

**Caring is Fuel**  
**By**  
**Daniel E. White March 16, 2026**

Tony LaRussa, as a longtime manager in Major League Baseball, led the winning team in 2,884 games, the second highest total in history. LaRussa's teams won the World Series three times. Six teams won league championships and thirteen times he managed the division title winner.

His success did not protect him from sleeplessness. "The explanation for his sleeplessness was simple, maybe," wrote Buzz Bissinger in *Three Nights in August*. "When anybody does the same thing for as long as [LaRussa] had, going on a quarter century, he was bound to see things he couldn't set aside no matter how hard he tried to rationalize."

"Another explanation was his own personality: intense, smoldering, a glowing object of glower. He barely smiled even when something wonderful happened, as if he were willing himself not to. Some thought he worked too hard, grinded away at it when he would have been better off forgetting it, took the bad things into the night when he should have slept. Even he knew he had gone too far, had made personal compromises he knew were wrong, but it wasn't simply an occupation to him or even a preoccupation."

"It was something he loved."

Why? Because his idea of a life well spent has been the ideal: "Beautiful. Just beautiful Baseball."

That ideal could be made more difficult if the players on his team, most of whom made far more money than he did, couldn't be persuaded to give 100% effort to the team rather than their stats, which are the basis of how they achieve multi-year, multimillion dollar contracts.

Or sometimes the ideal was thwarted by an unlucky bounce or a pulled muscle or a pitch thrown in the wrong place and sent by the batter out of the park.

None of these random factors that affect the outcome of any game were 100% predictable. All LaRussa could do was prepare as best he could and then rely on his experience and instinct. No need for anyone to engage him during a game. He stayed in his "foxhole," emerging occasionally to speak with his pitching coach or even more rarely to congratulate a player for something. Then, quickly, back to the foxhole.

LaRussa endured the anxiety inherent in the job of managing the various personalities, temperaments, anxieties and motivations of men uniquely skilled. His focus was always on the team but building that team was never easy. His way to cope was to rehearse scenarios, imagine matchups, think several innings ahead. In short, he came to every game prepared.

All in pursuit of Beautiful. Just beautiful Baseball.

Alysa Liu was 13 when she won the U.S. Women's Skating Championships. Then she collected the bronze medal at the World Championships and placed sixth at the Beijing Olympics, all by

age 16. Her response to this early success was to retire. She said she was burnt out by endless days of skating to get ready for the next competition.

She un-retired in 2024 at age 18, saying that she missed the ice. But she stated clearly that any return to competition would be on her terms. At 19, she won the World Championship.

Liu told Kayla Webley Adler of *Elle*, "The happiest I felt [at the World Championships] was, after I hit my ending pose, seeing everyone stand up and start roaring...But it wasn't the winning part that made me feel good, it was actually the skate program I did...I would do anything to skate that program and feel the energy of all those people again..."

"She appears serene, even relaxed while pulling off mind-boggingly difficult skills on the ice. She skates before packed crowds but there may as well be no one else in the room—Liu is so clearly doing it for herself," wrote Adler.

At the 2026 Olympics, she did skate that program again, earning her personal best score. As she waited for the last two skaters to perform, she said, "I don't need this [medal]. What I needed was the stage, and I got that, so I was all good. No matter what happened."

Beautiful, LaRussa might say. Just beautiful Skating.

In *The Way of Excellence*, author Brad Stulberg explains how elite performers approach anxiety differently.

Elite performers understand anxiety—nerves—as a natural reaction. *Normalizing nerves*, then is Stulberg's first observation. Then, these performers *reframe nerves as caring and readiness*. The third step is crucial: *get to the starting line*.

Once the contest has begun, the pro *lets her or his training take over*. The inference is that trying to think about what to do when gets in the way of just doing. The pro *gives himself or herself grace for being a human and feeling human things*. To think one can be superhuman, to not feel butterflies at the start, to not recognize that nerves are normal is destructive to performance.

Finally, writes Stulberg, *caring is fuel*. If you do not care, you will not achieve. LaRussa and Liu care about the beauty of what they do and the privilege they have to perform for others, losing themselves in pursuit of the ideal, even if the ideal is never reached.

Regular folks like you and me; we can lose ourselves pursuing whatever we hold as the ideal, letting our training take over, cutting ourselves some slack—grace—for being human and seeing the caring that nerves reveal as fuel for our pursuits.

We just need to get to the starting line.

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