled with treasure as well. People come from all over the world to have clothes custom-tailored. In addition, local artisans create amazing pieces of art. While there, I became mesmerized by beautiful Chinese lanterns. The problem with purchasing these lanterns was finding a way to get them home. They were simply too big and too delicate to safely carry on a plane.

I had also fallen in love with an extraordinary painting that I just had to have, but like the lanterns, it was too big to pack. There were strict weight and size restrictions on what could be transported in my luggage. It would have cost me five hundred dollars to take home as oversized baggage—a bit much for something that cost me only two hundred fifty dollars to buy.

I did some checking and found that I could purchase a crate five-feet by five-feet by four-and-a-half feet high and have it shipped back home for about the same five hundred dollars. I could stuff as much as I wanted into the crate, regardless of weight, and have it go by ship. This would allow me to buy a significant amount of treasure.

Think of it: I had a total of about thirty family members at the time, Dad, Mom, sisters, brothers-in-law, nieces, and nephews. Christmas shopping list—done! My plan was to get the next five years' worth of Christmas presents, plus as many clothes as I could possibly get made for myself, as well as a few of those spectacular lanterns. I wanted it all, and I was going to get it, crate it, and stick it on a ship.

It would be my own treasure chest crossing the world on an ocean-bound voyage, no less.

The toughest part was getting measured for all those tailor-made clothes in hot, steamy shops, then moving all hundred plus purchased items to Danang to be loaded into the crate. I had to rent a van to transport everything from Hôi An to Danang. That was a project and a half in itself, but it sure was a lot of fun, too. Merry Christmas, everyone! Instead of just one piece, now I could get three large, beautiful pieces of art into the crate. Merry Christmas to me!

Several months after I returned home, I heard a knock at my door. My treasure had made it all the way from Hôi An via Danang via ship to the West Coast via overland transport to Branson, Missouri, and was now being offloaded from a delivery truck in my front yard. At the time, I happened to be talking on the phone with my dad. With him still on the line, I saw this as a chance for Dad to share in my excitement. I walked out with a crowbar to where they dropped off the crate. As I pried it open, I couldn't contain my excitement! Finally, the lid popped off, and I took a look inside. What I saw boggled my mind and shocked me to my core. The crate was full of old useless junk! It didn't take Sherlock Holmes to tell me that my entire box of treasure had been stolen and replaced with a bunch of junk probably similar in weight to the treasures I had originally packed.

I continued talking to my dad on the phone, giving him a play-by-play of what I was seeing, and he said, "You must be crushed."

I paused a second, took a deep breath, and said, "No, Dad, I'm happy. I choose to be happy. I choose to be in control of how I respond to this moment. I'm used to doing this on the golf course, and I'm choosing right now to not allow my body to experience angst and misery."

I said this to my dad based on this approach to life that I'm living and believing—that something even better was going to come out of this

disaster. I didn't know what it was, but there was going to be some sort of silver lining in this situation, albeit one that took me a while to realize.

Of course, I made a claim to the insurance company for the crate and its contents, but was told, "Sir, you insured delivery of a box, and we delivered a box!" That wasn't going to cut it with me. I had a friend who had a friend who was a lawyer in the communist country of Vietnam.

The lawyer said, "Don't worry. I can help you. Just come back to Vietnam." So I did, returning to Hôi An the following winter. That was the beauty of it; or so I told myself. The silver lining of the theft is that it gave me an excuse to go back to that wonderful place, Hôi An. (Sure, that may seem like a stretch, but hold on.)

I returned to Vietnam, went to court, and through translators I learned the insurance company was ordered to pay. The compensation came in the form of Vietnamese currency handed to me in a grocery bag. So there I was in 100-degree weather walking out a door in a sketchy port area carrying a sack full of money—at dusk! That's a story in itself.

One of the beauties of being back in Hôi An is that for one night a month they have a very special lantern night. All the lights of the entire town, on every street, must come from lanterns. (Look online for photos of "Hôi An lantern festival.") My first time in Hôi An I had missed that special night; on my second trip I did not.

I was astounded by the beauty of lantern night. Walking the historic area, I noticed the antique lanterns in front of old temples were hand-painted. These stood out because all the other lanterns currently being made in the town were not painted.

I decided I wanted a painted lantern. I went around town asking the lantern makers if they had painted lanterns, but no one did. Painting



Hôi An Japanese Covered Bridge First Constructed in 1590s.

lanterns appeared to be a lost art. Finally, I arranged with one small shop owner to find an artist. Apparently, the artist would be a young boy who could actually paint to some degree. I sketched a design that I wanted to have on my own special lantern.

The boy came to the shop where I had made the arrangement. I showed him what I wanted painted and then watched him work. Customers browsing the shops on the street stopped by to look at the painting in progress. As this was going on, I was shocked to find out that these lanterns can collapse! They can be folded up, purposely, making it easy to stow them when not in use. They have a bamboo skeletal structure that is held open under tension, and when you release the tension clips, the lantern folds down into the rough equivalent size of the end of a baseball bat. Tourists, like me, don't know these things are collapsible because nobody shows them how it can be done.

The painter working for me drew attention to the store. Unfortunately for me, he also caught the attention of a group in town producing a movie. They saw his handiwork and now wanted him to paint a large number of these lanterns to be used as props in the movie, *The Silent American*, starring Michael Caine. They lured the painter away from me with my job unfinished. The guy was gone. He didn't show up for work one day, and it soon became obvious he wouldn't be showing up for work the day after that either. The long and short of it is that if I wanted a painted lantern, I was going to have to finish it myself. Fortunately, I had been watching the young man craft his skill and had carefully observed his technique.

Although unsure if I would have the talent to actually paint a beautiful work of art, I decided to try. I worked my way through trial, error, and discovery, and just kept painting. I had no choice since my painter had been lured into the movie business.



Author Paints Chinese Lantern.

Some people might have abandoned the painted lantern idea, but I discovered hidden talents by having the right attitude: "Losing my painter was a great thing. This gives me an opportunity. I'm going to create my own masterpiece. That's the silver lining in this situation!"

The final part of this story comes from me realizing that, with my background in marketing, perhaps I could assist the shop owner by creating a systematic marketing presentation to sell



Author's Painted Chinese Lantern – Dragons Symbolize Power, Strength, and Good Luck.

lanterns. I surmised that he needed a presentation with four steps, each designed to get more customers to the shop and to have them buy more lanterns.

Michael's Marketing-of-Chinese-Lanterns Seminar:

Step No. 1: Place somebody in front of the store painting lanterns. This will draw a steady stream of curious onlookers (potential paying customers). Train the person to stop painting after the curious onlookers arrive and move to Step No. 2.

Step No. 2: Have the painter/presenter open and close a lantern. Then, hand it to the customer so they can do it themselves. Explain to the customer that because the lanterns are collapsible, they'll easily fit in a suitcase or travel bag. Not only that, they can save even more space by packing a T-shirt through the center of a lantern. (Luggage space is at a premium for world travelers.)

Step No. 3: Show photos of the nearby workshop that depicts how lanterns are made. Explain how a new lantern, of any shape, size, or color can be custom-made in a few hours.

Step No. 4: Ask the customer what size, shape, and color they would like. There are so many sizes, shapes, and colors that stocking all of them is impossible given the hundreds of permutations. By offering a custom-made lantern, the shop eliminates the need for the customer to go find a purple one in the shape of a tear drop, or whatever combination their heart desires, from a competitor.

It worked! Street strollers became lantern shoppers who became buyers at an extraordinary rate.

I left town for a week or two for a trip into the mountains north of Hanoi. When I returned to Hôi An, the owner of the lantern shop saw me walking down the street. He jumped up from his chair, ran at me full speed, threw his arms around me, and said, ***“Your name is not Mike! You’re not Mike to me! You’re Mike the money man!”*** I will remember those words forever.

That was just one of the ways during the course of my trip that various things came into play, silver linings attached. One, I was able to use a positive attitude to avoid grief and agony when I saw the original shipping crate had been pillaged. The same technique worked when the painter disappeared. Two, I was able to be of service to my fellow man by helping the shop owner improve how he conducted his business. This is the owner of a tiny independent shop trying to make enough money (and there isn’t enough of it) to feed his family. The new marketing strategy would make a tremendous change in the lives of his wonderful and growing family.

The opportunity was reciprocal in that I learned that I could paint. I ended up creating a total of three lanterns. The first was a dragon design I made using photos of dragons I had seen depicted on artwork

throughout the country. The second was a painting of the Hôi An townscape, a rendering of the types of architecture that are there. I included the town’s most prominent landmark—the ancient Japanese bridge—in the panorama. The third lantern was painted with two cardinals for my parents, because that was their favorite bird, and they lived in St. Louis, Missouri (where the Cardinals play baseball).

All those bits of benefit and joy being shared with people is the Villanova approach to participating in the world. Saint Thomas was all about sharing ideas, particularly with the poor, as a means of teaching them. His philosophy was that ideally you should teach the poor how to make money rather than just give them money or food. As we have heard many a time, *“Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.”*

My second trip to Vietnam turned into a joyous one, and it would not have happened without the treasure being stolen from my shipping crate. My return trip to Vietnam also changed my whole outlook on travel—I went from being a wanderer on each trip, primarily going to a place just once, to returning to places I’d already visited and being rewarded with friendships. My normal traveling habit had been forever altered and dramatically improved.

Also, by going back to Hôi An and discovering the lanterns were collapsible, I was able to buy a beautiful lantern for each of the thirty people in my family. I thoroughly enjoyed choosing a shape and color to suit each family member. Back home in America, these were fixed up with dimmer lights and hung in each relative’s bedroom or den as a legacy from “Uncle Mike.” More than a decade later, some of these lanterns are still hanging, beautiful reminders that Uncle Mike loves each member of the family.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Newport Beach, California – Some of the Best Bodyboarding Waves in the World.

Keeping a Positive Attitude

Another memorable time for me began while making exhaustive plans for a summer vacation in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was going there to learn how to tango and check out the whole international scene.

After months of planning, I abruptly changed my itinerary at the very last minute. Why? Two nights before departure I came across

an online story about Argentina that included a photo of a bunch of people in a bus station. It caught my attention because these people were holding masks up to their faces and looking at one another with worry and suspicion. It turns out the story was about some type of flu that was decimating Buenos Aires, which was my destination-to-be—but not for long. I read how authorities were debating whether or not to shut down tango parlors because it's the type of dance where partners press their faces together. Suddenly, Buenos Aires was out.

Within hours I changed my destination to Newport Beach, California, intending to spend a month on a bodyboard. I left the next day. While in flight I recalled I had two friends who lived along the southern coast of California. One was a fellow businessperson from Branson, the other a long-lost friend from Villanova whom I had not seen or heard from in more than a decade. Upon arrival at Los Angeles International Airport, I sent e-mails to both acquaintances. The problem was the e-mail addresses were very old. I had no idea if they were still in use.

That night, I tripped on a darkened curb and landed squarely on my knee. Symptoms? To start with, it hurt like hell. It was a bad fall, but I decided to wait a few days instead of going to an emergency room. I wasn't about to subject myself to either the long wait or the monster bill that would come my way a few weeks down the road.

A few days later, at about ten o'clock on a Saturday morning, I got a phone call from my friend, formerly of Branson. She had received my e-mail. Great timing! She was having a big masquerade party that very night in her beachfront townhouse eighty miles to the south. All I needed was a ride. I remembered that Enterprise Rent-a-Car will pick up its customers, so I called to rent my ride to the gala event.

There was a Jack in the Box at the corner, which was where I told the driver to pick me up. Apparently, someone in the background at Enterprise must've heard my agent repeat my location. "Tell him to get me a cheeseburger!" the eavesdropper yelled. More background laughter

sounded, and eventually four cheeseburgers had been jokingly requested. Cheeseburgers were seventy-nine cents each. I bought four, knowing the laughs would be worth more than a few dollars. Then I limped out to the front of the Jack in the Box and waited to be picked up. And I waited, and waited. I knew Enterprise closed at noon on Saturday, and it was now 11:55 a.m.

I started calling the Enterprise office, but they weren't answering the phone. Finally, someone picked up, and I told him, "I'm the guy with the cheeseburgers, and nobody came to pick me up."

Enterprise finally came and got me. Back at the rental office, the agent and manager were both apologetic. I said, "Don't worry about a thing. There's not a problem at all. I'm as happy as a clam, because I know Enterprise's customer service policies." And they laughed. I said, "No, no. I'm serious. I used to live right down the street from Enterprise's headquarters, and Customer Service Policy No. 531 says if you forget to pick up a guy waiting for a ride, and he bought you four cheeseburgers, you have to give him the best car on the lot for the price of the cheapest car on the lot." Twenty minutes later, I drove out in a midnight-blue convertible BMW 530i for the price of a Toyota Corolla. The party at my Branson friend's townhouse was great, and it was wonderful to reconnect.

The next morning I drove up the coast in search of the perfect bodyboard wave. As luck would have it, I found an incredible beach and amazing surf. I caught a wave that gave me one of the best rides in my life.

There was just one problem: I had no shade, and there wasn't any natural shade at the beach. To say the least, sunburn and I aren't allies. I went up to a family lying on their beach towels and sheepishly asked if I could steal some of their shade which was provided by an overhead tarp.

Doing this just long enough to dry and change, I told these folks that I would be traveling north and wanted to stop at a coastal town that

had a great sunset, an ocean filled with surfers, a boardwalk with elderly couples walking poodles, kids skateboarding, and jugglers entertaining—you know the whole Sunday afternoon Southern California boardwalk scene. "Do you have any suggestions?"

Simultaneously, as if on cue for a TV show trivia game, they said in unison, "San Clemente."

An hour later I was in San Clemente. Or I should say, "on the top of San Clemente." The town is perched on the side of a mountain with side streets cascading toward the beach far, far below. Problem was, I wasn't allowed to make a left turn and drive down the hill. The streets had been closed for a town-wide festival. Fortunately, a Main Street parking spot came open, and I took it.

I then walked around town and pondered my options. My knee was starting to swell from the earlier fall, and I soon realized there was no way I could walk down and then back up that hill. Down, maybe. Up, never. So I asked a shop owner if there was public transportation service from the beach back up the hill. Once assured that I could get a cab, I walked straight down the hill, a journey of about a mile.

When I arrived at a pier jutting out into the ocean, I noticed a beautiful restaurant with ample outdoor seating. Unfortunately, there were fifty or more people in line to be seated. Never the bashful type, I walked right past the line of folks and went in, figuring there was a place at the bar and that it would be open seating. Before I grabbed a barstool there, however, I walked outside to see the outdoor seating and came across the perfect opportunity.

Picture Thurston Howell III and his wife, Lovey, from *Gilligan's Island* wearing their Sunday best. That's what this couple sitting together at a huge corner table looked like, and I approached. I explained to them that this was my only moment, my only chance to enjoy this sunset in this place, on this trip to California, and asked



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

San Clemente Pier – Idyllic Southern California Paradise Features Waves with Surfing Dolphins.

if I could sit on the other side of their (massive) table, at the far end. They said, “Absolutely, please join us. Sit close.”

Allow me to briefly digress here. My seat at the Howell’s table afforded me a terrific view of a breaking wave with surfers surfing and dolphins surfing alongside one another—their bodies mostly inside the wave but bottlenoses and faces peeking out. Plus, their silhouettes were quite visible as the translucent orange waves shone in the glorious sun setting directly behind them. It was better than I had imagined when asking the family on the beach about the perfect place to see such things.

But back to the Howells. They were nearly done with their meal. I also noted the scowl of the waitress as she approached. More than likely, she was upset because there were only two people (and a third had just arrived) at her eight-top. That meant her tip would likely be far smaller than if she had a full table. Worse, my arrival told her it

would be that much longer before she could turn the table and make her Sunday bonanza tip.

I noted her dilemma and promised her I would eat and be done faster than the couple could finish and pay—if she would bring me a Heineken, an order of crab cakes, and a dozen oysters. I also told her I was interested in ordering the oysters only if she confirmed with the chef they were good ones. (At the time, I seemed to recall that oysters weren’t good at certain times of the year, but I had no clue if this was one of those times.)

She quickly returned with the oysters. I thanked her and reminded her that I needed the Heineken. She said, “I brought you your Heineken.” After looking around the table, I told her she surely must have forgotten. She almost yelled at me, “I brought you your [then she whispered ‘damn’] Heineken,” and stormed off. Yikes.

I dressed all the oysters, smothered them with horseradish and lemon juice, and poured the first giant sea treasure into my mouth, only to have the worst sensation ever—yes, ever—go off in my mouth. We're talking foul, putrid, horrible. I quickly looked for a napkin on which to spit out the food. There was no napkin, and the expelled oyster ended up in my hands. I looked over at Thurston and Lovey, and they were aghast. They handed me one of their napkins.

Soon the waitress reappeared with my Heineken saying, "See, I told you I brought your Heineken. It was over there on my service table." Then she asked, "Aren't the oysters wonderful?"

She kept praising them nonstop until I finally said, "I'm sorry, but that was the worst oyster ever—in fact, it was the worst taste I've had in my mouth in my entire life." She thought I was joking, and she went on about how great the food was there. Finally, Thurston interrupted and set her straight.

The waitress would not stop apologizing. After a few more minutes, I told her that I had already caused enough of an interruption for the couple and that I would be happy to pay for the oysters—if she promised to just keep smiling and have a happy day because I was determined to do the same. Soon the manager arrived, but my crab cakes never did. I told him the oysters were foul, and he responded, "Everyone knows you don't eat oysters in July; they are filled with eggs and sperm."

Politely, I asked "Why, then, are they on the menu?"

He responded, "Because sometimes tourists don't know any better and insist on eating them."

When the waitress reappeared with the check, she explained how "she" had worked so hard to get the oysters removed from the bill.

She wanted me to look at the check to see where they were charged but then credited at the bottom. Not having my glasses, I said I trusted her, took the check and calmly wrote "\$20" on the tip line. I said it was not her fault, and that I had long ago decided to have the best Sunday afternoon ever. Giving her a nice tip made my day. The total bill was \$26—the Heineken \$6, the tip \$20.

I bid farewell to the Howells (who remarked they appreciated my patience during this fiasco) and went to the bar. There, my request for a cab to be called was met with a laugh from both the bartender and a patron. "Sir, everyone knows you can't get a cab from this beach." Shocked, I walked outside where it was now dark and cold, and the air was filled with a bone-chilling fog. I was dressed in my Sunday afternoon beach best, but my thin shirt and short shorts were no match for the winter-like freezer hell I had walked into.

I looked down the street; nothing was moving. I looked back up the pier and saw the backlit silhouette of one lonely figure about thirty yards away, probably the night watchman for a now-closed shop. My first thought was, "Where is the silver lining in this ordeal?" As I walked toward the lone figure, hoping for a miracle, he said to me, "Can I help you?"

I was more than a bit surprised. Since I was a stranger approaching out of the pitch dark and a good twenty yards away, I didn't expect him to acknowledge me. I responded, "I sure hope so, because I'm looking for the opportunity that's going to far exceed the horrible adversity that I've just been through."

"Michael London?"

I stopped in my tracks.

"Michael London, how the heck are you?"

It was Paul Gavin, my long-lost friend from Villanova, the one I had planned to try to reconnect with on this tango-inspired-trip-to-Argentina-that-had-turned-into-a-California-bodyboard-vacation. Since I was approaching from the dark, Paul had not seen me well enough to know who I was. Amazingly, he had recognized me only from the sound of my voice.

Then it hit me: Shakespeare once said, “There is no sound so sweet as the sound of one’s own name.” At that moment, I realized I had found the opportunity planted by those seeds of adversity. The experiences of bad oysters, terrible service, and facing a mountain hike with a busted-up knee, all faded into a silver lining.

This positive attitude thing can be very
powerful if you truly believe:

*“In every adversity there are the seeds of
an equal or greater opportunity.”*

The End?

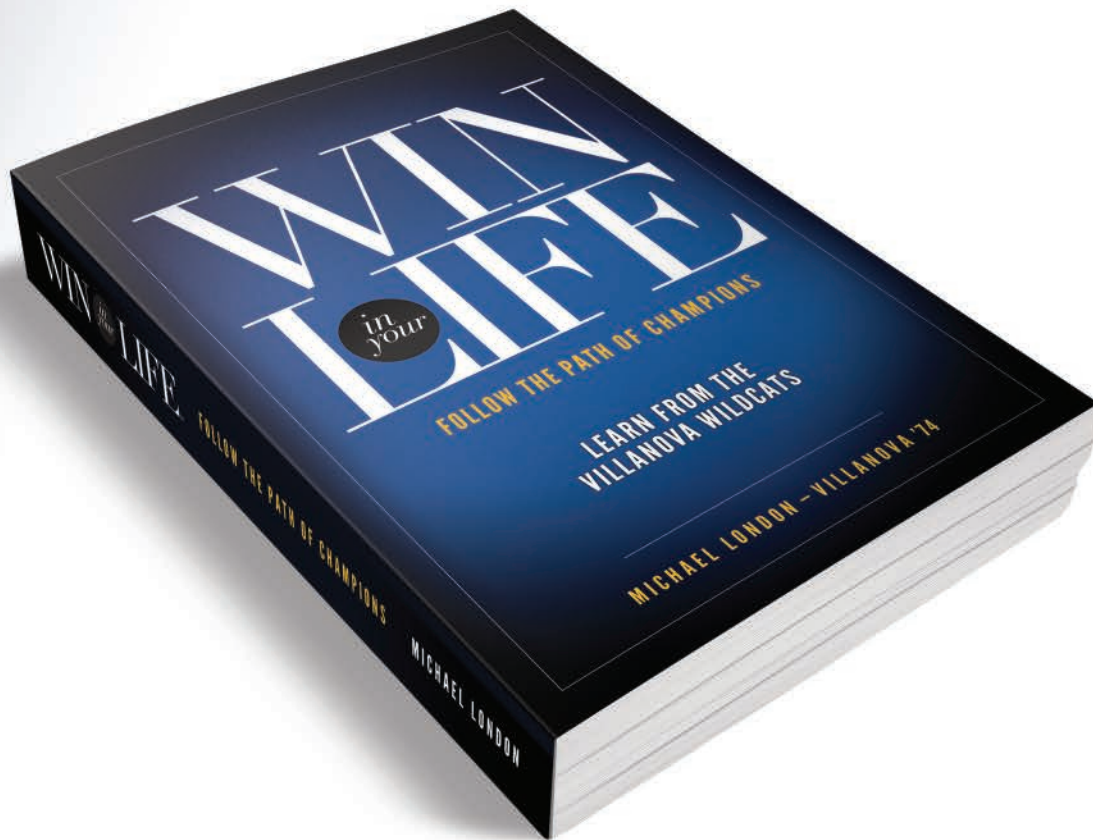
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Thank
You!

It is my sincere hope that you enjoyed this book as much as I enjoyed compiling, writing, and sharing my experiences.

Creating a “Winning Life” is definitely an exciting adventure, full of color and texture—and much more than a quick two- or three-step process.

You're welcome to join me online for access to additional digital resources.



There's More...



For more information and resources to create your own “Winning Life” strategy, join me online at

www.wininyourlife.com

Postscript

You might be wondering what Paul Gavin was doing at the same pier at the same time I was there. He was packing up his fine art paintings after spending the day at a sales display he sets up on weekends.

Paul and I chat regularly now, especially during basketball season. He is the artist that painted the Villanova Church found on pages 318–319 (Direct link: www.gavinarts.com/villanova.shtml) and the air show poster to the right. Check out the link below; be sure to toggle down and open an image or two.

<http://www.gavinarts.com>

Go 'Cats!



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*Saint Thomas of Villanova
Saint Louis MO*

Achievements, Records, and Awards

- The Villanova Wildcats won the 2016 NCAA Men's Basketball National Championship.
- Greg Bishop of *Sports Illustrated* said the championship game was "one of the best moments ever in sports."
- Villanova's run in the 2016 NCAA Tournament has been called "perhaps the most dominant tournament championship run of all time." During the analytics era (2002–present), it was the most dominant of all championship runs by a wide margin.
- Villanova outscored its opponents 501–377 in the tournament—winning games by an average of 20.7 points.
- Villanova's NCAA performance included two of the ten most offensively efficient games in the analytics era.
- In beating #3 seed Miami (AP #10), #1 seed Kansas (AP #1), #2 seed Oklahoma (AP #7), and #1 seed UNC (AP #3), Villanova became the first school in 31 years—since the 1985 Villanova Wildcats—to not only beat four top-three seeds on the way to a national title but to also beat four straight opponents ranked in the AP top 10.
- The 44-point win over No. 2 seed Oklahoma is the largest margin of victory in Final Four history.
- The 2016 NCAA Championship has been referred to as "The Perfect Ending" and is the only NCAA Men's Basketball Championship game to be won on a buzzer-beating shot.
- The championship game has been called "one of the greatest in the history" of all NCAA championships.
- Ryan Arcidiacono was the Final Four MOP—Most Outstanding Player. (Upon being asked how he felt to share that distinction with previous Villanova greats Howard Porter and Ed Pinckney, Arcidiacono remarked that he also shared that honor with his fellow seniors on the 2016 team, citing each by name.)
- Villanova ended the 2016 season at 35–5 and received a unanimous #1 ranking in the final Coaches' Poll (*USA Today*) while capturing their second NCAA basketball championship trophy in the history of the program.
- Villanova's thirty-five wins in 2015–16 is the most in school history for a single season.
- The team held the AP #1 ranking in the nation for the first time in school history.
- Over the last three seasons, Villanova has won more games than any NCAA basketball program in America (97-13).
- In 2016, Villanova finished Big East Conference play 16–2 for the third year in a row, also garnering their third straight outright Regular Season Conference Title. (At press time, they appear to have a lock on the title for 2017.)
- Under the direction of Wright, the Wildcats have advanced to the NCAA Tournament in 11 of the last 12 seasons.
- The Villanova Wildcats have appeared in the NCAA Tournament thirty-six times, the eighth highest total in NCAA history.
- Villanova has won more NCAA tournament games as a lower seed than any other school.
- Rollie Massimino, Jay Wright's mentor, currently holds the record for the most NCAA tournament wins in Villanova history with 20. After last season's championship run, Wright is only one win behind him at 19. A trip to the Sweet 16 in 2017 would give Wright the new record, and the student would become the master.
- The Villanova Class of 2016 won a school record 117 games.
- Villanova Head Coach Jay Wright was named the 2016 Naismith Coach of the Year. This is the second time he has won this honor.

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Villanova Wildcats

— 2015-2016 —

Ryan Arcidiacono, Phil Booth, Mikal Bridges, Jalen Brunson,
 Tim Delaney, Donte DiVincenzo, Patrick Farrell, Josh Hart,
 Kris Jenkins, Henry Lowe, Daniel Ochefu, Eric Paschall,
 Kevin Rafferty, Darryl Reynolds.

Practice players:
 Denny Grace, Peyton Heck, Matt Kennedy, Tom Leibig.



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TOP CATS!

'Nova wins at buzzer, first title since '85

COMMENTARY
BY BOB FORD

HOUSTON — Now there is another Villanova team to put on the wall and leave there forever.

The long wait since 1985 ended on Monday night on a spotlight court in a football stadium. It ended when a confident forward named Kris Jenkins launched a three-point shot at the buzzer with the score tied and nothing less than the national championship riding on the outcome.

INSIDE

▶ At the Pavilion, Villanova fans savored the moment. **A6.** The shot slid effortlessly through the basket as time expired. The red lights came on, the fireworks sparked, the confetti dropped, and the Wildcats rushed together in a champion's embrace. It might have seemed too good to be true, but it was true because this team had been so good for the entire tournament.

Mark it down as 77-74 over North Carolina. Put it next to 66-64 over Georgetown in the 1985 title game. It belongs there.

"Kris Jenkins lives for that moment," coach Jay Wright said.

Now Villanova has two shining moments, and, as difficult as it would have been to imagine, this one is as amazing as the one that came before. As great as the night became for the Wildcats, it was almost as deflating an outcome.

See **CHAMPIONS** on A7



Daniel Ochefu (left) and Ryan Arcidiacono, both seniors, hold the trophy after the Wildcats' thrilling victory over North Carolina. Complete coverage in **Sports, Section D**. CHARLES FOX / Staff Photographer



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