

Extra Innings at ABCA Convention

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San Diego, CA

I'm sitting here on the open-air balcony of my room in the North Tower of the Marriott Hotel and Marina complex directly overlooking the clear blue San Diego Bay. It's January 6, 80 degrees and 15% humidity. There's not a cloud in the sky. The sun is at a lower arc this time of year and it reflects off the Pacific and sparkles gold all day. The Californian coast in that area runs east and west, not north and south.

My son Pat, recently of VA Tech at his first convention, and I just put in 4 hard days at the ABCA Convention. The experience was in two words – spectacular, intense. We stayed a few extra days to enjoy the climate and restaurants of Southern California. GREAT DECISION!

But as I relaxed high above the yacht club, a totally unexpected moment occurred that will stay with me for the rest of my life. At 10:00am the US Navy's Tarawa amphibious war group put to sea. The ships paraded out of the harbor right in front of my view. Their decks were lined shoulder to shoulder with seamen in a customary salute to their fellow seamen ashore and to the countrymen along the harbor they serve and are willing to die for.

The intersection of my life and those sailors gave me a pause - a thrill and a stone cold chill. Here were these thousands of men going half way around the world to kick Saddam's butt. You may know that I live in Virginia just outside of Washington, DC. We have had our share of events this past year that make you angry, make you scared. No doubt more are on the way. And me – well I'm sweating it out on a balcony pondering baseball – a game.

For those of you who attended the conference you will remember Augie Garrido's opening comments. Of all his fine words and wisdom, the comment that hit home with me was this: "I may have sent more men to play in pro ball over the years than any other coach. (He's the winningest active coach) That represents about 2% of all the players I coached. But what concerns me most in my career is what I give to the other 98%."

Sunday morning, Bobby Moranda, Georgia Tech's pitching coach, gave an excellent closing talk. I've known Bobby for several years now. He echoed Augie's comments, saying, as he became a more experienced coach his priorities changed. Although mechanics, training and practice are of course important to any program, he was adamant that what he had learned was his mental management and the maturity management (my words) of his players was the most important and most challenging priority.

The piercing and overwhelming emotion of those ships passing by, the words of Garrido and Moranda combined in my soul to produce one crystal clear thought. This baseball game, my passion and my profession, had better be about a lot more than winning. If

those young men are willing to die so I can play ball, I better be doing a hell of a lot more.

So then, what is my contribution, what is our collective contribution? How you choose to do that is your career, your life at work. The game offers us a blank canvas. What we leave is not a mathematical equation of won-loss tabulations. I know many of you feel the same way.

But how odd is this? Our business - our professional life – the sustenance we deliver to our families is most often based on our ability to win and produce results. Therein lies a huge conflict that regrettably many have missed. (Hello Barry Bonds, perhaps the most successful unpopular player since Ty Cobb) The people we admire the most have always found that precious balance of success and contribution to the society as a whole and the individuals they touch.

The Tarawa battle group didn't just decide on excellence while training last month. It may have started at the Boston Tea Party or Yorktown or Normandy Beach or Kuwait. The management of tradition, excellence and honor prevailed.

Augie Garrido did not start thinking about winning as he crossed the 1000 win mark a few years ago. He, as so many coaches and field generals (in the true sense of the word), realize that winning is a product of applied knowledge and a soulful commitment to purpose that goes well beyond baseball fundamentals.

I hope to see you next year in San Antonio for the ABCA Convention. No doubt it will be another opportunity to build a winning tradition of athletic values that we can pass on to the sons of the many whose devotion to duty and sacrifice made it possible for us to play the game.