Beyond Basketball: How the Knicks' Championship United New York and Lifted Our Spirits

In my last blog, I announced that I would be taking the summer off from writing. However, after the New York Knicks won their first NBA championship in more than half a century, I decided this was one event worth coming off the bench for.

While the victory was certainly about basketball, it was also about something much bigger—the power of sports to unite communities, create. hope and enhance our emotional well-being.

Looking Back

At the beginning of the 2025/26 basketball season, oddsmakers gave the Knicks a 10% chance of winning the championship. Many other teams were seen as much more likely to win it. In fact, during the season, the odds of the Knicks winning the championship actually decreased as their overall play was inconsistent.

Additionally, at the start of the playoffs, they were given only an approximately 5% chance of winning the championship.

However, once the games started, the Knicks demonstrated an uncanny ability to erase huge deficits after falling behind in several games. In one instance, they stormed back from a 29-point deficit to pull out a game with just one second left on the clock, the largest comeback in NBA Finals history.

As a psychologist, I could not help but notice that the Knicks' success offers lessons that extend far beyond basketball.

The Power of Resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt and recover from adversity. When faced with setbacks, we do not avoid them; instead, we continue to move forward despite them.

The Knicks' playoff run was filled with challenges. However, they continued to believe, adjust, and persevere. Their journey powerfully demonstrates that

obstacles do not determine outcomes. When faced with difficulty, resilience involves taking the next step forward even when success is uncertain.

The Knicks' championship should remind us that persistence and determination can sometimes accomplish what others believe is unlikely.

A City Comes Together

During this unbelievable run, an exciting vibe came over New York City. For instance, strangers were high-fiving each other, restaurants and bars were packed, many watch parties took place across the city, and in one neighborhood, images of the game were projected onto a building for the crowd to watch.

This was a unique experience in which people who probably would never have gotten to know each other began embracing ~~strangers~~ on the streets. In one instance, people on the subway who did not know each other were cheering and singing in unison. This was a level of camaraderie that is not often experienced.

In a city of more than eight million people, individuals from different neighborhoods, cultures, professions, and backgrounds were united by a common source of joy. Strangers celebrated on sidewalks while families and friends gathered around televisions and exchanged texts late into the night. Social media was filled with excitement and pride.

For a brief moment, New. Yorkers seemed less concerned about their differences and more focused on what they had in common. At a time when our society often feels fragmented, the Knicks provided New Yorkers with a powerful reminder of our shared humanity as millions of people celebrated together.

Conversations started between strangers. Families created memories. Friends strengthened bonds. People who may never meet again felt connected through a common experience.

New York City experienced a collective celebration that reminded us of how important social connections are.

It wouldn't be fair not to mention that some people used the win to cause trouble, destroying cars, and setting buses on fire. It is important to note that this was a small fraction of the thousands of New Yorkers who simply wanted to have a good, safe time together.

Sports Matter More Than We Think

What happened in New York was not only the validation of the enjoyment – even love – of sports. The Knicks didn't just make fans happy individually. They created a collective emotional experience.

It would be incorrect to dismiss sports as solely entertainment. Research has revealed that watching sports of all kinds, both in person and on a screen, has many positive impacts on our well-being

A survey of over 7,000 people found that self-reported anxiety, loneliness, and overall sense that life wasn't worth living [don't you mean life wasn't worth living, which goes along with anxiety and loneliness?] were all positively impacted by attending a sporting event. In fact, the event did not have to be high-priced or feature professional players; the same impact was seen in local matches with amateurs.

Another study demonstrated that simply watching sports on TV positively affected life satisfaction and well-being.

Researcher Daniel Wann and his colleagues found that team identification is associated with greater social and psychological well-being.

Fans who are deeply involved with a particular sports team experience lower levels of loneliness and alienation because they have a stronger sense of social connectivity. It offers people a sense of belonging and ~~offers them~~ a unique identity within the community.

Humans have a fundamental need to belong. We thrive when we are connected to others and part of something bigger than ourselves. Sports fandom helps to satisfy that need.

Sports also offer a temporary escape from stress and a fun diversion from our daily routine. Cheering for a team can provide moments of joy, excitement, hope, and optimism.

Following sports offers a socially acceptable outlet for processing intense emotions, from anticipation to relief. Following a team through its highs and lows teaches fans how to adapt to disappointment.

More Than A Trophy

The Knicks won a championship, but they also gave New Yorkers something that may even be more valuable.

They gave people hope.

They gave people a reason to come together.

They demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity.

Finally, they reminded us that shared experiences can strengthen our sense of community and improve our well-being.

While championships are rare, [the lessons they teach us are not. We all face challenges. We all experience setbacks. We all need connection and belonging, which is the secret sauce to enhancing our emotional well-being.

The Knicks won a championship, but perhaps their greatest victory was reminding us of the power of resilience, hope, and connection.

This summer, the Knicks reminded New York of something important: when people come together around a common purpose, amazing things can happen.

And that is a lesson worth celebrating.