

FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

*Untold Stories from
Behind the Lights*

Dr. Nathaniel Hearne



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Dedication



This book could not have been written apart from the love, support, strength, and wisdom of my wife, Callie; my parents, Olean and Rayfield Hearne; and my brothers and sisters, Evelyn, Rayfield Jr., Mittie, Gloria, Jackie, Kenneth, and Debbie.

They have all given me the strength and encouragement to confront, articulate, and embrace my past experiences, and compile those experiences into this book. I also want to thank my children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and my many nieces and nephews for the inspiration they gave me to write this book. I love you all!

Acknowledgements



Friday Night Lights: Untold Stories from Behind the Lights is the result of the wisdom and generosity of many people: Among them my parents, siblings, children, relatives, and a number of friends.

Over the past 40 years, I have had the good fortune to coach, teach, preach, mentor, and serve as an administrator at a number of public schools and religious institutions across the state of Texas. I would like to thank the athletes, students, parents, and educators I encountered along the way. You were a major influence and encouragement in my decision to write this book.

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Coach Hearne was a teacher, coach, & administrator at Permian High School in Odessa, Texas for 10 years.

Introduction



I have been connected with the Church and public schools in the state of Texas for more than three decades. In those thirty-plus years, there is a tragedy I've seen happen over and over again. Students fail to reach their maximum potential and do not grow up to become responsible contributing members of our society.

I have watched and listened as, one by one, students paraded through my office with stories of defeat, rejection, and outright abandonment—stories of how they were cast aside by their parents, ignored by their peers, and rejected by the Church, their schools, and society as a whole.

Though the students were of different ethnicities and their situations not always the same, they had two things that linked them together: troubled relationships in the home, and a lack of knowledge of Jesus the Christ.

Through much assessment of the experiences I've had, and analysis of the types of repeating problems I've seen through the years, I've come to believe that if those in leadership will change the standards by which they measure success, there will be a profoundly positive impact on the development of our country's children.

Being a former athlete and participating in organized sports on the high school and college level, both as a coach and a player, I've seen success measured in a variety of ways. Many sports teams, especially those with winning traditions, have rules, guidelines, or beliefs they have woven into the very fabric of their organization from top to bottom. These rules are often placed in a

team handbook that is presented to the players and referred to by the coaching staff as the “bible” for that particular team.

Players are then coached to believe in this Team Bible philosophy. They are taught to encourage their teammates to believe in and have faith in the system; practice hard and everyone will experience miraculous success. The trophy or championship rides on whether or not the Team Bible is followed.

During my years of involvement with organized sports teams, including football, basketball, track, and baseball, I’ve had the pleasure of participating both as a player and a coach on a number of championship teams that used this philosophy. I call this philosophy *secular success*. Secular success is determined and measured by natural, human standards. There are objective guidelines that players follow that are spelled out clearly. Adherence to the Team Bible and this measure of secular success can, indeed, help win championships. But rarely do the goals measured by secular success address the long-term, inner character development of the athlete. The goals are focused on the immediacy of the competition season.

Lasting success is only possible when we submit ourselves to God’s Word and become followers of Jesus Christ in word and in deed. When a leader includes God’s principles within his or her action plans, there will not only be secular success, but *biblical success* as well. It is through achieving personal biblical success that one can effectively lead and guide others, best preparing them for success in life.

I’ve tried to live my life against the standards God has placed before me. I believe that, with Jesus the Christ who strengthens me, nothing is impossible to achieve. When you connect those kinds of beliefs with hard work, it will always produce positive results. These are the beliefs I have attempted to instill in the many

students I've encountered as a teacher, an administrator, and as a pastor, and to the athletes I've coached.

I've spent the better part of twenty years coaching a nexus of different athletic teams. One opportunity God blessed me with was coaching football at Permian High School in Odessa, Texas.

During my time as an assistant coach in the football program at Permian, I was fortunate to have been part of the State Championship team that was also named National Champions in 1989, and the State Championship team in 1991. Both of these teams had perfect seasons, which, at that time, was an accomplishment made by only one other team in the history of Texas high school football on the Class 5A level—The 1985 Houston Yates team.

Permian had a tremendous reputation for winning football championships (1965, 1972, 1980, 1984, 1989, and 1991). In those days, they were the epitome of high school football success. They were so well-known, that in 1988 an author came to Odessa to follow us through our football season that year with the intent of writing a book about us. That book, *Friday Night Lights*, made the New York Times Top Ten Bestseller List.

In December 2004, a major motion picture based on the book was released. According to an article in *Sports Illustrated* magazine, the *Friday Night Lights* movie was ranked as one of the top ten best sports movies ever made.¹ Public opinion of the movie, according to national reviews, was so favorable that two years later a television show was created and it became an Emmy Award-winning series.

From my experiences in coaching, the accolades bestowed upon those young men during that time and the championship teams they played on, came as a direct result of their belief in the philosophy of secular success. Since 1965, the rallying cry for

Permian has been “MOJO.” For a Permian Panther, MOJO encapsulates everything strong and successful about Permian. Adherence to the MOJO tradition and success go hand-in-hand.

Now, I’m not advocating that having a secular success goal is all bad. As a coach, I am fully aware of the importance and crucial value of a solid game plan. What I am saying is this: Over the years, many of the students and players—of all ethnicities—I’ve had the opportunity to work with in classrooms and sporting arenas all across the state of Texas, have told me later how valuable those beliefs I taught them regarding biblical success have been in their lives.

I’ve been given many opportunities to build biblical success into those around me. I’ve served as a teacher, coach, and administrator at Permian High School and in a number of schools across the state. For fifteen years, I served as pastor of several different Methodist churches. In this book I share with you many of those stories. I also chronicle my personal struggles as a child growing up in a segregated society. There is much to learn from my self-awareness of how others treated me, and how I responded. I grew up in poverty, and those experiences gave me first-hand knowledge of what it’s like to live in at-risk conditions—not knowing where the next meal was coming from, heading off to school each day with patches on my clothes and holes in my shoes, and not knowing from month to month if my family would be evicted from our home. Being in those situations taught me the importance of recognizing the advantages of disadvantage and the disadvantage of advantages that living for Jesus will bring. You will see how I later then taught advantages of faith in Christ Jesus to the students I encountered to help them achieve eternal success.

Ultimately, this book is about training our children in the core values that make up their character and helping them to think

differently when faced with perceived disadvantages in life. No matter who they are: at-risk kids, honor students, students with special needs, dropouts, athletes, or general population students, they must be taught to believe that there is no mountain too high to climb and no valley too deep to emerge from. I really do believe that in the United States of America, no child should be left behind.

If you are someone who is serious about improving our American society, if you are serious about doing your part to educate our children so they are properly prepared as this nation's next generation, then begin here with me by making a serious commitment to training yourself in the knowledge of biblical success. You will then be equipped to go into your circle of influence in the home, in the classroom, or on the field, and build a legacy of character into our youth that will last a lifetime.