DrEddie@PerformanceExcellenceCenter.com * 616.233.3480 * www.PerformanceExcellenceCenter.com

Super Bowl XLIV Review

The Saints and Colts provided us with an entertaining Super Bowl and numerous examples of mental toughness on one of sports biggest stages. Here is what I saw:

Experience helps, but ultimately it doesn't matter

Manning and the Colts had won a championship recently. The Saints by comparison had won only 2 playoff games in their previous 42 seasons! The familiarity with the Super Bowl hype may have helped the Colts get an early start as they led 10-0 early in the game. But QB Drew Brees and the Saints settled in and realized it was just another football game. They looked more comfortable as the game went on and they executed to their potential.

The kickers also showed how experience is less important than focus and preparation. Saints kicker Garrett Hartley is 23 and in his second NFL season, yet he is the first Super Bowl kicker to make three 40+ yard field goals (44, 46, and 47 yards). NFL veteran Matt Stover is was the oldest Super Bowl player ever at 42 years old. He went 1 for 2, missing from 51 yards.

Expectations are meaningless too

The Colts were favored by three. They lost by 14. Former Colts coach, now analyst, Tony Dungy predicted the Colts would win in a blowout. Remember that the next time you're told you are an underdog. Player and team rankings are often just opinions. Feel free to ignore them and get back to focusing on the game. Do you think the Saints paid attention to these views? Why believe someone who doubts you?

Sean Payton played to win

The Saints coach attempted a 4th down run that was stuffed at the goal line. Then he opened the 3rd quarter with an on-side kick that the Saints recovered. He took calculated risks and wasn't afraid to make a mistake. That type of controlled aggression is needed to win. The opposite of this is playing "not to lose". This approach is characterized by playing cautiously and trying to avoid mistakes. Athletes play with fear, rather than drive and determination. This "conservative" approach can contribute to the loss as athletes lack the "killer instinct" to put opponents away.

Manning didn't "choke"

The deciding play of the game was Tracy Porter's interception return for a touchdown with 3:12 left in the game. There is a lot of talk going on now about how Manning fails in the clutch with a .500 playoff record. The fact is, Porter made a *great* play. He studied the film, recognized the play and took a chance by breaking on the ball (see "playing to win" above). His preparation paid off. When two mentally tough players go head-to-head, one is going to lose and it doesn't mean he did anything wrong. Sometimes you just get beat. That is the beauty of sport. Manning and the Colts have nothing to be ashamed of. They played a great game and have a lot to be proud of in the loss. Mentally tough players will appreciate what they did well, learn from their mistakes, and give credit to the better team. I expect Manning and the Colts will do just that and be ready to compete again next season.