

WINNING

by
DICK BUTKUS

One of the greatest defensive linebackers in football history reveals
his secret of how to win.

On the field you practically have to act like an animal. You're propelled by your baser instincts, or at least what are thought of as your baser instincts—hate and rage and the desire to inflict pain and punishment. Some show it more than others, but just about everyone in the game has it to some extent. A defensive back or a running back or a split end may have the same emotional charge but they seldom get tagged with that animal business. They just don't seem to fit the idea as much as a linebacker or a lineman.

No matter how long you're in the league you can still develop that hate once the whistle blows. And each guy has his own way of mustering it up. It's not a personal hatred. It's more an anger or madness you have for anyone you come in contact with. It's not directed at any one particular guy, you hate them all

equally, unless it's a Lucci or some other loudmouth, a Flanagan,¹ or someone like that.

I want that competitive hatred burning inside my guts. I hope that I don't get as lenient as some guys do after they've been around a long time. They get so blasé about everything it starts affecting their play. That's what I can't understand. When you're all stirred up inside, when you're on, you fly to the ball and hit with all your might. If a guy's stumbling or only halfway down you still want him all the way down to finish him off.

That's what competition is all about. It's the killer instinct. You have to have it. You have to have it if you're playing golf, tennis, polo, horseshoes, ping pong, cricket, and even chess. When you have

1. Lucci (lū'che) or ... Flanagan, players for the rival Detroit Lions when Butkus played with the Chicago Bears.

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someone in trouble, you have to put him away. If you don't, you just give him a shot of confidence, and he'll come back and knock your head off. Anybody who has ever competed in any sport, or in life, will tell you that. When you have them on the hook, hang them. Joe Frazier² is praised for having a killer instinct, but when I say I have it I'll be criticized.

You want to hurt but not injure. There's a distinction, in my mind at least, between the two. I want to flatten and intimidate my opponents. I want to

2. Joe Frazier (frā'zher), world heavyweight boxing champion from 1970 to 1973.

absolutely destroy them. But I still want them ready to go the next day.

I don't think I'm the most popular guy on the field. That's all right. I'm not trying to be. I don't want them to love me. No one ever sees me smile, or pat an opponent on the back and say, "Nice play." Why should I? He's the enemy. For those sixty minutes I hate him. If he made a good play, so what. He's supposed to make them. He's a pro. That's what he gets paid for. Why should I encourage him to make more. It'll only hurt me and my team. When a guy puts a block on me, I want to kill him, not congratulate him.

Comment

1. Have someone in the class explain the following football positions: (a) defensive back, (b) center, and (c) linebacker. What physical qualities are best suited for these positions?
2. What are the "baser instincts?" Butkus says are necessary on the field?
3. How does Butkus feel about his opponents on the field? Off the field?
4. What distinction does Butkus make between "hurting" and "injuring" an opponent?
5. Do you agree that the "killer instinct" is necessary in all sports or games? In life? Explain.

Activity

Interview members of the various athletic teams at your school. Find out how they feel once the beginning "whistle blows."