

December 2008

The Lions have given me a lot to talk about this last month. As 0-16 looms, the pressure on Green Bay to win teaches us another lesson about mental toughness:

- **Play to your own standard of excellence, not up or down to the level of your opponent.**

If you read or listen to the media, you'll see most everyone is expecting the Lions to go 0-16. This is a game the Packers "should" win. Everyone "expects" them to win. And the players don't want to be the ones to lose to a team that has lost 16 in a row and 22 of 23 games dating back to last season. The Lions best chance of winning may depend on the Packers ability to handle this pressure, which can be a distraction for many athletes causing them to lose focus and give up the big play.

The Packers also risk taking the win for granted. The natural tendency is to do just enough to win. This urge is the cause of many upset victories for underdog teams. Mentally tough athletes overcome this normal tendency and will dominate lesser opponents. The Packers goal is to execute each play with 100% effort and to the best of their ability, regardless of the score. Overconfidence reduces an athlete's attention, effort and execution. Just look at the Buffalo Bills. After a 5-1 start, RB Marshawn Lynch said the team got "a little comfortable and lax." They went 1-7 over the next 8 games.

So if the Packers succumb to the pressure or take the Lions for granted, they may help Detroit avoid a winless season.

So how does this apply to hockey, to soccer, or to your sport?

Expectations are everywhere. Before a game you are often told this is one "you should win" or you play the role of "underdog." Teams and players are often ranked, or you'll make assumptions about how good or bad a team is based on record. If you let these assumptions influence your effort – there is a good chance you won't perform your best and you risk losing:

- Athletes who "aren't supposed to win" may give up too early in a contest.
- Teams that are favored may not give it their all and can be taken by surprise by a less talented team giving full effort.

**So, regardless of your opponent, be a mentally tough athlete who plays with 100% intensity and effort every time you are on the ice or on the field.**

Until next time ...

**Dr. Eddie**