



Philequity Corner (December 11, 2017)

By Wilson Sy

A sea of blue and green

For two weeks, the country was gripped by the UAAP Finals. Politics and other national issues were temporarily set aside as the Ateneo Blue Eagles and LaSalle Green Archers battled for the UAAP basketball crown. Protest colors of black and white as well as political colors of yellow, red and plaids were cast in the background. Instead, millions were glued to their TV sets as Araneta Coliseum was flooded by a sea of blue and green. More than 22,000 students, alumni and their families filled the Big Dome to the rafters and cheered their respective schools.

'Best game ever'

Many sports columnists, netizens and basketball fans hailed Game 3 as 'the best game ever.' There were many exciting plays, scoring streaks and thrilling lead changes. Ateneo seized a 10-point lead in the fourth quarter but LaSalle staged a furious rally and the game's outcome was not decided until the final seconds.

Teamwork vs. superstar

On paper, LaSalle clearly had the superior lineup because of two-time league MVP Ben Mbala. With his powerful offensive arsenal and menacing presence on the defensive end, Mbala looked like UAAP's version of LeBron James. Meanwhile, Ateneo had lost seven of its star players and prized prospects due to academic reasons. Hence, the Blue Eagles heavily relied on teamwork and placed their complete trust in their coaching team.

Tab Baldwin – a world-class coach

The Blue Eagle squad was led by Head Coach Tab Baldwin. The American-Kiwi is a world-renowned tactician who has coached many national teams such as New Zealand, Jordan and Lebanon. He has received numerous awards and has performed in the biggest tournaments globally. Currently, he is also a consultant for Gilas Pilipinas. Not many may know this but Coach Tab took up accounting in college. This may have contributed to his systematic approach to basketball and coaching. Those who know him say that he is obsessed with details, numbers, statistics and how these relate to basketball.

System vs. mayhem

To overcome the physical play and trademark mayhem defense of the Green Archers, the Blue Eagles had to rely on the system espoused by their renowned leader. Under Coach Tab, the Ateneo squad put more emphasis on methodical set plays, meticulous defensive strategies and a disciplined approach to playing. Further, Coach Tab's offensive system is characterized by adequate spacing, crisp passing and a focus on teamwork, which is typical of European basketball. Undoubtedly, the players had to work hard and dedicate themselves to the process in order to learn and apply this style.

Heart, soul and courage

The Ateneo players had to go through a weight training regimen to prepare themselves for the physicality of Ben Mbala and the athleticism of the Green Archers. Coach Tab also laid out advance

preparations and a very tough training camp to build *esprit de corps* and imbibe the concept of teamwork among the players. He likewise emphasized the importance of mental toughness and being able to perform in difficult and challenging situations. But most importantly, according to Coach Tab, it was the 'heart, soul and courage' of the players that won the championship for Ateneo.

Lucky charm

Though preparation and hard work are essential to success, the ball is round in team sports and luck can sometimes play a role. Three times during the playoffs, the Blue Eagles had their backs against the wall. But time and again, the team was saved by the late second heroics of Ateneo's lucky charm, Isaac Go.

Hail Mary shot

The first time Coach Tab saw Isaac Go, he asked who the 'big, fat kid' was. To the delight of Ateneo fans, Isaac has improved by leaps and bounds this year. The intense pre-season preparation has allowed him to harness his high basketball IQ and blossom into a reliable big man for Ateneo. This culminated in the Hail Mary shot which he sank in Game 3 to quell the Green Archers' last rally. Though he has been hailed as Ateneo's bail-out guy, Isaac credited his teammates and coaches for trusting him to make shots in the clutch. As a true blue Xavieran, Isaac noted that Game 3 coincided with St. Francis Xavier's feast day. The gentle giant even added that Xavier's patron saint may have had a hand in his Hail Mary shot.

A classy gesture by LaSalle

Minutes after the game, LaSalle lit the buildings inside its Taft campus with blue light. Ateneo patron Manny Pangilinan said that this was a 'gracious and sportsmanlike gesture' and 'an example to emulate.' From the bottom of our hearts, we thank the LaSalle community for the classy and heartwarming act.

Lessons learned from Tab and the Blue Eagles

Coach Tab always highlighted the importance of preparation, hard work and excellence. He emphasized the value of practicing a system and the discipline of following it even in the face of adversity.

Not surprisingly, these are the same values that we espouse to clients during our investor education forums and in many of our articles. Just like in basketball, preparation, focus and hard work are requisites for investing. Being disciplined in following an investment strategy is also very important especially during trying times. Though basketball and investments are totally different fields, there is a lot to learn from exemplary coaches and athletes such as Tab Baldwin and the Ateneo Blue Eagles.

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