

Safety Rodney Harrison says the Patriots now have a team full of guys with hearts like Troy Brown's: "We have good people in the locker room, real good character guys."⁷⁹⁷

Too many teams overemphasize "measurables," such as 40-yard-dash times and bench press repetitions, relative to intangibles such as a player's coachability, likability, selflessness, perseverance, and effort. The Patriots acquire players for their overall potential as football players, not their raw physical ability. By contrast, the Arizona Cardinals were losers for many years, in part because they drafted players for their skills, with insufficient concern for character. Again, Buchsbaum:

"Another awful pick was the Cardinals' selection of Michigan State OLB Anthony Bell with the fifth overall choice in the 1986 draft. Virtually everyone else had Bell rated as a second-round pick at best. Bell was a great workout guy but a mediocre player who lacked instincts. However, the Cardinals loved his workout and let his college coaches convince them that Bell had fine instincts and looked the way he did on film because that was the way he was told to play things and he was just being a loyal soldier."⁷⁹⁸

The Cardinals also made David Boston their #1 draft pick in 1999. Character is the only reason a guy as physically gifted as David Boston has now played for three different NFL teams.

Hire guys who love their work

"My best advice to you is to pursue the things you're passionate about... That's the foundation, in my opinion, to anything great."⁷⁹⁹

– *Patriots owner Robert Kraft, speaking to graduating college seniors*

"It's the self-starter in each of us that's really important. I don't think you can count on somebody else to motivate you to do something. You have to want to do it personally, and you have to provide that energy. It's unrealistic and unfair to expect someone else to push you in a positive direction. So you better pick out something you really like to do, because you will have to be your own driving force."⁸⁰⁰

– *Bill Belichick*

"I wouldn't go out and make myself feel the way you feel at training camp if I didn't love playing football, and with these guys in particular."⁸⁰¹

– *Patriots linebacker Mike Vrabel*

"Bill doesn't have a lot of patience for players that don't view football as being very important to them. All these guys are passionate about the game.

We definitely thought there were some things about the personality of this team [we inherited] we had to change.”⁸⁰²

– *Scott Pioli*

The hilarious Tom Lehrer song “Fight fiercely, Harvard”⁸⁰³ includes the line, “Albeit they possess the might, nonetheless we have the will.” Young “Billy” Belichick first witnessed passion defeat talent as a boy cheering for his hometown team, the Navy Midshipmen. Billy’s dad, Steve, remembers those Navy teams he helped coach: “Guys that were 165 pounds would hit a 200-pounder like he was a 125-pounder. . . They’re gung ho about the whole thing. Football [at Navy] is different than anything else. . . I had never seen so many small players knock the hell out of big players.”⁸⁰⁴

Because Belichick has reached the peak of professional football only after decades of devotion to his profession, he knows from personal experience that: 1) You must love your work to grind away at it every day; and, 2) Grinding away day after day, week after week, year after year is the only way to achieve success. Belichick advises Boston College students accordingly:

“I would not take the job that pays more than the other one. That’s the wrong reason to take it. Do something that you really love. If you can find something you love to do, it makes it easier to come to work everyday regardless of what you are getting paid.”⁸⁰⁵

As an employer, Belichick hires only players who, like Patriots offensive lineman Stephen Neal, can say, “I’m here doing my dream. I’ve always dreamed of playing football.”⁸⁰⁶

Tom Brady’s success demonstrates both the necessity and efficacy of passion in professional development. When Brady arrived in the NFL, he lacked the physical attributes associated with quarterbacking greatness, but he strengthened his arm and body and improved his mental game to compensate for other weaknesses (especially his non-existent “speed”). Brady jokes that if you keep grinding long enough, you too may become an “overnight sensation.” Success sneaks up on those who unceasingly strive to better themselves. Outsiders, oblivious to the daily grind, see only the apparently rapid results. Those who succeed remember the long struggle:

“[E]ight years removed from high school. . . being a professional quarterback on a team that’s been as successful as we have. You don’t even dream of stuff like that. At least I don’t think you do. It all seems like it’s been such a progression. I’ve just been taking the next step. What do I need to do to get better? What do I need to do to find an opportunity? Just continuing to take coaching.”⁸⁰⁷

Belichick, who has been grinding away at football his entire life, knows his success derives from his unquenchable love for the game. Belichick’s passion is obvious to everyone. Jim Schwartz, who worked for Belichick in Cleveland and now

serves as the Tennessee Titans' defensive coordinator, bonded with Belichick through their shared passion:

"It's a not a job to us. That's what we struck on. People always said Belichick would burn out and I would burn out. But imagine making a living with something you love to do. It's not work for me to be at the office at midnight. It's never a job where I say, 'Hey, I've got to go to work.' I'd rather watch game tape than watch 'Spin City.' We had a common bond."⁸⁰⁸

New York Giants general manager Ernie Accorsi says, "Here's a guy who wanted to be a head coach when he was like 6 years old. That's all he wanted to do in his life. It's not a guy who said, 'Oh, I think I'll get into coaching.' This was obviously his goal. His passion. His complete understanding of the game was amazing."⁸⁰⁹

Belichick knows Patriots coaches can teach tactics and techniques but can't instill passion in someone who is just collecting paychecks: "If a player has a high level of desire, we can mold his work habits or the methods that he uses so that he'll be more productive."⁸¹⁰ Patriots fullback Fred McCrary agrees: "I just love football. I absolutely love the game. If you don't love it, the NFL has a way of chewing you up and spitting you out."⁸¹¹ Barry Sanders, Ricky Williams, and Robert Smith are three outstanding running backs who suddenly retired from the NFL while still highly productive because they lacked passion.

Realizing how essential passion is, Belichick and Pioli hire players as passionate about football as they are. Belichick's Patriots are physically gifted men with childlike enthusiasm for playing football. Pioli's scouting system digs up players who love not only playing and winning games each Sunday but also the year-round hard work that separates winners from losers. Consider the reverential tone of Patriots players' childhood NFL memories and their addict-like obsession with playing football:

- Offensive lineman *Damien Woody* grew up worshiping the Washington Redskins offensive line. He loved watching "the hogs" part a sea of Miami Dolphins defenders for running back John Riggins in Super Bowl XVII: "You had to love that team. The way those guys ran the football. They just pounded people. ... [M]y favorite part was watching those boys blow open big holes for Riggins to run through."⁸¹²
- Cornerback *Ty Law* envisioned himself playing wide receiver while growing up in Pittsburgh "watching Lynn Swann making those acrobatic catches. I had dreams of doing that in the NFL."⁸¹³
- As a youth, wide receiver *Troy Brown* threw passes to himself, imagining himself catching balls in the Super Bowl. After sitting out four games in 2003 with a leg injury, Brown caught his first pass and threw the ball in the air because "I was ecstatic about coming back. I love playing the game, that's what I love to do."⁸¹⁴

After winning his second Super Bowl ring, Brown, now in his 12th season with the Patriots, swore “the fire will never die out, no matter how old [I] get.”⁸¹⁵

- Wide receiver *David Patten* missed the second half of the 2003 Super Bowl season due to injury. After recovering, he became overwhelmed with joy before the Patriots’ first 2004 preseason game: “I felt like a rookie all over again, like it was my first game. That first series, I was so out of breath because my adrenaline was up so much. There was so much excitement. It hit me 30 minutes before we went out, just to be in pads again.”⁸¹⁶
- The day after his father died, special teams captain *Larry Izzo* helped the Patriots beat the Cleveland Browns:

“Losing [my father] the day before the Cleveland game, I mean that wasn’t a question of whether I wouldn’t play—he would’ve wanted me to play. He would’ve been disappointed if I didn’t play. My career has always been very important to him and my family, so for me to not play in that game, was not even a factor. ...I’ve dedicated this whole season to him and his memory. He’s the reason I’m [playing in the Super Bowl]. He taught me to play football at a young age. Football’s always been a good part of our lives and our family. It’s going to be a tough deal, but I know wherever he is, he’s watching. He’s proud.”⁸¹⁷

- Rookie defensive tackle *Vince Wilfork* practically pinched himself before his first preseason game: “All my life I wanted to play in the NFL. Before the game I actually took a minute to realize where I was and look at the fans and realize I am actually here. A dream come true. Every game I will appreciate. I don’t care if it is preseason or Super Bowl.”⁸¹⁸ Wilfork has been focused on the NFL for decades: “I can think back to when I was 5 or 6 years old and telling my father I’m going to be a professional football player.”⁸¹⁹

Decades later, these players’ passion remains undiminished. Tom Brady swears he even loves off-season training: “There’s always room to improve. There’s always room for progress. I just enjoy playing football. I like lifting weights. I like training in the offseason. I love training camp. I know that’s sick, but I do. I like practicing and I like playing.”⁸²⁰ Hearing this, a grinning Bill Belichick told a reporter, “I can’t wait to remind Tom sometime this August about how much he loves training camp.”⁸²¹ Brady is so dedicated he actually squeezed in a full workout, starting at 5:00 a.m., the day the team visited the White House and met the President, even though coaches had exempted players from working out that day.⁸²²

Admittedly, not every Patriot masochistically loves the daily torture of training. An unnamed player, reminded that training camp started a week later, said, “Oh [expletive], don’t remind me.”⁸²³ That unnamed Patriot might have been guard Joe Andruzzi, who said of training camp: “My favorite part? Going to bed. This is a

trying time of year. It takes a lot out of you. It seems the turning point is when the (preseason) games start. You finally get to hit someone else. After a while you just get tired of hitting the same guys. It's refreshing to get some fresh meat in there."⁸²⁴

Because Belichick and Pioli know you can only become great if you enjoy your work on a daily basis, the Patriots draft and sign only players who love football and are dedicated to improving themselves in every way possible. Cyclist Lance Armstrong, for example, was an excellent cyclist until he nearly died of cancer. After beating cancer, Armstrong fell in love with training in a way he never had before. Armstrong has since won six consecutive Tours de France and is the Tour's only six-time winner.

Patriots safety Rodney Harrison is a football fanatic who fits the Belichick-Pioli profile perfectly:

"I've been playing this game since I was 6 years old. And it's just a great opportunity. I love it. Just play with passion. Play around, make sure your teammates play as hard as they can play. And just be an example... Being able to go out there and do something that you've been doing your whole life and just have fun doing it—the camaraderie with the guys, just the hours you spend, the sacrifices you make around your family. It's just wonderful to be able to go out there and play a violent sport and just kick butt."⁸²⁵

Belichick first noticed Rodney Harrison was special when Belichick coached the 1999 AFC Pro Bowl team (as a stand-in for his then-boss Bill Parcells). Belichick was frustrated because players weren't taking game preparation seriously: "we had a couple of guys that didn't wear their shoes out to practice. They came out in sandals. A lot of other guys didn't even bother to tie them. A lot of guys weren't too interested in the game plan or the plays—just pick them up at the game or whatever."⁸²⁶ Harrison's motivation lept out at Belichick: "At practice he was out there trying to get it right. It was important to him. You could tell that it may have been a meaningless game, but it wasn't meaningless to him. He was competing in it."⁸²⁷ Belichick added: "He was very intense in terms of [asking], 'What are we doing, how are we doing it, how do you want us to play this?'"⁸²⁸

In his commencement address at the New England Institute of Technology, Belichick told graduating seniors that he seeks "passion, commitment and staying power"⁸²⁹ in prospective Patriots. Belichick is living proof: he has studied football literally his entire life because the game excites him. He loves winning, but all coaches and players do. Belichick loves sweating every detail. After decades analyzing football footage, Belichick is a master at understanding the intricacies of what he sees on film or on the practice field. Patriots linebacker Mike Vrabel is astounded by his coach's ability to instantly interpret what he sees: "I can watch the film for an hour and not come up with [the insights] he comes up with."⁸³⁰ Ray Mickens, who played safety on Belichick's New York Jets defense, is similarly amazed: "You can't get anything past that guy. I've seen him in action when he was here. He sees things that