



THE ANATOMY OF A WINNING COACH – PART II



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Part One of Coach Madison's "Anatomy of a Winning Coach," including the first three areas of responsibility, was published in the September edition of the Coach's Box.

We will most likely never win all of our games and we may never coach a future Major League Baseball player, but we can teach our players how to be winners and how to be "major league people" both on and off the field. Remember, you don't coach baseball or softball, you coach players. You have a position of influence ... take advantage of it to teach players not only how to better play the game, but to be better students, teammates and citizens.

You are a winner as a coach if you focus on seven specific responsibilities. Below are the remaining four we have yet to discuss.

4. Communicate. Never assume that a player understands baseball terminology. When my youngest son was about 5 years old, I was tossing the ball to him and trying to teach him how to hit. He was small and the bat was a little too heavy for him, so I asked him to "choke up." He looked at me with just a hint of confusion and continued to grip the bat at the end near the knob. So, once again I said "choke up." After the third time of telling him to choke up, he finally dropped the bat and placed both hands around his throat! I assumed that he knew what "choking up" meant. During preseason practice, start with the basic fundamentals and make sure that each player knows the baseball "lingo" that you will be using during the course of the season. Communicate clearly and positively during practice drills. Also, communicate precisely what you expect from the team in terms of effort, attitude, sportsmanship and respect for teammates, coaches, umpires, opponents and the game itself. Communicate with parents, as well, to let them know of league rules, team policies, expectations, practice times and game schedules.

5. Practice what you preach. Remember, you are the leader. If you want your players to show respect, then the coach should show respect. If you want your players to avoid negative body language; then you-as a coach-should exude positive body language. If you want your players to avoid profanity, then the coach should never use profanity. If you want each player to have a positive attitude, then the coach should have a positive attitude.

6. Teach and inspire. Several years ago, I was leading the baseball camp in North Carolina. There were middle school and high school athletes from all over the nation in attendance. I wanted to get better acquainted with some of the players. I started talking with two players from a nearby state. I asked them "Where do you attend high school?" and "How do you like your coach?" One of the players said, "I hate that guy!" I was shocked and was speechless for a moment. Finally, I ask him, "Why do you think you hate him?" He replied, "Every time I make a mistake or ask a question, he puts me down or makes fun of the question I asked. " Your teaching methods should encourage, teach and inspire ball players to learn more about and love the game of baseball. Leave a legacy of positive memories and a lasting love for the game of baseball with the players you coach.

7. Have passion. If you enjoy working with children and have a passion for the game, you are set up for success. Young people are smart. They know when you are going through the motions at practice, the same as you know when the players' hearts aren't in it. Take a few minutes to plan an effective, fast-paced practice. Recruit two or three assistant coaches to help with practice, so that you can have two or three drills going on at the same time during practice. Keep the drill stations short (15-20 minutes). We live in a "remote control" society. If the drills are too lengthy, players will mentally "switch channels." Be creative and keep each drill educational, competitive and fun. You will be able to express your passion for the game and make practice fun by planning ahead in order to keep your athletes focused on learning and improving. The only way that you can transfer your passion for the game to the players you coach is to make practice upbeat and fast-paced with very little standing around.

I cannot emphasize enough the lifelong positive influence you can have on your players. I remember everything about my Little League coach and the many things he taught me; I still have a relationship with him almost 50 years later. If you miss out on the relationship part of coaching, you have truly missed out. Coaches need to use our influence to help each individual on the team. Our communities will become better places to live. Now that is winning!

Note: Keith Madison is the winningest baseball coach in the 106 years of the University of Kentucky baseball. Since becoming the Wildcats' coach in 1979, Mr. Madison has guided his team to 713 victories - more than any other baseball coach in school history and the second-highest mark among active coaches in the Southeastern Conference. Four of his teams have broken the school record for wins in a season; while 83 of his players have gone on to play professional baseball, with 14 having played in the major leagues.

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