

A Game of Recovery

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In the movie *Bobby Jones, Stroke of Genius*, there's a scene in which the U. S. Open champion Walter Hagan plays the younger Bobby Jones. Although he has an erratic swing and seems error prone, Hagan runs away with the match. Afterwards, he confides in Jones: "I don't always hit the ball straight, but you know what I've learned? Three bad shots and one good one still make par. Golf is a game of recovery."

Most of us have seen unlikely turnarounds in sports. During the recent Olympics, for example, the U.S. women's soccer team rallied from being a point down against Canada on three separate occasions before finally prevailing on a dramatic last minute goal. The victory propelled them into the final match where they defeated Japan to win the gold medal.

Turning to basketball, fans are annually treated to "March Madness" and a lineup of games that invariably include several seemingly impossible comebacks. Because of the many stunning recoveries, sportswriters often call the three-week event the most exciting in sports.

Or how about one of my all-time favorite "recovery" stories, the playoff victories of the 2004 Boston Red Sox? After losing the first three games of their league championship series with the N.Y. Yankees, they were trailing in game four with only three outs standing between them and the end of their season. But, improbably, they recovered. They came back to win that game, and, shockingly, the next three as well. In stunning the Yankees, they became the first team in baseball history to recover from an 0-3 deficit in a league championship and win four straight to claim the title (and eventually the World Series, their first in 86 years).

Sports fans can talk for hours about amazing comebacks. But the principle seems applicable across a broad range of life's experiences. Since this is a financial newsletter, let's move the conversation in that direction. Of course, stewardship (and the investing duties that come with it) is not a game. It's quite serious. When we handle this responsibility well, we help further God's kingdom—and also earn "Well done!" praise and eternal rewards from our Savior. But, like athletes, we don't always carry out our duties with perfection. We can fall behind where we know we need to be. Few of us, this writer included,

can look back at a lifetime of spending, investing, and giving decisions and be totally pleased with our performance.

It should be obvious I've been leading up to this: Being a good steward is—if I may use the term for purposes of illustration—a game of recovery. SMI exists to help you in this process. I certainly made my share of mistakes in earlier years, and am glad to share what I've learned so that you don't repeat them. I got up and kept going; so can you. You might even want to take a few tips from the athletes who have learned how to recover from setbacks. If you listen to their interviews, there's a common thread that goes through their description of how they overcame their poor starts.

1. **Let go of the past** They have a long-practiced and rather remarkable ability to put their failures behind them—block them out—and concentrate on the task immediately at hand.
2. **Play the next play** The most important thing is to focus on what they can do *now*. They know they can't make up for their past mistakes all at once, but they can begin to regain ground bit by bit—with a birdie on this hole, a basket on this trip down the floor, a single into center to keep the rally alive.
3. **Follow their training** Athletes have received training over the years as to how to execute the task at hand, and they know it is essential to stay faithful to that training. When the pressure is on is no time for untested strategies or spontaneous innovations. Instead, it's essential to concentrate on doing simple things well, performing as taught.
4. **Persevere** Essentially, this means repeating the first three steps over and over. It's not easy. It requires "a long obedience in the same direction." It's called being faithful.

If we invite the Holy Spirit to help us follow this pattern, we'll have a lot in common with the apostle Paul (who knew a thing or two about recovering from a bad start): "I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven" ([Philippians 3:13-14 NLT](#)).