



# TACKLING MY PRIORITIES

*I thought football was my life, but I discovered there was a better game plan for me.*

**T**ouchdown! The phrase seemed so familiar to me. I would hear it in my thoughts, dreams, and, most important, on the football field. I was what you would call a football fanatic. Nearly every inch of my wall donned a poster of something football-related. If you saw me at the park with my friends, I would be playing football. As I got bigger and stronger, so did my love for the game.

When I entered high school, my football career started to consume me. Mutual? Nah. I was lifting weights with my football buddies. Youth conference? A little bit. But I missed half of what many called a life-changing experience because I was set on training with the team. Family? We lived in the same house, but I felt that my team was my family.

Because of these choices, I started to stray. I would go through the motions to make my mom happy, but when I sat in sacrament meeting taking the holy emblems of our Savior's atoning sacrifice, my mind just wasn't in the right place. I had become a glory-obsessed athlete. My dream was to play in the big game under the Friday night lights.

During the summer, we had rigorous workouts—running in the 110-degree heat (43° C), lifting weights for hours, running up and down the bleachers, and overall just exhausting ourselves. Then my back began to hurt. Eventually the pain I brushed aside became something that required medical attention. I took medications, but they didn't help, so it was suggested that I get an MRI scan. One week later I received a call from my doctor. I was hurt worse than I had thought. It was apparent that my football career was over, and I did nothing but mourn my loss.

I joined the swim team to stay in shape. I was the biggest person out there, at 6'3" (191 cm) and 215 pounds (98 kg). I was also by far the slowest swimmer. It was a humbling experience. While on the team, I had fun and met new people, but I still felt empty. I felt as if there were a part of my heart that would never be filled again. I talked with many people and heard their experiences, but they were all just stories to me. I was lost in the thoughts of my broken heart.

I attended seminary, but I would end up just going and sitting in class, sending text messages to my friends, complaining about everything from not playing football to being hungry. Then one day the seminary teacher told us to take out our hymnbooks for an activity. I flipped through the pages and came across "How Firm a Foundation" (*Hymns*, no. 85). I read through the fifth verse, which says:

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design . . .  
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*

As I read this, I realized that God had allowed these trials to come in order to strengthen me. I went home and prayed and realized that I had been so foolish to forget God and forget how blessed I am, even without football. I had wonderful friends, a wonderful family, and, most important, faith in my Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It took me a long time to realize that with my faith fully set on God, putting Him before everything, I can never lose. After these experiences, I could walk out of sacrament meeting, cleansed through the sacrament and with my sights set on a mission, and look back at the end of my football career and ask myself, "Is this a loss or a win?" Sounds like an eternal victory to me. **NE**