

Small Talk – May 17 2021
By Michael Small

I think most of us agree – we like to win! Winning is a whole lot more fun than loosing! Do I hear an “Amen” to that? At the core, though, it is to do our best as individuals’ and as community and as teams.

The source of my commercial TV is YouTube TV. Like many other providers, almost a year ago through a contract dispute with Fox North Sports Channels, I lost my ability to watch the Minnesota Twins (that may be a blessing), the Loons, the Wild, the Lynx and other Minnesota sports events. Yesterday I had the opportunity to watch, for the first time this year the Wild, in their first playoff game against Las Vegas. (Call me old fashioned, but how is it there are pro hockey team in places like Arizona and Florida?) Minnesota was outplayed much of the game, but gradually gained momentum. Both teams were scoreless as they went into overtime, and then it happened, three minutes into OT the Wild score, suddenly winning the game. For those almost nine-thousand Vegas fans, they were crushed by the instantaneous despair of defeat. It was a good game and entertaining. Winning is easier to take.

But the game that caught my attention was the football (soccer) match between Liverpool and West Brom. I know this is foreign to many of you, but bear with me and the drama that unfolds. Liverpool vs. West Brom were at the end of extra time, the 95th minute and Coach John Achterberg urged the Liverpool goalie to become the 11th person in the goal area during the last gasp corner kick. Coach Achterberg urged their goalie Alisson Becker to venture forward. He recalled *“I just felt we had nothing to lose. The four minutes of stoppage time were up. It was all or nothing. It was a game we had to win. You never know what might happen. I thought maybe Ali could be a nuisance in their box. Maybe his presence there would make them switch off a bit. But I wasn’t expecting that....”* Liverpool was about to finish with a dreaded draw (a tie). *“Alisson had other ideas. His late intervention was dramatic and sublime in equal measure. The technique was masterly as he climbed highest six yards out and powered an unstoppable header beyond Sam Johnstone the West Brom goalie. Cue pandemonium as Alisson, the first goalkeeper to score a competitive goal in the club’s 129-year history, was mobbed by his delirious team-mates.”*¹ Liverpool wins 2-1. I know it is just a game, but it doesn’t get any better.

There is more to the story. Of course, the team had been dealing with the pandemic all season long. If they had lost or tied the game, their season would be finished! Months earlier, Allison Becker’s father had drowned in a tragic accident. He had been dealing with the grief for months. Before you read what follows, know that God does not care who wins a game, nor does God intervene. We are given strength by God to be the best

¹ <https://theathletic.com/2589423/2021/05/17/alissons-goal-that-rescued-liverpool-i-thought-he-could-be-a-nuisance-but-wasnt-expecting-that/>

we can be, to walk through valleys and to soar to the heights. God, I think, delights when we excel at what we do.

From *The Athletic*, James Pearson writes “Wife Natalia, who gave birth to their third child Rafael a week ago, put Sunday’s starring role down to divine intervention. She posted on Instagram: ‘Your faith, your usual humility, your commitment, your righteousness, your responsibility and conduct in the midst of pain, your heart was being seen, your tears collected by a God who is faithful and takes pleasure in rewarding his beloved children! The reward of the righteous comes and goes much better than you can imagine! I can only cry and be thankful to God! What a joy! Love you! Love you! Love you! Your life inspires! You are the best in the world, on and off the field!’”²

Though you may not be a soccer fan, I would encourage to view the winning goal, the first goalie who scored by a header in the Premier League Era. Go to <https://youtu.be/CFXkwCtEzDQ>.

It is only game, yes, but it is also life – and yes life abundant!

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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² Ibid.