

## Utility Player on the Field of Life

By Calvin L Weisberger, MD

**W**hen I was in early grade school, Sandy Ungar was always better in English than I was. Gary Simon was always better in math. Others were better at other subjects and activities. I was always second- or third-best. That pattern continued into high school, though occasionally I would come in first at something and sometimes worse than third. When we graduated high school, I did very well at the competitive test-related scholarships and won state and national competitive scholarships. Happy about this I went on with life, not reflecting on why I won those and why the better talents won things in specialized areas. I went on to college, and my life pattern continued. I did well in many things and best at nothing singular. In sports, I excelled at coming in second. Once I finished third in a two-candidate election (to write-in candidate Kermit the Frog). On I went to medical school, still without seeing the pattern in my life. I did fine in lots of things and best at nothing. When I was finishing my cardiology fellowship, the Chief of Cardiac Surgery asked me to become a cardiac surgeon and extend my training to that area. I was flattered but turned him down. I trundled on into the practice of medicine and blundered into SCPMG, where many types of oppor-

tunities were available. Busy practicing medicine, I also got involved in a variety of disparate activities. I worked in administration, pharmacy, purchasing, guidelines, research, writing, medical education and other endeavors. Outside of medicine, I was a Temple president and helped in political arenas and in the local school district. I was an assistant coach on many of my kids' soccer or baseball teams. As time passed, I got involved

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with an older men's softball team. When we organized, I volunteered to play second base. I had been a second baseman in Little League and any other venue I played in. I was never a talented athlete but was generally good enough to make some contribution to the team. This remained true on our softball team. When I sustained an elbow injury, it became necessary to take months off to recuperate. Because I exercised during that time, I maintained conditioning and even increased strength in my lats and other throwing apparatus. When I returned to the team, another player was at second base. I began to fill in wherever the team had a need. I played every position on the team. I excelled at no position but held my own at all of them. One day, when kidding with our coach about my best position being

bench or left out, he said, "You could do that too, you're a utility player in the game of life." It's funny how some people have insights into us that we lack ourselves. When I look at my past and my present, the wisdom of his statement seems obvious. When someone asked me to be the "champion" for whatever our strategic goal of the moment was; I was turned off by the term. I seem to always have been somewhat turned off by it. I guess I fit that old "jack of all trades, master of none" appellation. Well, I gave up my competitive drive to be the best a long time ago. Without knowing it, I settled into my persona. I accepted being the "least worst" rather than being the "best." I realized that whatever I could do, somebody else also could. The best, the champion, in theory leaves a performance void when they vacate their position. When you have someone like me doing a job, there is the undercurrent of comfort from knowing that however good a job the person is doing, they are certainly replaceable. To the champion or the best, this may not be an acceptable position or thought. Most of us can't be the best at anything except being ourselves, however. Being one's self is about what we have in this life. Now that I understand myself, I'm comfortable with it. I can take what life throws at me; I'm a utility player in the game. ♦

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