



### A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

**Last month I had the wonderful opportunity of working with a group of football players who were aspiring to become members of the National Football League. They were in training with the OPTIMUM PERFORMANCE TRAINING INSTITUTE (OPTI) of Sarasota, Florida, under the experienced tutelage of Coach Rich Lansky. I was asked to present a workshop to the players in order to prepare them for what is called the “combine”. The combine is an event that every prospective football player must undergo in order to be considered for the NFL draft. It consists of three basic elements: psychological testing, performance endurance and being interviewed by NFL coaches. It is intense and a player’s last chance to “prove himself” in order to be considered for the draft that will occur soon after. The players are rated according to certain parameters in order that their place in the draft be able to be observed by all teams vying for new players.**

**Previous to my presentation, I visited the OPTI several times to view the extremely rigorous physical training that Coach Lansky put them through. He is a former Olympic weightlifter who, himself, went through the rigors of training for his events as well. It was hard to believe what I saw in terms of the endurance that all of the athletes manifested in their course of training. Weight lifting and a myriad of physical exercises were expected to be performed with only very short breaks between repetitions. Watching players on a field or T.V. does not match the experience of meeting these “man mountains” whose will to succeed surpasses any of the obstacles of doubt or failure. They are intent on making it through the program and my sense was that they were obsessed with doing so that might be exemplified in the saying “I’m going to do this or die!”**

**The principal purpose of my involvement was to work with the players to help them begin to view the element of competition in a manner so that would allow them not to lose focus or playing in their “zones”. The training methods I used in my Workshop have been used with countless numbers of athletes, both amateur and professional, in many different sports. The Workshop was interactive so that the athletes had an opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences in order for the training that they would be exposed to could become “personalized”**

without becoming too personal. They weren't expected to participate if they didn't wish to but, as with most other Workshops, the guarantee of confidentiality enabled them to feel free to express themselves. The athletes were open and honest in their participation and the feedback received back from Coach Lansky after talking with the players indicated that they were able to make use of our training methods and bring them into their combine experiences.

Emphasis was placed on their "passion" for playing football and the fun that they have while doing so. The mental training was comprised of several relaxation techniques with the most intensive of them accompanied by some visualization and imagery techniques that taught how to gain and maintain focus. It is known that at a professional level, once a player loses passion for playing their sport and stops having fun doing so, their career is all but over. We also know that many players who tend to lose focus by concentrating on their opponent instead of their own game are not as successful and are prone to making more mistakes than those who can do so. Training in both areas was able to be achieved in order for the athletes to gain a whole different perspective of their involvement in their sport.

This was a very unique and satisfying experience for me as well as a learning one. A major element that impressed me a great deal apart from the rigors of their training was the integrity that these athletes portrayed in both their personal and sporting lives that brought them to the point of being serious draft considerations. Too often in this day-and-age we tend to only hear about the negatives and misuses that are associated with professional athletes. This experience was a welcome and positive departure from those messages. I wish them well and hope that one day I will be watching them perform in the NFL.

### **A Brief Biographical Sketch**

*After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.*

*Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980's he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-*

*written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a “mind game”, he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf.*

*He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.*

*Charles invites you to view his website at [www.charlesmbonasera.com](http://www.charlesmbonasera.com) as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address ([charles@charlesmbonasera.com](mailto:charles@charlesmbonasera.com)). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is “seeking alternative methods to happiness” and wishes those touched by his words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: “enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.*