

## RESULTS NOT EXCUSES

*Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil. Proverbs 5:25-27*

Little League baseball has been a major part of my life. With two brothers much younger than myself and three sons, I have attended thousands of games and spent countless hours watching bad baseball. Baseball is such a great game that there is never a shortage of new experiences.

One of those memorable experiences occurred when Andrew was playing on a team of twelve-year-olds. Andrew was by far the best player on the team, as any sensible parent would say about their son. Another of the good players was the boy who played catcher. He was bigger and stronger than the other boys and a great asset. It is probably not a great overstatement to say that he was one of the finest little league catchers in Fort Worth.

The game transpired late on a Saturday afternoon. It was an exciting game with the outcome in question until the final out. In the late innings, the opposing team had a runner on second and a good hitter at the plate. The kid hit the ball hard to right field.

Right field is where most teams try to hide the player who should be doing science experiments rather than playing baseball. Our team was no exception so we all watched with apprehension as the ball traveled toward the outfield. The ball landed on the grass but the kid made a very good play.

He caught the ball on one bounce and quickly threw it toward home plate. The throw was on line, the catcher was in position, and the runner was running as fast as possible. Everything was set up for a close play at the plate. We were confident because we knew the skill of our catcher.

The ball arrived just before the runner. The catcher reached out and tagged the runner before he slid across the plate. A cloud of dust enshrouded the whole event but there was no mistaking the cry of the umpire --- "Safe!"

A groan was heard from our side but it was quickly swallowed by the excited cheers from the opposite bench. Our catcher had applied the tag in time but he had failed to catch the ball. It was lying motionless next to the backstop.

Immediately realizing his mistake, the catcher turned to the bench, looked at the coach with a pleading expression, and said, "The sun was in my eyes!"

He was right. It was late afternoon and the sun was low in the right field horizon. He obviously lost the ball in the sun. My vast experience in watching baseball told me that such a condition did not matter. The runner was safe and we would not be allowed to execute the play again.

The mind does wondrous things at times. As soon as I heard this young baseball player say, "The sun was in my eyes," I was transported back to my high school days.

The band at Mapleton High School was one of the best in the state of Colorado. My contribution was with a trumpet. I would like to believe that my trumpet playing made us such a good band but that was far from the truth. The reason for our outstanding play was our band leader, Mr. Priezner.

As with all good music teachers, Mr. Priezner was very demanding. He challenged us to be the very best and he would not settle for anything that was less than our best. Practices were grueling and performances and concerts demanded perfection.

Mr. Priezner had a large banner hanging behind him as he led rehearsals in the band room. It was his motto and it quickly became ingrained within each of us in the band. During rehearsal, if someone missed a note or hit a clunker, Mr. Priezner would wave the entire group to a sudden stop. Often, he would walk over to the guilty party and ask for an explanation of the mistake.

At first we would use the normal excuses --- "I didn't have time to practice last night," or "I forgot to take my horn home," or a myriad of other excuses. In response, Mr. Priezner would slowly turn toward the front of the room and point his baton toward the banner. It read, "Results Not Excuses."

We soon learned that excuses were not allowed. We were all forced to take responsibility for our action or inaction. The only thing that really mattered was the result.

Mr. Priezner's quest for perfection and his unwillingness to allow us to make excuses transformed a small group of inexperienced musicians into a leading band in the entire state.

I was a much better trumpet player because of my few years with Mr. Priezner. I was also a much better person. His motto has carried me far beyond the classroom. There have been many times when I have been tempted to take the easy road because a good excuse was readily available. However, Mr. Priezner's menacing stare and powerful motto have motivated me to give it my best shot.