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Expect the Unexpected

We can't help but go into our competitions with expectations about how we'll play. We usually form an opinion about our chances of winning before the game begins. The confidence we feel when we believe we can win is great. It fills us with positive energy and improves our focus.

But what about when we're not the favorite to win? What happens when athletes think they'll lose? Energy, motivation, and effort drop – which often then *causes* the expected loss. That is what makes expectations dangerous. Your effort should <u>never</u> be dependent on the expected outcome. Mentally tough athletes approach every game and practice with same, high level intensity regardless of the opponent.

This weekend showed us how expectations can be meaningless:

- <u>"Long Shot" Mine That Bird won the Kentucky Derby at 51:1 odds.</u> Trainer Bennie Wolley Jr. was criticized for even entering the horse in a race they had little chance of winning. And when jockey Calvin Borel started the race in last place it would have been easy to believe they couldn't win and give up. They didn't. He just ran the horse as fast as he could to a stunning win.
- Manny Pacquiao knocked out Ricky Hatton in the 2nd Round. While many believed Pacquiao could win
 the match, few expected him to dominate the way that he did. Pacquiao was also able to ignore the
 pressure of making history (the only boxer to claim the lineal championship in four weight divisions, and
 a record-tying sixth different weight division championship). He likely focused only on his job as I talked
 about in an earlier newsletter (BearCats and Blue Devils Do Their Job). In this way, Pacquiao
 exceeded expectations.
- <u>Tiger Woods placed 4th in the Quail Hollow Championship</u>. Tiger is usually expected to win each tournament. But expectations didn't help as Tiger struggled at times and admits he made a mental mistake at 14. Regardless of expectations, you still have to play the game to the best of your ability. Sean O'Hare did that en route to his third PGA Tour win. It was good to see O'Hair put his loss to Tiger 5-weeks ago at Bay Hill behind him, after losing a five stroke lead. Expectations are often based on past performances. O'Hair made sure his present was different than his past.
 - Expecting to win can be especially dangerous as it leads to over-confidence. When athletes are over-confident, they tend to lose their edge and not try as hard expecting to win easily. This sets up the "upset" victory for the "underdog".

The point is this:

• Regardless of what you think will happen, focus on what you can control and give full effort. Ignore expectations, play your heart out, and then see what happens. You'll likely be pleasantly surprised with the result.

Enjoy the rest of your season and good luck in your playoffs, tournaments, and championships.

Eddie O'Connor, PhD

References:

Mine That Bird: http://sports.espn.go.com/sports/horse/triplecrown09/news/story?id=4128286
http://sports.espn.go.com/sports/boxing/columns/story?columnist=rafael_dan&id=4135570

Tiger: http://sports.espn.go.com/golf/news/story?id=4132643