

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

The Choices We Make

I was never a good basketball player. I was too short, and too slow, and never had much aptitude for dribbling. I was the last guy picked for the teams in gym class. I was better at writing about the sport than actually playing it; I covered sports for a local paper in Maryland for a while, but eventually moved on to writing about other things.

But when I read the story about Derek Fisher, the guard of the Utah Jazz, I instantly wanted to start following the game more closely—particularly the way Fisher plays it.

Which, I think, was with his heart, not his head.

The guard for the Utah Jazz basketball team had asked to be released from his multi-million dollar contract so he could spend time finding the best care for his eleven-month old daughter, who had a rare cancer in her left eye.

As Fisher told reporters: “Life for me outweighs the game of basketball.”

Mind you, this was not a man who could have easily find another job with the same, sweet contract. He was thirty-one—almost retirement age for a basketball player—and he was six-foot, one-inch tall, not exactly a giant for a sport of giants. And he rarely scored more than ten points a game.

In other words, he was not exactly a superstar. But in many eyes he had suddenly become one because he was walking away from a lot of money, and a lot of security to try and save his daughter’s life.

“I know it’s hard for people to imagine at this point what I’m giving up,” Fisher said to reporters. “And what my family and I are giving up in terms of what we’ve established in my career, and this contract that I’ve worked my entire life to secure. It’s the risk that we have to take at this point.”

The general manager for the Utah Jazz said, “We’re sitting here and everybody seems sad about this. I think what we should be is grateful there is somebody who cares as much about his family. And somebody that owns the team and cares as much for the same reasons.”

Amen.

In a world consumed with winning, achieving, gaining and getting—where winner takes all, and the worse pejorative on the playground, or the workplace, is “loser”—the choice that Derek Fisher had made was more than surprising. It was downright noble. We tend to look up to sports stars who are gifted at scoring: How about looking up at one who is gifted with grace? Shouldn’t we cheer for someone who knows what matters, and who has chosen the life of his child over a life on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*?

Cynics were muttering that Derek Fisher was just angling for a better team, or a better contract, and that this was part of how that game was played. Maybe. But I think otherwise. And I think he was showing us how this complicated and painful game of life *should* be played.

Every sport is a collection of strategies, plays, moves, choices. Knowing which ones to make, and when, is what makes you a winner. Derek Fisher’s choice is an inspiring move for those who value values—for anyone who understands that a game is only a game, and a job is only a job, and ultimately what matters is how you spend your time with those you love.

To me, and to many others, Fisher is more than a winner.

He is a champion.