

THE BE

EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS TO MEN

Use Failure as Fuel

LARRY FITZGERALD ALMOST WON THE SUPER BOWL. HE WON'T QUIT UNTIL HE FINISHES THE JOB

Maybe it's easier not knowing how close you came to victory. Were you one of two finalists for a job, or one of 50? After you gave her your number, did she consider calling you, or toss your card? Without knowing the backstory, you can rationalize away the outcome: The job wasn't right. You weren't her type. But you? You're fine. Fine! You just need to find a better match.

But what if you *did* know? What if you could measure the distance between yourself and the finish line—and know you were good, just not good enough? It would change you. It'd tell you that you weren't fine, that you needed to improve. It would be that simple: *I need to improve.*

Larry Fitzgerald knows how close he came, and it was pretty damn close. Two minutes, 37 seconds. That's how much time remained in last season's Super Bowl when the Arizona Cardinals wide

receiver, arguably the best in the league, scored a touchdown to put his team ahead of the Pittsburgh Steelers—a lead his team then lost and never regained. Two minutes and 37 seconds. That was the distance between success and failure.

Try ignoring that. You can't. Fitzgerald can't. So here's what he did a week after the loss: He sat down and watched his game footage. All of it. An entire season's worth. (He does this every year. Nobody tells him to do it; he just knows it helps.) He took notes, identified problems, and then consulted with his coach. "I need to drop my hips a little more. I need to focus my eyes down more, so I don't give defenders any indicators," he said.

Then Fitzgerald created an off-season training regimen to make himself better. Two minutes and 37 seconds better.

"You have to witness your work and see your flaws," he says. "It can be difficult for others to critique you, so you have to be extremely critical of yourself. You have to look at yourself and say, 'I need to improve on this specific thing.' You can never be content."

And by talking to his coach, he made sure he'd stick to the program. Tell someone your goals and you'll raise that person's expectations as well as your own. Remember that the next time you're trying to lose weight or kick a bad habit. With others watching, you'll feel an obligation to keep going.

Fitzgerald feels it. He talks openly about self-improvement. But after immersing himself in game footage, he did not immediately start that training regimen he designed. Instead, he left town. Left the country. Left everything familiar.

STIFFE

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MOROCCO MAY HAVE BEAUTIFUL beaches, but Fitzgerald prefers its ragtag markets. "They make really nice rugs," the big man says. "And their wooden doors have such a nice rustic look."

It's like *Antiques Roadshow: Larry Fitzgerald Edition*, and it was part of his Super Bowl recovery. Fitzgerald toured the world this year. He visited the troops in Iraq and Kuwait. He bought papyrus in Egypt. Explored Zimbabwe and Botswana. Did whatever it is tourists do in Namibia.

"It gave me an opportunity to really recharge," he says. "I wasn't checking the Internet or reading *ESPN*. I went 37 days without watching TV, and I didn't miss it one bit."

Athletes talk a lot about clearing their minds. It isn't about letting loose. It's about gaining control. When you focus intently on something, the way Fitzgerald does with football, you can grow to resent it. A job, a weight-loss regimen—these things take time and energy. They'll consume your life if you let them. But you need balance.

So expand yourself. Head to a hiking trail or take in a woodworking class. Make time for something new, and the old won't weigh you down. You can be your own good influence.

Fitzgerald works that way. He used to travel with buddies, the way most athletes do. But when he joined friends in Germany to see the World Cup in 2006, he was annoyed that they only wanted to party and find women. (Germany is excellent for both.) Fitzgerald, meanwhile, was hungry to visit national attractions and museums. So he started traveling alone, and still does. He sees exactly what he wants to see.

Once you feel in control of your time, you have renewed strength to tackle your biggest challenges. After a month or so of touring the world after the Super Bowl, Fitzgerald naturally started thinking about football. He was pumped and eager. "I started wondering, 'Man, what are the guys are doing? Anybody out there getting better than me right now?'" he says. "When it was time to go back, I was ready to jump into the regimen completely."

ASK LARRY FITZGERALD WHAT WAS different about last season, and he'll give you the dullest answer ever produced by a Super Bowl player: "We played a month longer than we used to play, which was a different experience," he says. That's like asking President Obama what changed after he won the election and hearing him say, "I live in a bigger house."

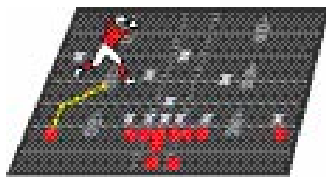
But Fitzgerald has trained his mind this way. He doesn't dwell, because

really, there's nothing to dwell on. Failure is just a mile marker on your way to success: It shows you how far you have come and how far you need to go.

So after he returned from his travels, and with months to go before he'd report to training camp, Fitzgerald devoted himself to fitness and nutrition. That means not just following

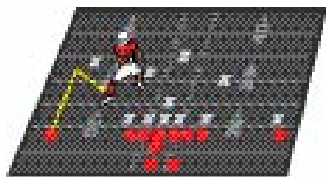
Run Larry's routes

Rule your backyard game with plays from the Cardinals' pass game coordinator, Mike Miller.



THE SLANT

This is perfect if your QB's arm is lousy. If you're to the left of your QB, start with your left foot on line of scrimmage (or vice versa). Run straight for three steps, and then cut across at a 45-degree angle. "Expect the ball to be in flight," Miller says.



THE CURL

If you can't run fast and long, try this. Charge for 10 yards, then stop while bending your knees, pumping your arms, and arching your shoulders forward. You'll throw off defenders. Now pivot back. "Run to the QB until you catch the ball, or you'll be clobbered."



THE SKINNY POST

Defense has a guy deep in the middle? "You have to bang the skinny," Miller says. (Yup, that's real NFL lingo; by running inside only slightly, you avoid the middle defender.) Run for seven steps—time this with your QB—and then cross past your defender's face and look up for the ball.

someone's formula, but understanding the rules and then living by them. If you know why something works, you're more likely to do it.

Take cooking. Fitzgerald eats right not because his coach gave him a cookbook, but because he takes cooking classes where he learns how to balance a meal. "When you don't know how to cook, you just say, 'I need something quick,' and then you fry something up," he says. "Now that I cook, I think, do I want to have fried fish, baked fish, or grilled fish?"

That skill is especially valuable as he maintains his weight. Before last season, Fitzgerald weighed in at 228. As he watched his game footage, though, he thought he could be faster and more agile. So he worked down to 213. "Just losing a couple pounds takes so much stress off your joints," he says. "Your body feels better."

He stays at 213 with the right diet—a lot of lean protein and not much sugar or salt—and regular, well-rounded workouts. Fitzgerald loves

going to spin classes in the off-season because the cardio workouts help him run routes. He does Olympic lifts and plyometrics to maintain his explosive strength, which helps him beat opponents down the field and outjump them for the ball. His fitness routine isn't haphazard. No routine should be. There's purpose behind everything he does.

"You can never let anything distract you from your main objective," he says. "My only goal is to be great. That's all I want. That's all I ever aspire to be. Greatness is something nobody can ever take away from you, no matter what happens. So I put all my energy and focus into my craft."

You might argue that Fitzgerald has already achieved it. He would argue otherwise. Two minutes and 37 seconds separated him from it. Not knowing how close you came to victory may be easier, but success doesn't come easily. You have to choose the harder path.

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"You have to find a way to focus, no matter what," Larry Fitzgerald says.

