

When God Speaks Through Linsanity

I have 1,001 reasons to love the Jeremy Lin story. First, the obvious: I'm human and, like anyone with a pulse, love a good ol' fashioned underdog story. Few things can top the tale of a Harvard walk-on-turned-All-Ivy-Leaguer who goes undrafted, bounces around a few NBA teams and the NBA's Development League, and then gets a Hail Mary chance with a team in the world's biggest media market. Fast-forward all of two weeks since the New York Knicks point guard was inserted into a game because of teammates' injuries, and we're all swept up in Linsanity.

But I also love Lin's story because of personal connections. I was raised in Hong Kong, where most of my friends were Asian-American, and I have family and friends from Taiwan. Having been a lifelong hoops junkie who played on high school and national teams (since I was born in Hong Kong), I also know what it's like to always be the guy on the court who doesn't look like everyone else and is, in some way, representing an entire race. It's thrilling to watch a guy break down stereotypes in a game that's historically been saturated with racial and cultural undercurrents.

Then there are the more underlying reasons for cheering on this Linccredible run. From a purely sports perspective, the 23-year-old "nobody" stands out in a league built around prima donnas—and on a team that was mired in the egos of at least two of them. His old-school, team-first focus on winning, as well as his atypical deference to teammates amid the media spotlight adds to the intrigue. As Fox Sports columnist Greg Couch wrote, "It took someone whom no one believed in to get a team of unmatched parts to believe in itself." There we go again with that All-American *Hoosiers* psyche.

Psychologically speaking, Lin's story fascinates us to the point that every columnist and his or her mother seems to be offering a new facet to analyze with each game. And it's true: Lin personifies something far bigger, a story of hope that each of us connects to no matter if it's an account fleshed out through a basketball player, a liberated POW, a widowed mother or a rescued sex slave. We were born to cheer on those rising from the ashes, just as we were born with the innate ability to hope for something more. Because of the way our sports-obsessed nation elevates athletes, Lin is the latest icon who typifies more than someone who can put a round object through a metal hoop; he's a living emblem for millions of overcoming obstacles, breaking down stereotypes, proving the doubters wrong and a host of other inspirational messages.

But as wonderful as those themes are, I believe there's a deeper message to be heard among the Linsanity. In fact, I believe it may be the voice of God whispering among the deafening cheers, as He so often does with a nation when we stop to actually listen.

It's not by chance that in a matter of months we've had two of the most remarkable sports stories to emerge in years, out of nowhere (or more precisely, if we're sticking with the sports terminology, out of left field). It's also not by chance both stories revolved around young men who publicly talked about their love for Jesus.

Unlike Lin, Denver Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow was already accustomed to the hype, having been a Heisman winner mentioned among college football's all-time greats. Yet when Tebowmania began this past NFL season (let's be honest, we're still riding its wake) and sparked everything from the "Tebowing" trend to heated political debates, even he couldn't deny that something else was at work. Tebow—as another emblem—divided our nation like few athletes ever have. And clearly, it wasn't just because people wondered how a guy with so many supposed flaws to his game could keep pulling out last-second wins.

For now, Lin has escaped such malicious personal scrutiny. I wonder how much of this is linked to Tebow's public display of honoring God; though upfront about his faith, Lin has been less demonstrative—plus, there are countless different variables involved in each situation. Time will tell when the fawning press will turn on Lin, but at this point, it's simply remarkable that both men have been given such a global platform with countless media outlets hanging on their every word. God has, is and will continue to use this to glorify Himself and speak. Here are some of things I believe He's saying through Linsanity and Tebowmania:

1) Young warriors still exist. Every generation in the last 50 years—from Boomers to Gen X to Millennials—has been dubbed godless, hopeless and lost. Through a 23- and a 24-year-old (among others), God is reminding us that He continues to raise up Daniels among today's seeking generation. These young men and women will walk with clean hands and a pure heart, and will refuse to bow before other idols (see Ps. 24:4). But they can't do this without the church's support. I don't care how strong Jeremy Lin and Tim Tebow are in their faith, they're young men thrown into the center of an "anything goes" environment. As you watch the madness surrounding both of them, don't just be a bystander; pray fervently that they'll remain strong warriors on the frontlines. And pray for other warriors whom God will raise up on similar platforms.

2) Expect to be hated. The standard of walking the walk of Jesus remains high, exclusive and controversial. (How many times have we seen athletes thank Jesus after a win and then get caught with their pants down the next morning?) In today's culture, those who actually practice what they preach will puzzle, mesmerize, frustrate and infuriate the secular media. Tebow isn't hated just for thanking Jesus whether he wins or loses a game; he's despised because so far no one has been able to poke a hole in the authenticity of his lifestyle. Jesus promised us: "You will be hated by everyone because of

me" (Matt. 10:22) ...

3) ... But win with love. Tebow's wins on the field may have momentarily stunned the critics, but it's his missions work that's silenced them. And while Lin has certainly defused the cynics with his play, he's won over virtually everyone with a selfless attitude that exudes the humility of Christ. I don't highlight this to elevate these guys to mythological status, but to show how doing what Jesus said to do—aiming to be the last, not the first; leading by serving—can actually conquer the hardest hearts. It's cliché but true: Love wins in the end.

4) We don't need another American idol. Going to a prophetic extreme, you could say Lin represents a literal changing of the (point) guard, as America loses more of its global power and China continues to rise. Given that, there's nothing wrong with a nation experiencing tough times to look to a couple of feel-good stories such as Lin's and Tebow's for inspiration. But the problem is that we've become a society mesmerized by whoever's next in queue with their 15 minutes fame. Putting Lin and Tebow aside as people, Linsanity and Tebowmania are just our latest fixes. I doubt our national obsession with average Joes attaining celebrity status will end soon, so in the meantime God seems to be periodically inserting those who follow Him into the limelight to not only encourage us, but also warn us of the cost of our foolish, wicked and idolatrous ways.

Even Lin recognizes this. When asked by a *San Jose Mercury News* reporter what he's been pondering amid his meteoric rise to fame, he gave an honest yet telling answer: "There is so much temptation to hold onto my career even more now. So I'm thinking about how I can trust God more. How can I surrender more? How can I bring Him more glory?"

Whether we're participants or bystanders in Linsanity, Tebowmania or whatever's next, whether we're hated or loved

for our stance as believers, I pray we're all asking the same thing.

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