

Pass It On®...

Overcoming Our Own Worst Mistakes.

Kaelin Clay made an unpardonable error in football. And he owned it.

There's a story in football that goes all the way back to 1929. Roy Riegels of Cal picked up a fumble and nearly returned the ball to the endzone ... for the opposing team. He had to be tackled by a teammate and earned the nickname "Wrong Way Riegels." He was so distraught that his coach had to talk him into returning to the game.

Scoring for your opponent is unforgivable for fans. We lay our dreams at the feet of kids playing a game and suffer meltdowns when mistakes are made. Similar to Riegels, Kaelin Clay of the University of Utah caught a pass across the middle in a game against Oregon. The speedster sprinted 70 yards to the endzone. But in a premature celebration, he let the ball fall from his hands, just inches from the goal line. The ball was scooped up by Oregon's Joe Walker, who ran the length of the field for a touchdown.

But, unlike Riegels, Kaelin Clay gathered himself quickly, took responsibility for the blunder and finished the game with several key catches that set up scores. It wasn't enough. Clay will candidly tell you that the loss to Oregon was his fault. Still, he learned from it.

"Life is crazy," Clay says. "Things change. That moment right there helped me realize that no matter what happens, just keep pushing, because something good will happen in the end." Clay made all the highlight reels for all the wrong reasons. But he didn't quit. He pushed harder.

They say sport mimics life. At the very least, it intensifies living, subjecting our souls to the scrutiny of perfection. But perfection doesn't exist for any of us. Our best is all we have to offer. Resigning to failure will never deliver the gift that comes when we overcome; a process that requires us to be accountable to ourselves first, and next to the teammates who accompany us on this journey.

Children, in particular, fall victim to the discouragement that comes with falling short. Many don't have the skills to move on. They suffer mentally and emotionally rather than rebound.

Kaelin Clay speaks to them: "I tell them things are going to happen; you just have to keep pushing. It's going to be all right, and it happens for a reason."

Kaelin Clay went on to become an All-American. He played in the NFL for four years. Maybe none of that success would have happened if he hadn't learned from his mistakes.

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