



ONE ENGINEER'S OPINION
By DANIEL R. AERNI, P.E.

ON THE LEGAL GRIDIRON

In the movies and on television, court cases are generally portrayed as exciting affairs, full of tension, drama and colorful lawyers, witnesses and judges. Those of you who have been involved in trials know the real truth. Trials have their dramatic and exciting moments, but for the most part, there is routine business to be taken care of. Exhibits and affidavits must be introduced, photographs must be identified by the individual who took them, background information and details must be recited, and sometimes rehashed by numerous witnesses.

Sometimes I envision my role in the courtroom as being analogous to a player on a football team. Long ago, I learned that I would not be the quarterback. That role is invariably played by an attorney. More often, it seems that my role is closer to that of a tight end. Generally, my job is to block well, either protecting the quarterback or enabling a running back to spring free for a short gain now and then. Every once in awhile I am called upon to make a catch.

Most of the catches are fairly routine and yield a reasonable though not spectacular gain. Every once in a while, it happens that I manage to snag a pass and break enough tackles to make a spectacular gain.

Just as in football, there are surprises along the way. Sometimes a well conceived play actually loses ground. Sometimes, despite the best efforts, the game is lost. Sometimes a game that looks lost is pulled out of the fire at the last moment.

One of the more important lessons is that there will be a game next week as well. Showboating, taunting, or putting the opponent down are not to be tolerated. What goes around comes around. The game is meant to be played hard and intelligently. However, it is not meant to be taken personally. Those on the other side want to win just as much as you do. Like football, the game is enjoyable for those who work hard at it and have learned to play the game fairly and well.

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