

# 7 Softball Lessons from Alabama's Patrick Murphy

By: Cindy Bristow

**I recently listened to NFCA President and Alabama Head Softball Coach Patrick Murphy gave his opening speech at this year's NFCA Convention and I was transfixed. He created 7 amazing goals we could all aspire to so read on and learn the 7 Things Patrick Murphy has Learned from People in the Game of Softball.**



*As competitors we're constantly chasing success and looking for ways to improve ourselves and our teams. These 7 Lessons, while simple, are extremely powerful and summarize what it takes to be a Champion!*

Patrick Murphy is currently in his 22nd year of coaching college softball. It hasn't all been at the [University of Alabama](#) and not all as a head coach. He started out as an assistant coach to recently retired LSU Head Coach Yvette Girourd at Southwestern Louisiana, was an interim head coach at NW Missouri State before becoming the assistant coach at Alabama and finally the University of Alabama Head Coach. He knows what it takes to be a good assistant coach so he wanted his opening speech at this year's NFCA Convention to carry a message. Murph feels that we do a great job of teaching the skills and strategies of the game, but that stuff only takes up 20% of a coaches life. And he feels we do a lousy job of teaching coaches the other 80%.

I completely agree with him and that's why I'm really excited that he agreed to let me share with all of you the 7 Lessons Patrick Murphy Has Learned from People in the Game of Softball. These lessons are in Patrick's words.

1. First on the WHEEL OF SEVEN is my former boss, Hall of Famer Yvette Girouard. I remember way back in the fall of 1989, my first year at Southwestern Louisiana. My Dad passed away in late October and when I came back, there was a card on my desk. It was a sympathy note from Yvette. Underneath the card was an envelope with two sentences written on it: "I heard you didn't have a TV. Go buy one." \$300 was in the envelope. I was floored. That was like winning the lottery at the time. My salary for the first three years at USL was \$6,000 a season. I literally started crying at my desk. Yvette would do

these random acts of kindness for the next five years while I was an assistant with her. And unfortunately, I realize now that I appreciate what she did for me then, much more now.

**Yvette Girouard taught me lesson No. 1: POSSESS A COMPASSIONATE AND GENEROUS HEART**

2. The next lesson comes from an athlete — one that ended the season of Girouard's Lady Cajuns at the 1993 Women's College World Series. We had not seen her, we had not faced her, but we knew all about her. Lisa Fernandez of UCLA was the epitome of the word COMPETITIVE. She was the first pitcher I saw sprint off the mound, grab a great bunt and turn and fire to 2B to retire the lead runner ... by two steps! As a player, she oozed swagger and we loved to watch her compete. She won the Honda Award as the top player in the college game three times and as a member of TEAM USA, she led her team to 3 gold medals in Olympic play. To this day, I ask a question to all of our recruits about their competitive spirit — and it goes all the way back to Lisa Fernandez in 1993.

**Lisa Fernandez taught me lesson No. 2: COMPETITIVE ATHLETES RULE THE ROOST!**

3. A person who knows all about Lisa is 2011 Hall of Famer Ralph Weekly. Ralph was an assistant coach in the 1996 Olympic Games in which Lisa participated. What Ralph has taught me may surprise some, others no. Coach Weekly is the best in the business at being a good winner but even more important, he is a great loser. When you read the postgame comments on [UTLadyVols.com](http://UTLadyVols.com), you will see what I mean. He is as gracious about his opponent as he is to his team. It's called SPORTSMANSHIP and Coach Weekly has it! Not many coaches have mastered this rare trait, but Ralph has. Imagine playing for a spot in the Super Regionals and losing in the regional finals on your home field. You are faced with many cameras and sportswriters in the postgame press conference. What do you say? Here's what Ralph said: *"All the credit goes to Oklahoma State, they had a great game plan. Let's give credit to them, and we need to move on and get ready for next year."*

**Ralph Weekly taught me lesson No. 3: WIN WITH GRACE, LOSE WITH MORE GRACE!**

4. A coaching mate of mine with Team USA and a great rival of Coach Weekly's is Hall of Famer Carol Hutchins. Hutch is widely respected across the country by coaches and athletes alike. She has the rare ability to see the big picture but also to DREAM BIG! Not only has she won many Big 10 championships, she is still the only school east of the Mississippi River to win a national championship. To me, that takes someone with an incredible resolve and an unreal belief in her system. She has never used the weather as an excuse — in fact, she has played and coached in the state of Michigan her entire career. She has literally showed cold-weather schools to have faith that it can happen. You can win big DESPITE the obstacles of a northern school playing an outside sport!

#### **Carol Hutchins taught me lesson No. 4: NEVER SAY NEVER!**

5. Someone you may or may not notice this entire week (at the NFCA Convention) but has been working hard for months is our next teacher. Hall of Famer, and Illinois State Head Coach Melinda Fischer teaches all of us that hard work and dedication equals a great career. I don't think I have met a coach who works as hard or as smart as Coach Fischer. She is a legend at the school where she graduated from — Illinois State University. Melinda is the type of coach who works at her craft and gives of her time for this organization — but has never asked “What's in it for me?” What an incredible career she has had with the Redbirds over the past 28 years. She is the role model for everyone who is looking to find a cause to hang their hat on. Melinda has chosen the NFCA and we are MUCH BETTER OFF because of it!

#### **Melinda Fischer taught me Lesson No. 5: THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IS DOWN THE AVENUE OF HARD WORK!**

6. Our second Hall of Fame inductee this year is Coach Deb Pallozzi of Ithaca College. Not only is she one of the brightest stars in our business but she is also one of the busiest! Coach Pallozzi still attends as many clinics yearly as she did as a young coach starting out in 1980. In fact, she has participated in several NFCC clinics (National Fastpitch Coaching Colleges). I remember speaking at an NFCC course one year and I noticed Deb in the class. I immediately got nervous as I thought she was there grading me, not taking the course. It was like I was student teaching all over again. What struck me with Deb, though, was her ability to blend in, to be one of the gang and not the “Coach who has more wins than anyone in the classroom.” She was inquisitive, thoughtful and definitely was there as a student of the game, not as my supervisor.

A couple of Deb's assistants have told me that they know exactly when Deb has attended a clinic — she comes back to campus fired up and ready to work on new things in practices.

#### **Hall of Famer Deb Pallozzi taught me lesson No. 6: WHEN YOU STOP LEARNING, YOU STOP WINNING**

7. The last inning of our lessons, No. 7, comes from a former student-athlete at Alabama. Believe it or not, we are not beneath learning from our players! Not only do we have the opportunity to make a difference in their lives, but often, they do the same for us. And a young lady named Jessica Smith did just that for everyone in our program. During her very first spring practice at Alabama, she tore her ACL. After months of rehab, during a running session later that next fall, she tore it again. During her career she had four surgeries and numerous other trips to various doctors. Through it all, she never wavered in her commitment to TEAM first. She found her calling: as our dugout spy. Jessica would study each opposing coach and by the third or fourth inning, she learned all the signs — both on offense and defense. On one occasion, Charlotte Morgan hit a towering homerun and at home plate after her celebration, she pointed right at JESSICA and said, “That was you, Jess!” Jessica had yelled out location prior to the pitch and Charlotte

knew exactly what was coming. Jessica was beaming — the great Charlotte Morgan gave the credit away — to a person on the bench! When we played Kentucky one year, our friend and Kentucky head coach Rachel Lawson had no idea what she was doing for a young lady in Crimson but when Rachel walked past our dugout, she pointed right at Jessica and said, “I can’t wait until you graduate.” That meant the world to Jessica. Her role was validated by a DI head coach! At her senior banquet, the first words out of her mouth were this: “Coach Murphy tells us often that the quicker we learn it’s not all about us, the better off we will be.” At the end of her speech, she called up a younger teammate. She wanted to pass on something she had been working on for the past four years. Jessica had made an ‘Alabama Scouting Report’ notebook. It was a three-ring binder about four inches thick. Every team we had played over the past four years was in it. No one in that room could believe what she had done.

**Jessica Smith teaches us Lesson No. 7: IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT THE ROLE IS, JUST PLAY IT TO PERFECTION!”**

So I have **five questions for everyone in this room:**

- What lessons will you teach us?
- What lessons will you teach your assistants?
- What lessons will you teach your players?
- Will they be worth repeating?
- Your legacy as a coach is unfolding on a daily basis. How will you be remembered?

To summarize these 7 powerful lessons from Patrick, here’s a quick look at them:

6. **Lesson No. 1: *Possess a compassionate and generous heart***
7. **Lesson No. 2: *Competitive athletes rule the roost!***
8. **Lesson No. 3: *Win with Grace, Lose with More Grace***
9. **Lesson No. 4: *Never say Never!***
10. **Lesson No. 5: *The road to success is down the avenue of hard work***
11. **Lesson No. 6: *When you stop learning, you stop winning***
12. **Lesson No. 7: *It doesn’t matter what the role is, just play it to perfection***

And now I’d like to add one more lesson, and this one is mine, not Murphs. My:

**Lesson No. 8 is: Learn from Anything You Can & Give Credit Where Credit’s Due**

I think you’ll agree with me that this is a tremendous speech that carries an amazing message. Patrick Murphy is a person that by himself can stand among the best in our game, and yet when given the chance to talk about himself he spends it talking about others. Coach Murphy is always bettering himself and taking time to notice and learn from others.

All of us are collections of all that we've learned to this point. No matter who you are, what field you're in or how successful you might be – what you currently know is a collection of all that you've learned to this point. You weren't born knowing what you know now; you learned it along the way. Some of it you learned from reading what others know, or listening to what others think, or going through your own life experiences. You disregarded things that didn't work or make sense to you anymore, or you altered things based on your experiences and you might have even made up some of your own knowledge based on your own discoveries – whatever.

What matters is that all of us get smarter and better by learning from people and things around us so give credit where credit's due. It doesn't mean you're weak, it actually means you have the confidence to acknowledge that others have skills as well and that you're simply a collection of your experiences up to this point. Keep growing and giving credit and you'll be amazed at how much smarter, and better you'll be!

A very special thanks to my friend Patrick Murphy for sharing his time with us by serving as NFCA President, and for allowing me to share with all of you his words of wisdom. Share these with your teams and see if they can come up with some lessons of their own. And remember, never stop learning or sharing!