

Joe Torre On Winning

Don't be afraid to fail, encourage your talent, and use your heart. And never be unprepared.

Competing at the highest level is not about winning. It's about preparation, courage, understanding and nurturing your people, and heart. Winning is the result.

To emphasize the importance of preparation, I make my players recall a painful memory from the fourth game of the 2004 American League Championship Series. We were up three games to none against Boston, and carrying a one-run lead heading into the last inning of the fourth game at Fenway. Mariano Rivera was pitching when he walked the leadoff batter. Boston decides to put in a pinch-runner, a guy named Dave Roberts, who would change the tide of the game and the entire series when he steals second. Bill Mueller comes to the plate, hits one through the middle. Roberts scores to tie the game. The Red Sox would go on to win it 6-4 and fight their way back to take the championship. Roberts hadn't had an at-bat all series, but he was prepared to do the job being asked of him. As tough as that game was, I use it and Roberts' performance as an example to my players. You may be frustrated by not playing - that's my decision. But you have to understand when I put you in, you had better be ready to play because everybody in that clubhouse is relying on you. There will be a time when everyone on the team is going to contribute to winning a pennant.

As a member of a competitive team, you want to make sure you have yourself ready to play. You don't control anything but what you do. As a manager, you are responsible for everybody. You're the final decision-maker. It's tougher to do what I do here, but, I will tell you, hitting with the bases loaded is no day at the beach either. After 25 years of managing teams, the last 11 with the Yankees, I have learned not to live in the past and dwell on something that failed. The great UCLA basketball coach John Wooden told me once that you can be prepared and have the best talent there is, but you can't necessarily control the outcome.

I believe anybody who is not afraid to fail is a winner. I remember seeing my older brother, Frank, playing for the Milwaukee Braves in the World Series in 1957 and 1958 against the Yankees. I look back and admire him so much because he never seemed to worry about leaping to that next level. He just seemed to thrive in the pressure, never asking himself "what if I fail?" That's why having perspective is so important. If you talk about game seven of the World Series, it becomes so enormous that it scares the heck out of you. If you take it to a level that it is a baseball game and that one of two teams has to win, all of a sudden your chances are better.

These days it is so important for a CEO, or any manager, whoever it is, to be aware of his or her personnel. We are in an age of computers, and everything is so damn impersonal. But in the end, it still comes down to people. You have to make people feel necessary. Even if their contributions are minor, it adds to everything else. That's what makes the machine work. I love players with heart, not necessarily emotion, but those who deep down are driven by something more than mind and body. I don't play favorites. The 25th member of the squad is just as important as the first guy. And I can't let my own emotions get in the way of competing. I have had to release guys I loved, and keep players I didn't necessarily care for.

I played and managed in more than 4,000 big league games before I ever got to a World Series. But all that experience without a championship helped me prepare for what I needed to do when I came to the Yankees. When I first accepted the job at the end of 1995, my brother Frank said I was crazy. Others were writing about how I wasn't capable of doing this. All I knew was that George Steinbrenner was the guy who was going to give me the tools. Then it was up to me. I wasn't afraid of the challenge. I saw it as a big opportunity. Still, even with all the talent and resources we have here, having heart is what really makes a difference. As a manager, or if you're running a company, you want to know that you can ask somebody to do something and that they are going to find a way to get the job done. That's the essence of a competitor.

The toughest decision for any real warrior is deciding when to step away from the fight. I always think to myself that if February rolls around and I'm not excited about going to spring training, it's time. It never happens. A few weeks ago we won a real nail-biter down in Texas and afterwards my stomach was burning. It was the first time in years that my stomach burned like that. One of my coaches, Larry Bowa, said to me, "See? You still want to do this." I do love the feeling of a big win. But again you don't have to have a World Series ring to be a winner. A winner is somebody who goes out there every day and exhausts himself trying to get something accomplished. Being able to get the most from their ability. That's what characterizes a winner.