

## PROTECT PEACE ON YOUR TEAM

Helmets were off and fists were flying!

In a particularly rigorous practice leading up to my high school's biggest football game, tensions boiled over. We were undefeated and making the state playoffs depended on our beating the top ranked team in the state of Michigan. After one play during a scrimmage, an offensive player popped off to a defensive linebacker and an explosion erupted!

My coach, a devout Christian, confided it was his worst nightmare. A quick YouTube search of "teammates fighting each other" yields violent scenes of players turning on each other at all levels of competition.

All teams experience tension and anger. While the negative impact of anger on a team is well documented (e.g., disunity, emotional distance, latent conflict, poor performance) the Scriptures stress one result that is seldom discussed: anger potentially gives Satan a spiritual foothold.

The Greek word for *foothold* can be translated as *opportunity*. In other words, if teammates allow tension and anger to grow, they unwittingly give Satan an opportunity to push them further away from each other.

In instructing us about anger, the apostle Paul makes an interesting observation. "In your anger do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). He wisely notes that anger in and of itself is not necessarily sin. In fact, there are times when anger is the appropriate response. This is good news for those of us who participate in sports.

For instance, anger among teammates can be a powerful motivator to address conflict and set things right for the sake of the team. When handled correctly, anger can be a "spring of action" that helps athletes and coaches address tension and feelings of unfairness. However, Paul is quick to warn that anger can easily open the door for sin. The Scriptures state that we should be careful our anger does not lead to evil, which is why only the foolish give "full vent to anger" (Prov. 29:11). While anger may be helpful in motivating us to address interpersonal conflict, we should not camp out there and let it build.

### HOW MIGHT SATAN USE ANGER TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN TEAMMATES?

One of the central problems with unresolved anger is that it profoundly colors your perspective of another person. Most of us understand that no person is all good, or all bad. However, an angry person can easily lose sight of the good a fellow teammate does and only focus on the bad. "Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit," admonishes Solomon (Eccl. 7:9). A habitually

angry person is always provoked by the actions of another. Anger, if unchecked, can lead to bitterness, which communication theorists define as *anger that has cemented*. If you find yourself stuck in a rut where everything your teammate does makes you angry, then it would be wise to consider, as Paul does, how your anger may have given the devil a foothold (Eph. 4:26).