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Sometimes in life you're at the brink of achievement, ready to succeed, only to let it slip away. It happens to all of us at some point. We get it then lose it. We thought we had it in the bag then realize the bag is empty. You thought your door was closed for the night? Wrong. The dog got out. Or perhaps you were on the verge of a big discovery but ended up quitting. There are an infinite number of scenarios where a person is inches or seconds from succeeding only to pull the plug and walk away.

A recent NFL playoff game involving the Buffalo Bills and the Kansas City Chiefs is being touted as one of the greatest playoff games ever played. The teams went back and forth with prolific efficiency rarely seen before. The Bills scored the go-ahead touchdown with 13 seconds remaining. Game over--on to the next round. Right? Not so fast. The Chiefs quickly drove down the field in two plays, kicked a field goal, then won the game in overtime.

The Buffalo Bills are infamous for letting playoff games get away from them. Those who follow the team will remember the wide-open touchdown drop in the final seconds of a 1990 playoff game in Cleveland, “wide right” in the final seconds of Super Bowl XXV, the last second fumble in Miami in 1999, the Music City Miracle in Tennessee in 2000, the missed tackle in overtime in Houston in 2020, and now “13 seconds” in Kansas City in 2022.

All of these Bills' playoff losses are heartbreaks indeed. Each of them was indicative of a team that stopped short of the goal, ran out of gas, or lost its focus and persistence in the final moments.

This column isn't about bashing the Buffalo Bills. It's about realizing that

the ultimate goal can be reached if you maintain your effort, don't lose focus, and don't get down on yourself. In some situations, it's justified or prudent to quit, where you have to cut your losses and learn a lesson, but in many instances, even the slightest extension of concentration, effort, and persistence can pay off.

I've seen stock investors lose it all because of some bad decisions. After cashing in on a big earning, they failed to diversify then lost it all overnight. An aggressive gambler I know went “double or nothing” after winning big at a casino then ended up walking out with empty pockets. I watched someone diet hard for three months to lose 40 pounds only to quit the diet and put all 40 pounds back on in a few weeks.

R.U. Darby, a successful insurance man during America's “gold rush” days of the mid 1800's, set out with his uncle to go drill for some gold in Colorado. He invested a lot of money and time to obtain equipment and manpower to dig down into a mine in hopes of discovering a jackpot of gold. As they were digging diligently, the vein of gold ore they were following disappeared. They had come to the end of the rainbow and the pot of gold was no longer there. They drilled on, desperately trying to pick up the vein again, all to no avail.

Exhausted, they decided to quit. They sold their machinery to a junk man for a few hundred dollars, and took the train back home. The junk man then called an engineer to look at the mine and do some calculating. The engineer advised that the project had failed because Darby and his uncle were not familiar with the fault lines. Calculations showed that the vein would be found just three feet from where Darby and his uncle had stopped drilling! The junk man drilled the extra

three feet and took in millions of dollars in gold ore.

So how can we prevent ourselves from coming up short like this? How do we turn the tables on these “13-second” or “3-foot” moments”?

First of all, there are never any guarantees in life. Something can always go wrong when you least expect it. You can do everything right but still come up on the short end of things. That happens. You can get unlucky or your opposition gets lucky. A ball can make a funny bounce. The key, though, is learning from each and every experience and doing everything in your power to be more physically and mentally prepared for when that situation or scenario arrives again. If you remember your lesson, prepare hard, play hard, pay attention, and don't quit, your chances of succeeding are much greater than if you just “play the game.” “Playing the game” is always fun, but it can leave you feeling unfulfilled if you're a person who likes the adrenaline rush associated with competition. If you're just “playing the game,” someone else will be “playing to win,” and you will “lose the game.” Look, the object is to “win the game,” so stay focused and persistent and win it!

Let's use “13 seconds” as our rally call during this upcoming year. Jog 13 seconds longer. Pray for 13 more seconds. Lift 13 seconds longer at the gym. Hit the bag for 13 more seconds. Give your boss 13 extra seconds of your best effort. Spend 13 more seconds on a sales call. Think hard for another 13 seconds. Give your spouse or children an extra 13 seconds. If the referee counts you out at 10, you can still get up at 13 seconds. This year, be 13 seconds better!

And oh yeah: Go Bills!

~ The End ~