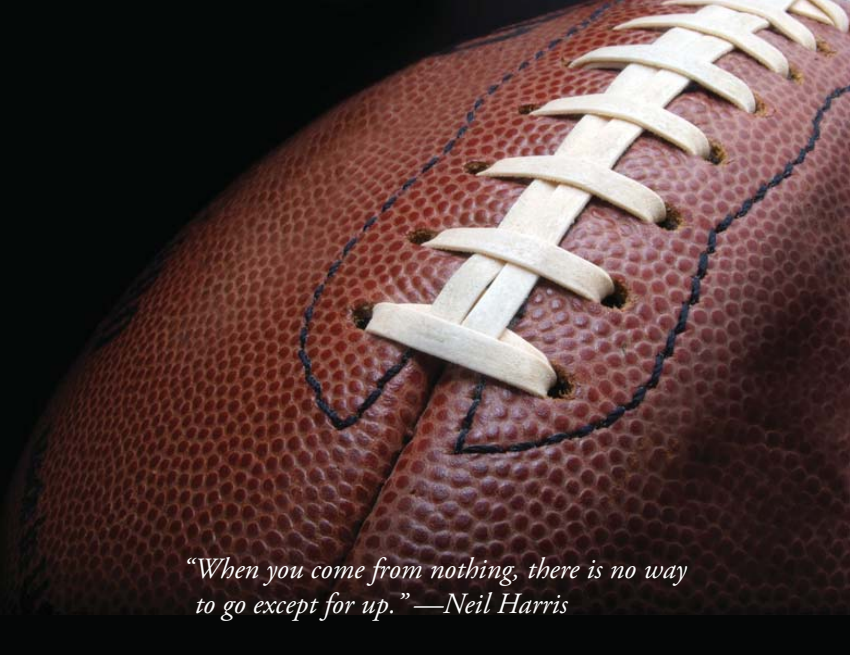


Thirty-Two Seconds to Go A Case of Motivation of Control, and Self-

by

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“When you come from nothing, there is no way to go except for up.” —Neil Harris

Folks, we are in the final seconds of the 1983 Big Eight college football conference championship game. It's been a wild game here in Norman, Oklahoma, as rivals Oklahoma and Nebraska battle it out for the conference championship. The Huskers are 11–0 and can make it 12–0 if they are able to hold off Oklahoma. Moments ago, the Sooners were second-and-one at the Nebraska 1-yard line, but a penalty has bumped them back to the six. Nebraska cornerback, Neil Harris, deflected a Danny Bradley pass and we are now in a fourth and goal situation. This is the final chance for the Sooners to stop the Huskers from victory. There's the snap; Bradley throws to Buster Rhymes in the end zone, but there's Harris again and he knocks down another pass with 32 seconds to go. Everyone is on their feet! The crowd goes wild! Harris has just stopped the Sooners and secured Nebraska's perfect 12–0 season, a third consecutive Big Eight conference title, and the Huskers' 22nd-straight victory.

Saturday, November 26, 1983, is a day that Neil Harris will always remember. He was put into play because the backup cornerback was injured during the game. Neil rose to the occasion and all of his training and sacrifice paid off that day. Harris played a defense position of cornerback for the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers from 1981–1984. Each year that Neil was a Cornhusker, they either won or tied for the Big Eight conference championship. During his years at Nebraska, they were ranked in the top 10 for most of all four seasons and included a 1982 Orange Bowl championship on their list of accomplishments. It was a great time to be a part of the University of Nebraska's football program led by Coach Tom Osborne.

It was a relatively short drive to Lincoln, Nebraska, from his native Kansas City, Kansas, but in many ways, life in Lincoln was a completely different world from what Neil had previously known. Harris' childhood was not an easy one, but his love of family provided early motivation for many of his accomplishments. One of Neil's earliest goals was to protect his mother and younger sister whom he helped to raise. Taking on that parental role at such an early age solidified Harris' desire to get his family out of their impoverished African-American neighborhood and into an area of greater safety and opportunities. Harris attended JC Harmon High School in Kansas City, Kansas, where he excelled in both football and basketball. Neil saw sports as an avenue toward his goals and realized that if he were able to go to college to play the sports he loved, he would also be equipped with an education that would further him and his family. Knowing that he would be able to get a college education through sports helped motivate Neil throughout high school to be successful in the classroom as well as on the playing field.

Harris could have attended other colleges and universities in the Midwest for either sport, but he chose football and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln because of its rich football culture and history. Neil received a scholarship from the University of Nebraska that covered all of his expenses. Moving to Lincoln to start his football life during the summer of 1981 was bittersweet. “Being away from home wasn't the easiest thing to do. It was hard knowing that my family was struggling and I was here pursuing a dream... Made me feel selfish in a way” (N. Harris, personal communication, April 6, 2013).

Harris did not realize that a new family was waiting for him in Lincoln. Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne built a player-support system with community members. Players were fortunate enough to have local host parents during their time at the university. Neil's adoptive parents were two of the most loving and inspirational adults Neil had ever had in his life. Steve and Kim took Neil in as though he were their own. Their own two children accepted and looked up to Neil as a big brother. "You know that movie *The Blind Side*? I can joke and say that I was almost their 'Big Mike'" (N. Harris, personal communication, April 6, 2013).

Despite these wonderful changes in his life, all was not easy. During his first two years at Nebraska, Harris did not see as much playing time as he was used to. "Those first couple years were rough...going from being a major contributor on the field (in high school) to having to scratch and claw my way into playing time" (N. Harris, personal communication, April 6, 2013). Neil wanted to earn his playing time. To play the cornerback position he had to be quick on his feet and able to make the necessary plays to stop opposing receivers from making catches. To prepare for this challenge, he spent extra time in the weight room and worked with the personal training staff to help advance his footwork and agility. It was clear that the level of competition within the team was high, but this did not stop Neil from pursuing a much more valuable role on the team. "If you want something, and I mean *truly* want something, there are no if's, and's, or but's about the situation... You grab life by the horns; you don't let life grab you" (N. Harris, personal communication, April 6, 2013).

Neil Harris was a collegiate athlete who never took his talents for granted and always put the team first. Neil had his shining moment in 1983, but never bragged about it. He realized that the relationships he built were even more important. Neil made friends easily. He was outgoing and enjoyed himself. Though he made friends and hung out with his teammates, a lot of his free time was spent with Steve, Kim, and their children. They encouraged Neil academically and professionally, and played a big part in his pursuit of a business degree. Neil never gave up on his dream of being able to give his mother the chance to live a better life.

Once Harris was given the opportunity to "move up" in life through his athletics and academics, he never stopped. Currently, Harris owns his own warehousing and distributing company that is operated out of Lincoln, Nebraska. Since starting, this business has branched out to Kansas City, New York, and even internationally in places like Japan. He continues to grow both professionally and personally through the hard work and persevering attitude he developed early in life. Harris has served as a sports mentor as head and assistant coaches (for girls and boys teams) in Nebraska's Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and even served on the Nebraska's AAU committee. Harris' resolve to improve his life, the lives of his family members, and countless others is an inspiration and a testament that hard work pays off.

Questions

1. Based on the case description, what personality constructs best describe Neil? (You can find a great list of personality constructs at: <http://ipip.ori.org/newIndexofScaleLabels.htm>.)
2. What aspects of Neil's behavior relate to intrinsic motivation? What are some that relate to extrinsic motivation? Which of these do you think dominated his behavior? Why?
3. How would you describe Neil's sense of self-efficacy? Justify your answer with information from the case description.
4. How would you describe Neil's locus of control? Justify your answer with information from the case description.
5. Using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_Systems_Theory), identify aspects from Neil's case that apply to: individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

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