

## SASKATCHEWAN PRAYER BREAKFAST

Wednesday April 18, 2012

Your honours, distinguished platform guests, ladies and gentlemen, and friends.

Good morning people of Saskatchewan! Good morning Rider fans!

First, I am going to introduce Maureen, my lovely, talented, and hard-working wife. Because of Maureen's many endeavours as a volunteer, she really doesn't need an introduction in this city or this province. As a matter of fact, in many circles in Saskatchewan, I'm known as Maureen's husband.

Lieutenant Governor, thank you very much for arranging to have Maureen and me attend this event. It is a privilege for us to be here, and I have to say, that for us, this feels very much like coming home. This is an important visit for us, because we had to come visit our hearts. Maureen and I believe Tony Bennett sang about leaving his heart in San Francisco because he didn't know about Regina.

I believe God has a plan for me in my life and I believe that plan has had me intertwined with the sport of football. Not just football though, because there are threads to my experiences as a classroom teacher, a high school coach of multiple sports, as a college instructor, and as a college baseball coach. Then, of course, threads connect me to my family, my colleagues, and my friends. I believe God has given me assignments where I have been challenged and have had to grow as a result of my experiences. When I have strayed to other work like construction, insurance sales, and even public school administration, God has nudged me back to the classroom and to coaching.

When I look back on the tapestry that has been my life, it looks rather pleasing and coherent, but as I have lived my life day-to-day, my life's tapestry has not been as neatly organized. The threads that attach and combine the individual segments show evidence of knots, tangles, and twists.

I haven't always responded well to God's call. Sometimes I have been like Samuel in the Old Testament and haven't recognized His call. There have been times when I have resisted and procrastinated, and on occasion I haven't listened carefully enough to discern God's call. Other times, I have been uncertain how to proceed, and there have been times when I defiantly have done what I have wanted to do.

The good news is that God continues to call, and I want to do His will. I am reminded of the chorus to a hymn. The words are

Here I am Lord, is it I Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.  
I will go Lord, if You lead me,  
I will hold Your people in my heart.

I am thankful God's call included my coming to work with the Saskatchewan Roughriders!

I began my CFL coaching career with a five-year stint with the Toronto Argonauts. Oh yes, I had prayed for that, too.

In 2002, Coach Gary Etcheverry, yes the one and only “Etch” who coached with us here for three seasons and who was the Head Coach of the Toronto Argonauts, called me in May and asked if I would be interested in joining his coaching staff in Toronto. (Coach “Etch” and I had coached with and against each other for several years in Southern California.) When “Etch” called, I told him I was teaching high school biology, was taking treatments for prostate cancer, and that I had agreed to be the special teams coach for a local junior college football team. I told him I was obligated to finish the year in my teaching assignment and that I must complete my medical treatments. It looked as though my opportunity to coach in the CFL was passing me by.

God works in mysterious ways. In July, after several regular season CFL games, Coach “Etch” called again and asked me to go to Toronto to coach his team’s quarterbacks. He told me his coaching budget was depleted, so he would not be able to pay me much. Maureen and I discussed and gave prayerful consideration to the situation, and because I had taken an early retirement from a previous position and she was working full time, we decided I could pursue coaching with the Argos. The next day I was on a flight to Toronto.

You may remember the story that in my office in Toronto I kept a sleeping bag behind my desk and that I slept on my office floor. Staying in my office gave me opportunity to study CFL football after the other coaches had left for the night. In addition to viewing current videos, I watched old game videos from previous years. I was particularly interested in offense and old videos that featured Doug Flutie.

Later that football season in September, we came to play the Saskatchewan Roughriders. As I sat on the team bench on the east side of the stadium prior to the day before walk through, I looked at the west-side stands. While looking at those stands, I thought and prayed that I would have the opportunity to coach here someday. As I still do, I felt something special about this place.

Make sure you want what you pray for!

As you know, I came to the Roughriders in 2007 as the offensive coordinator and we had tremendous success and won the Grey Cup. In 2008, I had the opportunity to become the head coach, and as a way to establish my imprint on the team, I established the “Rider Rule.”

The Rider Rule is a character statement that says “I will be where I am supposed to be, when I am supposed to be there, and I will get done what needs to be done while I am there.” The Rider Rule fits every person’s obligation and responsibility: from team requirements of punctuality, game preparation, and individual practice habits, to individual positional skills in game performance. In addition, The Rider Rule has broader implications for teamwork, social responsibilities, and family commitments. I was committed to having a team of players, coaches, and support personnel who demonstrated responsible and ethical character traits. As a slogan, we said “We will make our headlines on the playing field rather than on the street corner.”

In 2008, I told everyone in the Rider Organization, especially the players that we had been good in 2007, but that we wanted to transition from good to great. The expectations of greatness meant we would be a consistent playoff team and challenge or win the Grey Cup on a regular

basis. Based on the book Good to Great by Jim Collins, we defined what being good meant, and discussed how the satisfaction and complacency of being good made the idea of being good an enemy of being great. We identified game-winning characteristics and then made an intellectual commitment to pursue those game-winning characteristics with great passion, and with the intention of doing them better than any other team in North America.

In 2009, I added emphasis for how we would achieve our goals of moving from good to great. From my experience through many years of coaching, I know that successful teams develop a special feeling that includes accountability, responsibility, and commitment. As a result of thinking about this special feeling, I decided to use the letters of the word feeling as an acronym for traits of championship teams.

The letter “F” identifies three priorities. The first is our faith in God, the second is our responsibilities and relationships within our families, and the third is our responsibilities and relationships within our team. If someone were to ask what our priorities were, we could utilize the first letter, “F,” in our acronym to answer: God, my family, and the Saskatchewan Roughriders.

The first letter “E” stands for excellence. Our quest for greatness implies a quest for excellence. We strive for excellence because perfection is not possible. Lives are not lived perfectly. Football games are not played perfectly. Living and performing with excellence means we overcome obstacles and distractions to achieve the highest possible level.

The second letter “E” identifies effort. Effort is a quality that is directly controlled by us. In professional sports, teams are made up of similarly physically gifted and talented players. The one characteristic controlled by the participants is the amount of effort they expend. Our goal was to work at achieving excellence at an effort level that others would be unwilling to match.

The “L” is for leadership. I told the players that everyone can be a leader. Not everyone needs to lead all the time, but everyone can lead some of the time. Leadership doesn’t always have to be about being out front or being vocal. There are times when quiet words and actions build teammates and team. Being positive and providing encouragement are great examples of leadership.

The letter “I” signifies integrity. Integrity means living life congruent with the Rider Rule. We must learn to trust ourselves so that we can become trusting of our teammates. Integrity is a character trait that leads to individual abilities to get a job done, and then the confidence in teammates to do their parts. Integrity is being responsible, accountable, and dependable.

The letter “N” stands for working now in the present and seizing the moment. Recognize we have no control over the past and none of us is guaranteed a future. The only time we can control is right now. In football, players have no control over the last play whether it was a success or a failure, and because of the nature of the game of football, no player is assured of a next play. Players have to focus in the *now* of the current play to maximize productivity. All of us need to focus in the present and the current day.

The letter “G” identifies gratitude. Gratitude is another word for thankfulness and I’ll talk more about working in the spirit of gratitude later.

Football is a great game and it may be the toughest game ever devised. Football requires cooperative teamwork from players of diverse body types and skill sets. Football requires discipline, split-second reactions, and commitment. My definition of commitment is to follow through on a decision after the emotion for making that decision is past. An example of commitment would be for a football player to give maximum effort when he is gasping for breath and weary from battle.

Football is a great game because it teaches life lessons, fosters a sense of camaraderie, cooperation, and love. As a team prepares for training camp, strangers converge and then community emerges.

Remember the jubilation of the 2007 Grey Cup win? Remember the six consecutive wins to open the 2008 season? Recall winning the CFL Western Division for the first time in years in 2009? Revel in your memories of being down 21 points at halftime, then coming back to win in double overtime in the game to start the 2010 season.

Yes – football is a great game, but there are circumstances relating to the results of games and the business of football that can be excruciatingly cruel. Players and coaches are hired and fired. Players are traded, have their playing positions changed, and they are played or not played with very little input from them. Players and sometimes coaches are a commodity.

Players are asked to cooperate, demonstrate loyalty, and sacrifice for the good of the team. Often, the players receive little in return.

Remember with me – back to the Grey Cup Game on a November night in 2009. Our Rider team led the entire sixty minutes of the game and as the final seconds expired, the opponent's field goal sailed wide right to insure our victory. Rider Nation was jubilant. Some players had put on Grey Cup Champion caps. Then, the unbelievable – we were penalized for having too many men on the field, and you know the rest of the story. You remember how you felt. The men in the locker room were absolutely crushed. There was anguish and bitter despair in that room. There were tears, there were sobs, and there was anger and resentment. There were men in that room who had never had the opportunity to play for a championship at any level, and sadly, there were men present who would not have another opportunity.

The men play the game of football because they are tough, courageous, and competitive men. Every man plays through some level of injury and pain. Unfortunately, some players experience career ending injuries.

It is my responsibility as a person of influence to respect the humanity of the men and of mankind. I must respect the men in the locker room, the game officials, and people in the organization, the opponents, the media, and you.

I believe every human being has a sense of dignity, feelings of individual pride, and feelings of self-worth. I believe these human qualities are gifts from God. As a person of influence, it is my responsibility to respect each individual's sense of dignity, it is my responsibility to respect each individual's sense of pride, and it is my responsibility to respect everyone's feelings of self-worth. We all appreciate the players and coaches for what they do. It is important for us to love and respect them for who they are.

In all of our interpersonal interactions, I suggest we consider adapting the Golden Rule from “Do unto others as you would have done unto you” to “Do unto others as they would have wanted done unto them.” Let’s force ourselves to see from the other person’s perspective.

I am committed to respecting diversity and using the word acceptance where I have previously used the word tolerance. In addition, I commit to walking hand-in-hand with people even though we may not see eye-to-eye. When I make tough decisions, I make them with compassion and consideration.

In 1975, I was the head coach of a high school team in Southern California. In 1972, we had taken a team with a losing history and had a winning season. In 1973, we won the first championship in the school’s 18 year history. In 1974, we finished second in the league, but in the playoffs, defeated a heavily favoured team. In 1975, our fortunes were not as good. We had lost some games and we had lost several players to season ending injuries. Then in one game, our running back went down and was taken away in an ambulance with a shattered femur. After that game, I wondered and then decided I was working at an endeavour where I was leading young men in a quest for glory that endangered them physically. I seriously considered getting out of the football coaching business.

After much introspection and prayerful consideration, I decided to continue coaching. I reasoned that if I quit coaching, someone would take my place and who perhaps would care less about the players. I also reasoned that injuries heal, and that the lessons for life learned in football are needed by the players after they leave school and become leaders in society.

As I continued to coach, not every player thought I was coaching because I cared about him. There was a time when I was coaching at the University of Redlands when I was referred to by some of the players as being the meanest man in America.

Like a lot of people, my roots are from extremely humble beginnings, and football helped me into mainstream life and social circles. Sports, especially football, have provided a platform for my development socially, intellectually, my emotional maturity, and in my relationship with God.

When I was a freshman in high school, I had a second period study hall. It just so happened that Mary Smith and Nancy Johnson were in that study hall. Mary and Nancy were seniors and among the most socially elite girls in the school. The two of them sat at a library table by themselves and no one dared to even try to sit with them! One Friday in late October – I dared! I walked into that study hall and I placed my books on Mary Smith and Nancy Johnson’s table and began to sit down. They looked at me in surprise, then in total derision, and informed me all of the chairs at their table were taken, and that I should find somewhere else to sit. So I did!

But – circumstances can change!

That afternoon we were playing a home football game and we were well ahead in the fourth quarter, so the coach put me in to play. After I had been in the game for a few plays, I heard the coach call from the sideline; “Give the ball to Miller until we score.”

Coaches matter! Teachers matter! People matter! You matter!

In the huddle our quarterback called 9 toss. On the play, I caught the toss and ran around left end for a 7 yard gain. The next play call was 8 Toss. Again, I caught the toss and ran around right end for a 9 yard gain. The next play was 9 toss again and I caught the toss, ran around left end, broke a couple of tackles and scampered into the end zone for a touchdown. I was ecstatic! The other players, my coach, and my parents were happy too.

Monday morning, I sat through first period math, and I'm sure I could have solved quadratic equations that morning. Then I went to second period study hall. When I walked in, Mary Smith said, "Well here is touchdown Ken!" Then, Nancy Johnson said, "Here, sit with us!" My social circumstances and my life had changed.

Listen! God calls us in many ways and almost all of them are gentle, subtle, and can be mistaken for something else. Listen carefully, because that restlessness you experience in the middle of the night may come from God.

I have a couple more thoughts and a thank you as I finish.

People ask me how I like retirement and my answer is I'm not quite sure, because I haven't hit my retirement stride yet. Sometimes, I get a slight panic attack because I feel as though I should be in a meeting or that I haven't completed an important task. Sometimes, it just feels like I'm experiencing an off-season vacation and that I'll be going back to work in a couple of weeks or a month.

During my time as coach of the Riders, I often reminded the players to work with gratitude and to be thankful – be thankful for the skills to play the game of football, be thankful for this city, be thankful for this province, be thankful for our fans, be thankful for our great Roughrider organization, be thankful for our families, and be thankful for each other.

In the spring of 2005 while I was coaching in Toronto, Head Coach Michael "Pinball" Clemons came to me and said the league had asked him to write a short article about training camp from a coach's perspective, but that he was too busy and he wondered if I might write an article for him.

Michael "Pinball" is a great delegator. He is a good friend, and he was an excellent CFL head football coach. I learned a lot from Michael "Pinball" about coaching. I have to say, tongue in cheek, that learning what *not to do* is as important as learning what to do.

I agreed to write a one page article for him. When I finished, it was sent to the league office and it was placed on the CFL website for a few days. I have not shared that article with anyone, but with training camp just around the corner, I'm going to read it for you now. This is what I wrote.

*Football training camp*

*A coach's perspective*

*This moment, as I think of training camp, my feeling is one of anticipation. I am eager for the reunion of players and coaches, and to meet the players who are new to our organization. Enthusiasm, optimism, and wonder are words that will express the tenor of my mood as we come together to face the challenges, hardships, sacrifices, and realities of reforming our team for a new season. We as coaches, and I'm sure the players too, know that each of us must improve*

*our level of production in order to realize our goals this season. Expectations for excellence are high.*

*In the past weeks and months, we have reviewed, evaluated, and modified our systems. We have organized and developed plans for the systematic and natural progression for the instruction of our plays, and we continually work on the revision of our special language unique to football that is vital for efficient communication. We have evaluated opponents, considered the changes in coaching and player personnel of other teams, and designed preliminary game plans. This work has been done through the winter and early spring as the cold wind blew, along with the snow and ice that chilled our bones. As training camp rapidly approaches, we are putting the finishing touches on playbooks and practice plans. The air is warmer now, leaves are unfolding, and the grass is green. Spring brings with her the feelings of optimism and renewal, so now it's time to play football!*

*Soon the air will be filled with the shouts of players and coaches, whistles, and the sounds heard from the clash of helmets and shoulder pads. There will be audible grunts of exertion, gasps for breath, a momentary silence, and then the roar of exclamation from players, coaches, and spectators after a big hit or a great play. You will hear coaching commands and comments like "step with the proper foot", "get off", "pursue", "make that tackle", "recapture your leverage", "work with a lower base", "ball security", "deliver a blow", "great catch", and "that effort will win for us".*

*Let's go. Let's pick it up a notch. Let's take our game to the next level, the level of domination and excellence.*

*Dear God – help me! I loved it so much!*

It has been a blessing to have had the opportunity to coach the Saskatchewan Roughriders. I am thankful for all the players, but I'm especially grateful for the men I have coached with and to a handful of great players I was privileged to coach who have retired and whose names are synonymous with Saskatchewan Roughriders. Those men are Omar Morgan, Eddie Davis, Chris Szarka, Jeremy O'Day, and Gene Makowsky.

As I continue with my life, I shall work to be a discerning listener and do my best to heed God's call.

Thank you all very much!

God bless you!

and

God bless the Saskatchewan Roughriders!