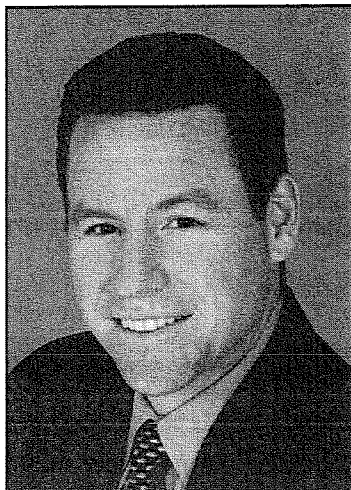


YOU CAN'T SCORE FROM THE BENCH

By Spencer H. Silverglate



In choosing my first words as FDLA President, I find myself thinking about Billy.

"Billy?" you say. "Wasn't he an FDLA President in the 70's?" "Or a speaker at the Annual Meeting?" "Maybe a legislator from Tampa?"

No, Billy was none of these. In fact, Billy never took the bar exam and probably never even heard of it. At just four feet tall, Billy's idea of a test was reaching the Fruit Loops at the top of the pantry without breaking too many shelves in the process.

Billy, you see, was a 7-year-old boy who played on my son's 9-and-under baseball team. In addition to being the youngest, smallest kid on the team, Billy was weak on most baseball fundamentals. As you might imagine, Billy spent a lot of time on the bench, and when sides were chosen for a scrimmage, Billy was the perennial last pick.

Billy was persistent, though. He showed up to every practice and every game and always cheered the team on.

Defining the precise turning point in a person's life is difficult, but I suppose for Billy, it happened unexpectedly at a routine Saturday morning practice. It was scrimmage time, and the two team captains were surveying the available talent. My son, one of the captains, had first choice. Before he could open his mouth, the best player on the team, Tony, strutted to his side, naturally assuming that, as usual, he'd be the first pick. Billy was in the back of the

group waiting, as usual, for the other 12 players to be called before him.

But this time, things didn't go as scripted. My eyes may have deceived me, but that morning, little Billy looked six feet tall when he ran out on the field as the number-one draft choice. When I later asked my son why he did it, he said simply that Billy needed it more than Tony.

I identify with Billy when I think about my defining moment in the FDLA. It was the moment that led me to the privilege of writing this, my first president's column. It was my first meeting six years ago. I was the guy in the corner of the room who didn't know a soul. During the course of the event, Tom Dukes, Jerry Weedon, Valerie Shea, Mark Antonelli, Bob Dietz, Doug McIntosh, Jack McEwan, Dick Collins and Ralph Marchbank—all past or future presidents of the organization—introduced themselves to me, one by one. I hinted to each that I might like to get involved, and that was all it took. In the FDLA, as it turns out, if you want to get involved, involved you will get—even if, like Billy and me, you're not the likeliest pick.

I wholeheartedly thank the past presidents who got me involved in this fine organization. I will seek their counsel frequently in the coming year. I also plan to continue their legacy of getting new members and even not-so-new members involved. If you're interested, please e-mail me at ssilverglate@cswm.com.