

# Chronicles of Diversity

*Your leadership weekly*



*Detroit Pistons  
Championship Photo*

## Detroit Pistons Basketball

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Probably the most frequent question I get in one form or another, is something like, “I don’t understand you, why can’t I put you in a box, like other people.”

It really is not that difficult, I have always understood it and it is really quite simple. I pretty much live my life just like I learned to play basketball. The problem with that answer however, is there is a lot to basketball that most spectators don’t understand, especially the mental aspects of the game.

Almost no one gave the Detroit Pistons a chance to win the NBA championship this year. The Los Angeles Lakers were perceived just plain better, except in the areas that ended up humiliating the Laker basketball dynasty.

Those Piston concepts are the same as how I learned to play basketball, and they could also serve as a model for individuals and organizations as they try to cope with a world in which they are overwhelming underdogs. In short, the Pistons game is also a model for Christians and the church.

The principles of the Detroit Pistons that brought them the championship, were solid fundamentals, suffocating defense, and they pushed the ball (on offense) at every opportunity.

The goal for all the NBA teams is to win the championship. Only about twenty players, coaches, and team officers made significant contributions to winning that championship. Professional basketball is a competitive entertainment game, therefore for its own end, it really isn’t that important, but basketball at any level can serve as a model for life’s experiences. And because of the relative small number of competitors involved at any time, it is a game our mind can comprehend. Just five people on each team running up and down the floor trying to outscore the other team.

Thousands of fans may fill the stands for the games, but they are just spectators. The same can be said for most churches. Many people turn out for the big game on Sunday, but few attend the other games that the church schedules. Excuses for this vary, but in essence the reason comes down to we don’t want to be forced into playing, fundamentally because most Christians (most people) are too lazy.

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Life is not a spectator sport whether we like it or not, neither is Christianity. You can miss all the practices and games if you like, but when you really get to the end of your life, your life will be greatly shriveled because of your selfish, sluggard behavior.

“Well I’m not into golden ball trophies and championship rings, besides I’m not good enough to compete at a high level in anything.”

The Bible has thousands of promises, that you are capable of winning once you decide to play on God’s team. But until you move beyond the spectator status, those promises will be nothing but words on a page.

Psalm 30: 11,12 is one of those Bible promises that as long as you are a spectator in your life you will not experience its fulfillment. It also carries a reward far greater than a golden ball trophy and a championship ring. The problem is that much of American evangelicalism values the ring and the gold ball more than God’s trophies.

*You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.*

### ***Solid Fundamentals***

The main fundamental of basketball, which translates both offensively and defensively, is to keep your knees bent and your feet moving. That same principle from skiing is, “Bend zee knees please, and mileage, mileage, mileage.”

To convert that into a Christian fundamental, “Bend the knee please, and read your Bible, read your Bible, read your Bible.”

I am a real Bible thumper, to the point that I can not understand why Christians will do anything else but this one fundamental. They will go on missions trips halfway around the world, they will listen to Pastor Whoever, for hours and hours, and you can ask them to do almost anything and they will make a half hearted attempt. But to pray and read their Bible consistently requires Divine intervention, and most people are just too unwilling to forfeit any control in their life, especially if it has to do with learning of God.

Seven times going through the Bible cover to cover would be a good start before you go after the deeper things of Christianity. After that time the trappings of ministry and life will have gained a perspective that you can not gain any other way. It is really all about God and His nature. The major problem with the church today is that Christians have not, will not, and don’t ever seriously plan to read their Bible. Have you ever read your Bible once cover to cover according to a specific plan?

As all preachers do, I borrowed the Psalm 30 example from Larry Kroon, a pastor from Alaska, who’s daughter plays center for the Seattle Pacific University women’s basketball team, who just happened to have a miraculous liver transplant, that not only saved her life, but also allows her to continue to play collegiate basketball.

His read your Bible, read your Bible, read your Bible, program is a little more disciplined than most, maybe that’s why God gave him such a wonderful understanding of this Psalm 30 promise. That is why I appropriated it. The essence of that Bible study program is to get a Bible that you don’t feel bad about marking in and get a Bic four color pen to mark in it as you read.

Use the Black ink to mark the things you notice. Mark the facts that seem to strike you as important.

Use the Green ink to mark things that you might have questions about. You don’t need to know the answers, but just realize there is a lot there that you will one day know more fully, or mark things you would like to research.

Use the Red ink for soundings. Soundings are things that the text says which reach into the depth of your soul. You will quickly find that God knows some depths of your personality you never knew existed.

Finally, use the Blue ink to give you insight into the personality of God and His character. As

you gain insight into who you are and who God is, the more you will understand the true meaning of gratitude and thanksgiving.

### *Suffocating Defense*

Now the perceived way to play suffocating defense is to play physical defense. There is a physical element to playing defense in basketball, but as the Pistons demonstrated, that is not the key when the opponent is bigger, stronger, faster, and better than you are. Physical to physical you will just lose. Because the opponent possesses skills superior to yours, the art is not to make him mad (at you). For if that is your goal you are in for big time defeat. The goal must be to make him frustrated with himself and his teammates. This ability can not be physical but must be considered art. If he is better than you are he must beat himself. In a game where success is measured in fractions of inches, it is easier than you may think.

The key is the psychological, the first thing then is to always force your opponent of expect the unexpected. If they don't know what you are going to do, they will try to anticipate your next move, it's just natural. When they can't anticipate, they become perplexed, and from then on you have achieved victory in the head game. Then all you need to do is to translate that to victory on the floor. The goal is to use the opponents pride as the your ultimate weapon, this makes the truth of **Proverbs 16:18** as your prime truth: *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Much is made in Christianity about the devil being your adversary and that is true. But the Bible, you know that book you seldom read, also shows us by God's grace alone, the devil is not an adversary we need to worry about. Therefore, compare the two passages from the Bible that speak to that battle. The first comes from 1 Peter 5:5-9 and the second from James 4:6-8.

**1 Peter 5:5-9** *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for*

*“God resists the proud,  
But gives grace to the humble.”*

*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

**James 4: 6-8** *But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:*

*“God resists the proud,  
But gives grace to the humble.”*

*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Notice both passages reference Proverbs 3:34 and are the key to the Suffocating Defense. You need God's help to defeat not only the devil, but also your own sin. Only God's grace can do that. This too is a mind game. As long as you think you are a Shaq attack or can perform all of Kobe's kudos you will not win the victory, no matter how cool you think you are.

Legalism is the way most defense is played in church. Legalism teaches that you have to be strong to win the victory over sin. Given the whole season of life's challenges and the legalism defense will beat you to a pulp. Not only will legalism break you physically, it will eventually break your spirit and replace it with a depravity of hopelessness.

To play and to win against a suffocating defense don't allow legalism thoughts to enter your mind. Once you let the devil know he is a defeated soul and he flees, you are left to battle your own depravity, but you are not alone. Romans 8:1,2 states: *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

Punish your depravity and your legalistic tendencies with the freedom available by Jesus Christ, and you truly will be made free of the law of sin and death and its mind games.

### ***Push the Ball whenever you can.***

Consistent offense is easier to play than consistent defense because it is more fun. That is why when the Pistons took away the Lakers offense by playing defense, the whole Lakers game all fell apart. Offense is also easier to learn than defense. Generally offensive basketball is also much more an individual effort than a team undertaking, and therein lies its greatest weakness. Something that a suffocating defense can more easily defeat.

As a potential basketball star, you can learn offensive basketball on your own, at the park, in the driveway, and to some extent even in the gym. You can turn out the lights in the garage and learn to dribble around all the cars and tools without seeing the ball or where you are going, its all fun. You can pretend you are Kobe and hit the winning three at the end to win the NBA championship at the park. Under those conditions Kobe will probably make at least two of three, you might only make one of ten, but it is still fun.

Fun offense is most fun however, when you can out run the other guys. To a certain extent “run and gun” is just an extension of your defense, not letting the opponent know what to expect. But with the modern emphasis on individual showboat plays and shots, team offense is something that a good coach must instill. That coaching for team play does two things, it shows the potential of your offense and it doesn’t allow the other guys to set up their defense, which is probably the most important. Defense wins championships in all sports, that is why making the most of your offensive opportunities is so important.

To shift that to the Christian perspective. God can by His grace give you a suffocating defense, but God enjoys offense too, and He is the best coach. The Bible does not call the church to huddle in cloisters lamenting on how bad the world is becoming. God gave the church the Great Commission to go into all the world, not to make religious converts, but to make disciples.

Making disciples of Jesus Christ is the most exciting thing that you can do with your life. Just like pushing the ball whenever you can, God is continually opening doors of opportunity you could not imagine a few dribbles, or passes earlier.

### ***Championship***

As in the song the spectators sing, “We are the champions my friend.” Romans 8 finishes in verses 37-39 with the ultimate inscription of the Championship of life. This epigraph of eternal life in the present reads: *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

### ***Seeds for Prayer***

I am persuaded that God has led and trained me for His purpose to do His work. In the end of his sermon on Psalm 30, Larry tells us not to try and restrict God to our understanding, or our time table to bring about His will in our lives. The opportunity in Eastern Washington looks fantastic from my understanding, we need to be able to draft a winning team to win God’s championship and our part of the Great Commission. Please intercede that God would bring about His provisions that would bring Him alone glory.