

“They support even when you fail to win a medal.”

The Danville News

Robert John Andrews

Thursday, July 29, 2021

“Fans in the Stands”

Word count 750

Sunday, several weeks ago, we conducted the second act of a funeral service in memory of a community leader whom we buried a year ago on March 23, 2020, of natural causes. He lived long, he lived well. The service was when we finally began to take COVID-19 seriously. Masks. Social Distancing. Shut-downs. Funerals limited to immediate family. On March 25, 2020, I began recording in my log book the virus death count: 780 had died of it, with 54,869 infected. The count from March 25 this year? 545,281 dead from COVID-19. Because of the triumph of vaccines, the number as of this writing is 609,877, a remarkable slowing of the rate, at least in regions where vaccination rates are high.

The death toll and infection rate are increasing where fewer persons are vaccinated. Do the numbers. Will the next unvaccinated young person dying convince doubters that vaccinations are worthwhile? Family members still suffer and die without loved ones holding their hand. A loved one holding your hand can turn frightened eyes peaceful and calm. Yes, it also happens that when the family member leaves the room, that is when the person dies – a loving kindness shared.

Fourteen months later, he finally got the sanctuary remembrance he deserved. We hope others will too. One of his grand-daughters read a favorite funeral passage, II Timothy 4: 7-8: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

What’s interesting is how this Bible passage doesn’t mean you win the race. It doesn’t mean there’s cheering fans. You run because you’ve been given the chance. You participate. How you play the game really is more important than winning or losing, whether at checkers, AYSO soccer, or balance beam cartwheels. That’s the real value of real sports. We salute amateur athletes especially. Professional sports are entertainment and the athletes paid entertainers, which epitomizes the origin of the word, ‘sport.’ The original word meant a diversion from work, a “turning, leading, or carrying away the attention from serious or sad occupations.”

The challenge is to keep running the race regardless, with or without fans, similar to life. The Olympics in Japan is another victim to this virus. The fanfare just won’t be there. Given all the extremism in politics and climate, we sure could have enjoyed an old-fashioned Olympics. Aren’t the Olympics supposed to be a festive time, an international amusement, a time for international reconciliation, plus the fulfillment of personal dreams and effort? Now it seems a chore, just when we could really use a diversion and examples of excellence. They’ve been forced to quarantine some athletes and workers. Vendors will lose out. They’ve been forced to ban fans in the stands. Imagine all the disappointed parents who hoped the day would come when they could cheer on their son or daughter after all those years of disciplined training, after all the swim-meets, after all those times chauffeuring them. Where’s the ‘people juice’ that motivates the runner or gymnast to give extra effort? The competitions will be televised so they still will get to showcase their talents. They’re setting up zoom screens so winners can connect with family and friends. When English football resumed, the bleachers were empty so they piped in chants, groans, and shouts to boost the players’ spirits. A touch of normalcy, even with a few

'boo's' thrown in. A fan-less Olympics lacks the electricity, the energy fans create when supporting you in person. Best, they support you even when you fail to win a medal.

How many of us do better when we aren't left on our own? How many of us are better, less disappointing at least, when busy? The weak, undisciplined, and lazy fellow likely could benefit from fans supporting him to get and keep his everyday life in order. Two, four, six, eight, who do we appreciate? Let's hear it for him, he lost two pounds today! He brushed his teeth today! He only had one drink today! He took his pills today! Hooray! He's been vaccinated! Give a cheer. He didn't sit around watching TV those long and empty afternoons. 1-2-3-4 – let me hear you stomp the floor!

Sorry, there's no cheering fans for most of what we do.