

# The Jersey Effect

## The Snap Frankton – 10/26/14

Scripture: Romans 8.26-30 Good things from bad

Proposition: God can use the bad things in our life for our good

This is the last in a series that's the reason for your wearing your jerseys. The series is titled: The Jersey Effect, and it comes from a book of the same name by Hunter Smith. [SLIDE] Hunter was the Indianapolis Colts punter during the 2006-7 NFL season, the one when the Colts won the Super Bowl. Yes, Hunter the punter. Hunter is a devout Christian and even though he's retired now, he still lives in Zionsville. We've talked a lot about other players and coaches on that team, and we've heard some insight from Hunter as well. Today, being the last day, we're just going to talk about Hunter's story. So let's get started.

[SLIDE] So we've talked about Hunter punting for the Colts for ten years. It was the only pro team Hunter knew. The Colts drafted him right out of Notre Dame in 1999 and made the Colts team and just stayed. He played in the big games leading up to the Super Bowl (including all those losses to New England). He played in the Super Bowl. Two seasons after winning the Super Bowl, the Colts are on target to do it again. But San Diego stunned the Colts in the wild-card game, 23-17. Hunter remembers his last punt, from out of the Colts own end zone. And as he was walking off the field after the punt, he realized that unless the Colts rallied and won, he had probably punted his last punt in a Colt uniform.

He understood the writing on the wall. He knew he had played out his contract. The Colts were trying to save some money and look toward the future. They knew that a ten year punter was standing near the end of his career and they could find a younger punter to save them some money and build for the future. We all know that something like that happened again a few years later with Peyton Manning. In this case, the special teams coach tried to convince Bill Polian to keep Hunter, but financially it wasn't realistic.

Walking off that field after the San Diego game had been lost, Hunter asked Jeff Saturday to walk off with him. Saturday had played out his contract too and didn't know if he would be back as a Colt the next year. They had both started playing for Indy the same year, and it looked like they may have their last year together as well. They walked off the field together, Christian brothers and fellow Colts. Hunter was right; the Colts didn't renew his contract. (They did renew Jeff Saturday's.) So now Hunter had to do what all other players have to do when they get cut – say good-bye. He met with Bill Polian, the general manager, Jim Caldwell, the head coach, and a few others. He cleaned out his locker and said good-bye to some of the personnel of the Colts complex and left the building wondering what was next in his life.

It wasn't long before four other teams were chasing Hunter. It came down to the Packers and the Redskins. He chose the Redskins. In his first year with the Redskins their record ended up being 4-12, four wins and twelve losses. That same year, the Colts ran off fourteen straight wins to open the season and ended up losing the Super Bowl to the Drew Brees led New Orleans Saints. The next year, the Redskins cut Hunter before the season but then signed him when their punter got

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hurt mid-season. Hunter played in three games. That year the Packers won the Super Bowl – if only he had gone to Green Bay instead of Washington. Again, Hunter remembers the last play in a Redskins uniform – the last play of his professional football career. And it's one a lot of people would probably want to forget.

December 12, 2010. The Redskins stadium, FedEx Field, was packed with over 66,000 fans. It had rained quite a bit and was still raining so the field was muddy. It was week 14 of the NFL season and the Redskins had to beat the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to keep their faint playoff hopes alive. The Skins held a 10-3 halftime lead, but through most of the second half, the Bucs held them scoreless. Meanwhile, Tampa had scored two touchdowns to take a 17-10 advantage. The Redskins rallied behind their quarterback, Donovan McNabb, and scored a touchdown with nine seconds left to go in the game to make the score 17-16. All that the Redskins needed to do was to hit the extra point and take the game into overtime. Hunter trotted out onto the field as the holder for the extra point. For those who may not know, the holder is the one the ball is hiked to, then sets it down for the kicker to kick. He had been the holder his whole ten years in Indianapolis and both years in Washington. It was so routine for him. Catch the ball, get it down, spin so the laces are away from the kicker, and wait for the foot to come through.

However, the snap was a little high, the ball was wet and Hunter missed the ball. Here's a picture from one photographer's view. [SLIDE] The ball slipped clumsily through Hunter's hands where it was recovered by Tampa Bay for a 17-16 victory. Hunter wrote that he felt like he was standing naked on FedEx field. He felt terrible. It was all his fault. He dropped the snap on the extra point that would have tied the game and sent it into overtime. At the time, he didn't know it would be his last play as a professional football player – a dropped snap leading to a loss.

He walked off the field and to the showers. God began working on him. He had a decision to make. He knew the media was going to ask him some tough questions and he could begin to place the blame on other things. The snap was high. The ball was wet. It was cold – December in DC. Earlier in the game, the Redskins kicker had missed two short field goals which would have made the extra point mute. Throughout the game, the Redskins offense had first down and goal four times inside the Tampa ten yard line – from the 8, 6, 5 and 2 yard lines – and had only scored two touchdowns. There was lots of blame he could have placed. But none of that mattered to Hunter. He wasn't concerned about shifting the blame or defending himself. He was concerned with his jersey effect. How was his jersey going to be remembered in the face of adversity? Here is a partial transcript of what he told the media after the game:

At the end, when you have an opportunity to tie it up and the whole game comes down to that, we did all we could to be in the game, and it's my fault. [SLIDE] I have a beautiful wife, and I have three wonderful children, and I have a faithful God, and that is reality to me. It's not that this just doesn't mean anything to me, because it is a letdown to the organization, but I can move forward...

Two days after dropping the snap, Hunter was cut by the Redskins, and hasn't played professional football since.

Reflecting back, in the midst of that moment of defeat, God impressed on Hunter's heart that his jersey as an athlete and the jersey as a Christian is to be used for God's glory, not only in moments of victory, but also in moments of defeat. God will be glorified if our life is in him and not contingent upon giving our all to some area of hoped for success. Hunter was given the opportunity

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to decide if his commitment to God was more important than his football reputation and more important than his own success. He chose to listen to God.

To me this is a great example of what our scripture talks about this morning. Actually, this is one of the most mis-understood scriptures in all of the Bible. Here is what Romans 8.28 says: **[SLIDE]** **and** *we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God.* Let's look at it closely. Many people think this verse says that God causes everything – the good and the bad. That's not what this verse really says. It says God uses everything that happens for our good – no matter whether what happened is initially good or bad. God causes good to come – even from the bad things that happen to us. Hunter mishandled a snap that cost his team the game. And he was cut from the team because of it. Yet God used that bad experience to allow Hunter to show his jersey effect. God helped Hunter take responsibility when he could have passed the buck. And in doing so, Hunter was a great Christian witness.

There's only one caveat to this. Here it is: **[SLIDE]** **you** have to let God cause good things to happen. We can block the good things. Let me explain. What if Hunter had gone to the media and began passing around the blame. High snap. Wet ball. Missed field goals. Ineffective red zone offense. He could have done that. But how would he be remembered. He'd be remembered as the holder who passed the buck. And his Christian witness would have been drowned out by his buck passing. Instead, he listened to God and took the blame. And his jersey effect could never have been better. After the interview, one of the media folks told him that was the best interview he had ever done.

How about you? You wear your jersey just like Hunter does – your Christian jersey. When the chips are down, do you pass the buck when the opportunity arises? Do people look at your response to adversity and get a bad idea of how Christians handle adversity? I guess the first question would be: Do people know you are a Christian? Would people at your work be surprised to know where you are right now? Would they be shocked to see your face in church? If they would be, maybe you need to rethink how you're portraying your Christianity. Maybe you need to use your words and tell them you're a Christian, rather than them having to guess. When the chips are down, how do you respond? When you have a chance to be a witness in the midst of the all the muck and mire of your life, do you? Remember: **[SLIDE]** **the** good that God can bring from our trials is enhanced by our response to the trials.

God called Hunter to use his jersey for God's glory, no matter what the circumstances were. God calls you to do the same thing. He calls you to use your jersey for God's glory no matter what the circumstances are. Whether you're a teacher, farmer, businesswoman, car salesman, student or retiree, you have a choice. Because with every jersey comes power. The power to destroy, the power to build up and mostly the power to influence.

One last thought as we wrap up this sermon series. We've heard from some of the Colts players and coaches from that Super Bowl winning team. We learned about selfish jerseys from Jeff Saturday. We learned about distracted jerseys from Ben Utecht. We learned about a jersey turned idol from Dylan Gandy. We learned about a jersey that helped someone shy away from sharing the gospel from Matt Giordano. We learned about the jersey and fellowship from Clyde Christensen. And here's one last thing I want you to think about the next time you wear your jersey.

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When Hunter was 17 years old, he had the opportunity to listen to former Baltimore Colts player Willie Franklin. Hunter watched as an athlete who was in love with Christ witnessed to the young men assembled to hear him. And he did it unabashedly. Franklin was already retired when Hunter heard him speak, and Hunter, even at a young age, understood that the man standing in front of him was making an impact after his playing career was over. Years later, Hunter and Franklin were speaking on the phone and Franklin share with him this thought. [SLIDE] “We’re all just stones that are thrown into a spiritual pond...and you don’t know how far the ripples will go.”

This is what we do. We allow God to use us. We allow God to pick us up and cast us into a spiritual pond. We allow God to make an impact – an impression – as we splash on the surface of the pond. And then we allow God to make us sink. Finally, we watch the ripples above us on the surface of the pond. The ripples from our jersey.