

## When Hope is Deferred! By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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In the last article I spoke of “Building Hope” in off season training. Now I want to tell about my senior high school year when my football, wrestling, and academics tested that hope.

The following statement really tells it all:

*“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.”* Proverbs 13:12

- 1) Hope is a great stabilizer to keep a person energetic and positive.
- 2) However, when what is hoped for is delayed it can sicken a person.
- 3) But when some aspect/or all of what is hoped for is realized it is an incredible source of life, energy, excitement, and vitality.

I was going to experience all three of these as a high school senior.

The fall of my senior year began with great hopes of a successful football season and then opportunities to play on a college team.

We had a new coach. Bucky Disalvo was a native of our town, Cumberland Wisconsin. He was excited to be coming home as a Vice Principal and Head Football Coach. He was coming with a stellar record of coaching several years at another larger nearby school.

I was playing a new position in the line as a tackle on both offense and defense. I had definite confidence after being coached by my brother Phil most of the summer. Phil had been the starting pulling guard for the U. WI Badgers the previous year under the coaching of a former Baltimore Colt lineman. Hopes were high!

The first four games were hard fought games, but we came up short of wins. Our team was playing hard and we were seeing improvement, but we couldn't put a win on the board. Hope was being deferred!

The next three games were ugly. After trying to start each game with excitement and confidence, the team fell apart. We were 0-7 and last in the Heart of the North Conference. There was one last non-conference game and a chance to redeem some self-respect. Throughout the game we shifted individually and as a team from hope to despair and then back again. It was a wide open high scoring game. Repeatedly I recall the other tackle, Brian, and I sacking the quarterback. A teacher complimented me the next week by saying my number 74 must be permanently sealed to the quarterback's chest. But for all our sacks, I remember too many times getting up only to see a pass had been completed. We lost again. Coach Disalvo would go on to coach several successful seasons that my younger brother Dan enjoyed. But for now hope had been greatly deferred!

As a team we were heartbroken. Personally my dream of playing in college slowly faded. A dream was dying. Today I see that it needed to in order to make way for even greater dreams. God had given me more skill for wrestling than football.

The wrestling season began three days after that heart wrenching loss. Within a few days the excitement of a new season and a clean slate brought hope to life again. Instead of losing everything, we were winning most everything Coach Walsh scheduled for us. By midseason we were rated in the “Sweet 16” of Wisconsin. At 180 pounds, I was winning every match. My younger brother, Dan, made the varsity as a freshman forcing another senior and good friend of mine, to cut weight. Jim's spirit while cutting weight made our team even better. Hopes were high again!

Things were going well, and then the unimaginable happened. While wrestling with Coach Walsh, I did a standing roll, blocking his ankle on the way down. His ankle broke! Coach kidded me about it as did everyone else. But in the end I saw a great inconvenience made positive. We made Armature Wrestling News. A picture of Coach Walsh in his walking cast and “the wrestler who broke his coach’s leg” made the front page of the national wrestling magazine.

An undefeated record fueled my hopes going into the state qualifying tournaments. But coming from northwestern Wisconsin, with very little competition with the rest of the state, doubts that I would not be ready to compete with the wrestlers from the “big city schools” was strong. Little comments could make or break the hopes and dreams of 12 months of training.

I have never forgotten a comment made by Harry Rhodes, a wrestler for our conference rival, Chetek. He was also a senior and had qualified the three previous years all at 145 pounds. I had lost to him as a sophomore when I invaded his weight territory. Harry told me: “Ben, you can win the State Tournament. The other wrestlers are no different than us. I have made mistakes, but have learned from them and know I can win in Madison.” (2 weeks later he won!) That statement has always been in my memory. Thank you Harry! I left the Regionals and then the Sectionals with extra confidence. In the next article I will explain what happened at the State Tournament.

Academics were also an up and down ride that year. After three years of being an average student in an average high school taking the average courses and getting average grades, my coaches and advisors urged me to take college prep classes. Instead of taking shop & drafting, I took College Calculus and Physics to prepare for my dream of becoming an architect. What really stretched me, however, was College English. While working with the best students in the senior class I gained confidence in my abilities. Often I felt I was hanging on for dear life in a new ride that was much faster than any previous one.

Even my Pastor got in to the act of stretching. He asked me to teach a Sunday morning class of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys. I think they controlled the class more than I did, but in the end it helped me verbalize what I learned from the Bible and what I believed.

My challenge to youth is to stretch yourself when you are young. Don’t just get by. See how far your God-given abilities will bring you. You will not know without dreaming, working and trying harder tasks.

Keep your hopes and dreams high. And when they are deferred, look for what you can learn and then make adjustments. Those who stay hopeful will find new energy for the next challenges that come their way.

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