

Perspective

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Except for high school athletics, the thrill is gone

Congratulations to coach Drew Sterkel, his assistants, and the team for winning the 1A girls' track State Championship last Saturday with a dazzling display of speed.

A great joy for Tuscola fans is not just winning, but winning with our kids: amateurs who play for the sheer joy of sports; play for their classmates, families and friends; play for their town, team and school. This unity of town-team-school-athlete is a wonderful elixir, a magic formula increasingly missing from the professionalism of sports, which has now been sadly extended to college athletics.

The tradition and excitement of the long and storied Arcola-Tuscola football rivalry, for example, is that each town sends its best players onto the field against the other town's best players, each wearing their town's colors, rushing out onto the symbolic field of battle like some Middle Ages clan battle. The point of the contest is not the individual

but the community and school for which they fight.

But what if, one year, Tuscola benched the local kids and replaced them with big, fast bruisers from out of town—"ringers" who didn't live here and have no loyalty to team or town—just to whomp Arcola?

Would that mean anything to a Tuscola fan? It wouldn't to me.

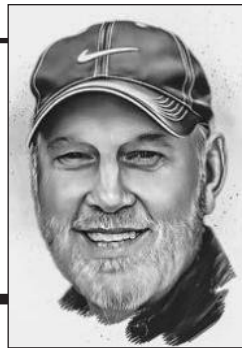
I encountered this sense of loyalty-loss brought on by mercenary athletes—roving athletes who care more about themselves rather than what team or town pays them the most—in the late 60s when I was pitching for the Tuscola Merchants, an Eastern Illinois League team.

The Tuscola Merchants was compromised almost entirely of Douglas County talent, mostly Tuscola players. One late 60s summer, we got hot in the league playoffs and made it all the way to the final game.

When we ganged at the park in Tuscola for the trip

I'm just sayin'

By Mike Carroll
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north to Royal, our coach pulled up in his big station wagon. Out of it piled not only coach but three players we'd never seen before. Evidently the coach had traveled down to Eastern Illinois University and recruited some stars with some monetary inducement.

He really, really wanted to win that championship. We all did... but...

On the drive up the regular players complained that it didn't feel right, as this was no longer a team of local guys who knew each other and had played together for years.

We lost a close game to Royal. But even if we had won, the victory would have been less joyous than if we had won with long-time local regulars.

I experienced this same sort of loss of team identity in major league baseball many years ago. Growing up a Cardinal fan when Stan "The Man" Musial played his entire 22-year fabled career as a Redbird, I remember that it was an era when most of the greats were identified throughout their careers with one team: Ernie "MrCUB" Banks, 18 years with the Cubs; Willie "The Say Hey Kid" Mays, 21 years with the Giants; Hank "Hammerin' Hank" Aaron, 21 years with the Braves. This longevity built deep and lasting player-team-fan loyalty bonds.

Then, thanks largely to the legal effort of Cardinal centerfielder, Curt Flood, baseball lost its iron grip on players when its "re-

serve clause" (that tied players to one team) was tossed out by the courts. Admittedly it was good for the players, now free to negotiate higher salaries with competing teams. But it took a chunk out of the emotional factor of fan-bonding with loyal and long-time favorite players.

Even with modern professional sports and their follow-the-dollar players, at least there are multi-year contracts that bind pro players to a team. But, today, we no longer have even that with college athletes.

Freed by the courts from, in effect, any and all commitments and promises made to a college, modern college athletes are wandering around the nation's university landscape today like Bedouin nomads in the Arabian desert, constantly searching for a better watering hole.

I don't know many of the new Illini players and was just getting used to those who left early. Color me pessimistic, but I am skeptical the newbies will fall in love

with the University of Illinois, like, say, the Flying Illini of the 80s, who all hailed from in-state and who, to this day, return home to celebrate their team, their fans, their school.

College athletes are all pros now, thanks to the courts and fat cat boosters and collectives paying top dollar for a player's name, image and likeness.

Admittedly, it's good for the kids who have a chance at serious money. As for fans who want to win at all costs, they probably wouldn't care if Illinois wins in basketball with, say, imported Russian tank commanders—as long as they can drain the treasury. But it's sad for those fans who want "our team" to really be "our team." Because when "our" team wins, there is great joy and pride in the community.

Thank you Alyssa, Jillian, Lia, Mia, coach Sterkel and all who contributed to this joyous addition to Tuscola's scrapbook of treasured memories.

mike carroll

What does Ken Griffin want from politics?

By Jim Nowlan

What does Chicago billionaire Ken Griffin want from politics? To take over the Republican Party in Illinois? To be governor? A reporter called with these questions. As a retired politico and professor of politics, I get these inquiries from time to time.

I don't know Griffin personally. In 2020, I chaired a campaign committee that received \$4.5 million from Griffin. With this indispensable help, we knocked off the Illinois Supreme Court (first time in our state's history) a judge whom we felt sullied his robes with decisions that blatantly protected Mike Madigan, indicted ex-speaker of the Illinois House. The contribution allowed us to compete on a par with the money that Madigan, unions and trial lawyers spent to support the judge.

Here is what I have learned about Griffin and his political

objectives. First, he doesn't care for politics or politicians. Griffin is not a people person, at least not a hail fellow, well met political sort. He has no interest in mucking it up personally in politics. He would be a terrible political candidate, and he knows it. After all, Griffin doesn't suffer fools lightly, which is exactly what you have to do, every day, to be successful in politics.

Griffin has a very small staff at his office that work with outside political operatives who represent campaigns. In other words, "our guys talk to his guys" to achieve mutual objectives.

So, what are his objectives? With a net worth of \$27 billion and change (which he earned all by himself, starting as a trader from his college dorm room), Griffin has more money than Croesus ever dreamed of. So, he can spend scores of millions in campaigns in Illinois

and beyond, and consider it a rounding error to his wealth. What could politics do for him personally, anyway?

From all I can tell, Griffin finds his adopted state of Illinois poorly led, and this offends his buttoned-down business sense of what can and should be. Isn't it enough that he just wants safe streets, good schools, and an attractive business climate?

Illinois should be a powerhouse. In each of the six Rs critical to economic development—roads, rails, runways, rivers, routers, research—Illinois is arguably among the top three states. And it's smack dab in the middle of the world's largest economy. Yet, Illinois has for decades been steadily slipping relative to the nation in per capita income. In 1950, our state's per capita income was 122 percent of the national average; today it is 105 percent.

My well-to-do Prairie State friends are leaving for Florida, generally replaced by working class sorts plus some bright young professionals coming to Chicago.

Unfortunately, because of widely televised violence and mayhem on Chicago's main thoroughfares, many of my fellow Downstaters are now afraid to go to the City—which they used to love, for the Cubs and Bears games, and for its breathtaking museums.

Why is Griffin's money needed to achieve his objectives?

When I was a young elected legislator and statewide candidate in Illinois in the 1960-70s, a Republican Party existed. The party helped guide its chosen, generally moderate candidates through the primary elections and to frequent success in November. Today, the party has no money, almost no precinct workers, and avoids

trying to play a role in endorsing good candidates. So, it is irrelevant in politics.

Big money has, unfortunately, replaced party workers in American politics. I don't like it, but I haven't figured out an alternative. It's our billionaires against theirs.

But can money buy good outcomes? Griffin backed Republican Bruce Rauner for governor (2015-2018; now of Florida). Rauner turned out to be one of the worst chief executives in Illinois history; for example, he deprived Illinois of a state budget for more than two years. This may sound appealing, yet its harmful effects are still being felt.

In 2020, Griffin spent \$54 million in a successful effort to defeat a state tax increase referendum, which Gov. J. B. Pritzker touted. The governor now says that revenue apparently isn't needed, as he is offering voters tiny tax cuts during his cam-

campaign for re-election.

This year Griffin's guys have put his money (\$45 million thus far) on Richard Irvin, the black mayor of suburban Aurora. They think he has the best chance of beating Pritzker in the fall. But Irvin, a novice to state politics, has stumbled over heavily scripted talking (or non-talking) points in his few public appearances. The mayor may not be ready for prime time, as they say.

So, Mabel, money can't buy happiness, and maybe not good government, either. Yet that doesn't change Griffin's objectives: safe streets, good schools, an attractive business climate. Is that too much to ask?

Nowlan has worked for three unindicted Illinois governors. A former state representative, Nowlan was the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor in 1972, running with Gov. Richard B. Ogilvie. He lives in Princeton, Illinois.

Find the happy on your way to happiness

Now is that time of year when I make my annual graduation speech to all the seniors out there about to turn their tassels, toss their mortar boards and make their final procession through the gymnasium as high school students.

I have to do it here because no one wants to hear a narcissistic buffoon blivate for 40 minutes about life lessons, college and career goals, personal triumphs and tribulations, challenges and successes, and so forth and so on. Chances are, they will, anyway. It will just be some other narcissistic buffoon. Not here, in whatever burgh you're reading this in. The speaker here is top-notch, I'm sure.

But why not me? I'm as qualified as the next person. So, instead of talking about the graduates, let's discuss me for a minute. Because that's what narcissists do. They make it about themselves.

I realize I'm an unlikely candidate to give a graduation speech. I haven't bathed in success, amassed a fortune, won a congressional election or held a high appointed office. I'm not famous, rich or revered. Isn't that what you want in a graduation speaker?

No, I'm an imperfect human who has gone through life like a bumper car chasing dreams, crashing occasionally and mostly spinning my wheels. I had no master plan and instead traveled the slow and tedious road of trial and error and dumb luck.

Maybe that's what makes me an ideal candidate because I think most of us do the same thing. Even if we break through the tiny bubble of our lives, we replace it with another tiny bubble somewhere else, interacting within a limited boundary. We reach for the goals we can see, travel the roads we know and make choices as they present themselves.

And there's nothing wrong with that.

It's a rare bird that flies outside its nesting zone to discover what lies beyond the mountains and the sea. And there's nothing wrong with that, either.

There was a time when I would have encouraged young adults graduating to be that rare bird. I wouldn't discourage it today.

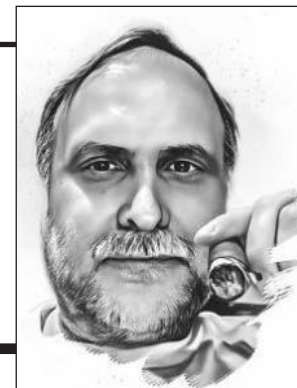
But the older I get, my priorities in life have changed. The one constant I have found in the nearly 40 years since I graduated is that there is no substitute for happiness.

Wherever you go, whatever you do, if you aren't happy, you're in the wrong place. It might be your physical space. It might be your job or career. It might be your own head space. Sometimes, I've settled for contentment in the absence of happiness. I'm done settling.

There is only one person responsible for your happiness

Ramblin' Man

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and that's you. It can be daunting to make the changes that you need to make to find happiness, but the choice is yours.

Happiness in life doesn't come all at once. Sometimes, you have to make sacrifices for a few years to get where you want to be. But do what makes you happy.

That's my unsolicited advice. Even during those building years, make time to be happy. Carve out a happy space.

In the end, it's not the money you made, the posses-

sions you accumulated or your career achievements that matter most to you. It's the relationships you've developed, the hobbies you've mastered, the time you spend with the people you love.

Today, my recliner means more to me than the wall full of plaques behind me. I'm more interested in propping up my legs than my career. Yet, I couldn't have gotten here without the journey that led me here.

So, if you're as confused as I am about the message I'm try-

ing to convey, let's recap: Try to find ways to be happy on your way to happiness.

If seeing the world and taking on incredible challenges makes you happy, don't let anything hold you back. If staying put, working a steady job and raising a family gives you the time and means to pursue the pleasures that you like, don't let anything push you away.

The underlying message here is personal responsibility. You're going to be the one to live with the consequences of your decisions, so be the one to make them.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't listen to advice from others. But in the end, do what works for you.

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