

It's The Stride...

By Brad Ohlemacher

January 31, 2007

I just had the honor of participating in a great experience! I was my brother's guest at the second-ever, three and a half day YPO (Young President's Organization) conference called the "Coaches Clinic". The participants were an internationally diverse group of about 100



business people that got an "immersion of champions" experience that is hard to describe. I can't imagine a successful attempt at duplicating what will go down in my memory as one of the finest events I've ever attended.

The marathon session had 24 presenters there to share their stories of athletic success and in some cases athlete-to-business success. Their goal was to teach lessons from the world of sports that would translate to the world of business and of course, your personal life. Mission accomplished!

Most of what I heard was like what Sasho Cirovski told me while we were waiting for John Ondrasik to talk to us and perform. (If you breathe air, you've heard "100 years" or "Superman", his two most popular songs.) Sasho's vision is "to lead the USA to its first ever World Cup Championship".

He said to me, "Brad, nothing you heard spoken today or that you will hear *me* say tomorrow is *new*". It is what you pull from the unique stories or "**what you do with what you hear**" that will make a difference.

Side note: this guy is the kind of coach you hope your kid will encounter sometime during life; he is *the real deal*. Ironically, it was Business Week, and not Sports Illustrated, that discovered this rising star.

YPO events are known for their posh locations (it was held at Pebble Beach) and their first class handling of all conference details. This was, of course, all of that and more. Many of us have been to first class events where famous people share their great stories, but this one was different -- different primarily because of one extraordinary

man, Ronnie Lott. If I had been a life-long sports fan I might have been "star struck" by this *Hall of Famer* and *possessor of four Super Bowl rings*, but I barely knew of him. Unfortunately, if I had ever watched him play football, I was unaware I was doing it.

I really started to figure out what this guy was about when I noticed his detailed attention to our speakers, making sure each was comfortable when it was his or her turn to talk. He was **available** at all times to answer questions. I learned that the private equity firm he co-founded with \$40 million dollars is valued at over a billion today, but it was his comment to me during the 6:30 am wind sprints that stuck with me most of all.

Ronnie Lott's personal style, sphere of influence and raw desire **to share**, is what made this Coach's Clinic *real*. He created an event with people of "super-sized" accomplishments from the world of athletics... and let them feel safe enough to let their guard down and speak openly. They **trusted** him that nobody from the media would be present. That trust enabled **real honesty** (like Larry Baer's candid comments about Barry Bonds – sorry, had to be there)...

We spent three days in a casual setting with some incredible people, interacting with and sometimes even feeling like one of them. We all know the saying about surrounding yourself with people smarter or better than you are. Honestly though, spending that much time with champions makes you start to think and act like one. OK - now back to the point of why I bothered writing this.

My greatest experience there was my personal story... and no it's not the one where I thought Deacon Jones was going to come out of his chair and kick my ass when I asked him a question. (I either *talked to* or *asked questions of* almost all the speakers).

Second side note: Deacon Jones is one mean and funny SOB! I bet more than a few quarterbacks

had a real hatred toward that guy. He made it clear he would do anything he could get away with (short of breaking the rules or getting caught) in the execution of his role. In the audience, an earlier presenter, the famed NFL referee Jim Tunney, nodded in agreement.

However, as we say “where there is yin there is yang”. Ronnie shared a story about how Deacon had visited his school when he was a kid, and how it influenced him to **believe he could achieve**.

Back to my story (yes there is a point to this) ...



Every morning at 6:00am, about 20 of us would meet with Eugene Thomas, a former Bear’s trainer. He is the super guy who would lead our daily exercise program.

Our second morning we did *intensive* wind sprints. Most of the people enduring this were *in-shape* and *fairly athletic*. My plan and subsequent



action was to run all-out as fast as I possibly could to show how I could push it and succeed in the presence of these superior athletes.

Even if I wasn’t unfortunate enough to have a photo of this moment, I’m sure many of you can visualize me. Here I am, at my zenith, with the grace of a pelican trying to fly with a big old fish in its mouth, scurrying along with my arms flailing.



But... then my world changed. I heard this voice, as if from above, (surprisingly it was not God recalling one of his defects) offering guidance and encouragement; it was Ronnie Lott!

He was saying “work on your stride, c’mon now, work on your stride”! Now I can’t be absolutely sure he was talking specifically *to me*, but all of a sudden...my running got smoother and a lot easier. I felt like I was gliding.

I felt like, well... a champion!

If I had to describe my “take-away”, it would be *that moment* and *those words*. I can think of many times when I ran fast, but didn’t get where I wanted to go; without the efficiency I could have, and certainly without the grace *that is possible*. “**Work on your stride**” is my lesson, as well as the reality of how a little coaching and support can make a big difference no matter who you are or what you are trying to do.

Send me an email if you want a raw copy of notes from the conference. Jeff spent several hours and typed out about a bunch of pages and has given the “ok” to forward them on to anybody that requests them.



This is the list of our presenters or “resources”:

Jennifer Azzi	Deacon Jones
Larry Baer	Ari Kiev
Harris Barton	Alexi Lalas
Billy Beane	Willie Lanier
Peter Burwash	Ronnie Lott
Brandi Chastain	Steve Patterson
Shasho Cirovski	Jerry Rice
Anne Cribbs	John Robinson
Chuck Daly	Jason Sehorn
Baron Davis	Eugene Thomas
Shawn Hunter	Jim Tunney
Greg Jamison	