“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

‘I WON’T CHEAT!’ COACHING BOOKLET
By: Dale Murphy

Throughout my baseball career, I had a wide variety of coaches. Some helped mold me into who I am today. Some were like fathers. Some required a lot on and off the field. But, thinking back, three coaches really stick out in my mind: Jack Dunn, my high school coach, and my Atlanta Braves managers, Joe Torre and Bobby Cox. They each taught me so much – about the game of baseball and the game of life.

Joe Torre and Bobby Cox occupy first and second place in the record books for postseason victories and have won a combined 4,000 regular season games. As one of the privileged few to have played for both of them I can say that they share the same basic characteristic. They show respect to those around them. I was asked in a recent interview specifically about Joe and what makes him such a great coach, to which I replied, “Nobody on the Yankees wants to let him down. Even though playing in New York can bring distractions from ownership and media, the players are able to perform at such a high level because of...
the way they are treated by their manager. When you like your coach, you will give more effort.” I had such an admiration for each of these men that at times I wanted to win more for them than I did for myself. Good players are important parts of the winning equation but it is the coach who sets the tone. This chapter will give coaches of all levels some valuable insight into their most important role and responsibilities.

For my 50th birthday my wife told me we were taking a trip to visit my parents, Chuck and Betty Murphy, in Portland, Ore. She left out the part about old teammates from Wilson High would join us for the reunion. I was so surprised. After catching up with everybody on my Watco American Legion team, we started reminiscing about the good old days. It really struck me how much we had bonded while playing together as teenagers. It was remarkable how positive an experience it was for everybody – and it wasn’t just because our team made it to the World Series. (We eventually lost to a team from Puerto Rico that went on to win the championship only to be disqualified for using ineligible players.) Every now-middle-aged guy there would tell you how Coach Dunn just had that big of an effect on all of our lives. It really was a credit to him that 30-plus years later, a group of men could get together and come up with story after story about what we had experienced during those few, short years. His legacy lives on in each of us.

One thing that really made Jack an exceptional coach was that all of his players felt involved, even the guys who didn’t play much. They felt like they were an important part of the team. Jack would keep everybody busy. Some players had roles as regular position players and pitchers, but even the guys who spent most of the time in the dugout had responsibilities. Some would be assigned to watch to make sure opposing runners touched all the bases. Others had another important job: stealing signs.
from the third base coach or the catcher. The main thing was, we were all involved. We worked hard. We had fun. We learned a ton. And as a bonus, we won a lot of games.

A COACH’S ROLE

Jack set a tone for a lot of things in our lives. The opportunity a coach has to make a great impact on the kids playing for him cannot be over emphasized. Being called “Coach” truly is a great title. Just consider these synonyms from Roget’s New Millenium Thesaurus for the word “coach”: instructor, drillmaster, educator, mentor, old man (my kids will really start calling me “Coach” now), skipper, taskmaster, teacher, trainer, tutor. The dictionary calls it a noun in this usage, but I like to think of the composition of a coach as being more of an action verb. Coaches need to take an active role to foster a positive environment for learning, improvement, participation and fun. In many aspects, you will influence a child in ways that a parent cannot.

Now that we have a good idea of what a coach is, let’s discuss his or her role. I fear that a lot of boys and girls give up after their first couple of years because of nerves, boredom, pressure, or a lack of playing time and/or skills. Good coaches are able to overcome these challenges and influence these youngsters to keep trying and to stay involved. A great coach will eat up all of the negatives and allow his players to perform, free of distractions. I remember how nervous I was as a little boy to play against the 12-year-olds. They seemed like men when I was only 10. For me, that was as scary as anything I could imagine. Fortunately, good coaches put us at ease and made it a good experience. Jack did the same for us when we were in the American Legion World Series. Those coaches knew how to calm us down, how to build us up and how to motivate us despite the odds against us.
“The last thing you need when you’re not playing well is to look over and see panic on your manager’s face. With Joe, he always looks like he’s in control. I mean, from being around him so long, I can tell when he’s angry. But panic, that’s something you’ll never see from him.”

DEREK JETER
TALKING ABOUT JOE TORRE

Like parents, coaches need to keep in mind the lessons that we went over in the previous chapter. We’d all be better off trying something else if we simply have the philosophy that sports participation is all about winning games and trophies. I mean that. Coaches, never forget that your players should be learning how to become solid participants of life through the lessons hard work, respect, optimism, self confidence and the other traits that we discussed earlier.
When it comes to a classic example of good coaching perhaps no one fits the bill better than John Wooden. He was named ESPN’s “Coach of the 20th Century” for a good reason. Dave Lower, basketball director for Athletes in Action, summed it up like this: “Consistently, whenever I talk with one of his former players, they speak not of what they learned from ‘Coach’ in basketball or as champions, but what they’ve learned in life – the principles and character qualities he embodied.”

Since he was 12 years old, Wooden has based his life decisions on a creed given to him from his father. Wooden has shared his valuable “Seven Keys to Life” with everybody from players and coaches to seminar audiences for decades. They include:

- Be true to yourself.
- Make each day your masterpiece.
- Help others.
- Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
- Make friendship a fine art.
- Build a shelter against a rainy day.
- Pray for guidance and give thanks for your blessings every day.

Former Louisville basketball coach Denny Crum, who played under and coached with Wooden, said his mentor was consistent in his philosophy. He knew that winning in life was more important than winning in sports. “In spite of all the wins he had, you never heard coach Wooden talk about winning,” Crum said. “He always talked about doing the best that you could and then you were a winner.”

As sports continue to bury their roots deeper into our society’s soil, it’s very important that coaches help their athletes look at all of it in perspective. The old Nike commercials urged people to “Be Like Mike.” And while
MJ might be a fine role model for youth, unfortunately, there are plenty of professional athletes who aren’t. Coaches are in a unique position to be the role model every kid needs.

Reggie Morris, a counselor and basketball coach at Los Angeles’ inner-city Manual Arts High School, was quoted about the impact of role models. “Kids will find a role model, whoever is available, whether or not that person is a positive or negative influence,” Morris said. “So if a kid doesn’t have a positive role model, then he may still end up with a role model, but it may be a dope dealer or a gangster. We need to have positive role models who are available, visible, and accessible to the community and to the kids.”

The world needs positive role models. And while some athletes’ examples are worthy of admiration, there are some professional athletes who, quite frankly are not. Coaches can help through their own good examples, make up for negative role models seen so often on the nightly news.

COACHES’ THREE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

No. 1: Create a positive atmosphere in which players can achieve and learn.

How you act, what you say, and how you encourage and correct are all important elements in building a constructive environment for your players. This is an aspect of a team that the coach completely controls. How did the Atlanta Braves win 14 consecutive division titles? Because their manager, Bobby Cox, has created an atmosphere where guys of all skill levels thrive. To him, the worst player on the team is just as important as the superstar. The Braves are notorious for having unknown players step in and fill big roles. Many guys who excel under Cox will go to another team and struggle. Be the
type of coach who focuses on what your players can do instead of always talking about what they can’t do. It is easy to fall into a trap of negativity, especially regarding the players who aren’t as talented. But remember, there will come a time when your team depends on one of these role players and it is the coach’s job to make sure that each player is confident and ready to perform.

What else has made the Braves so unique? They are optimistic that their next game will be their best. When I played for Bobby I knew that he believed in me and counted on me to come through when it mattered, even if I was in a slump. That meant a lot to me. It will to your players, too. When you like your coach it is easier to go the extra mile. The last thing you want to do is let him down. As a young kid, you just know whether you like your coach or not. As you grow older, you realize that it’s deeper than that – you respect what he does and how he treats you. His attitude makes you want to treat other people the same way. This is when strong team unity begins to develop among the players because they all believe in one another. A team with the traits of unity and optimism will consistently beat teams who have more talent.

One thing that bothers me is when a coach yells out to the field from his bench, “Don’t do it that way, Johnny!” Whether the coach intends to or not, this can humiliate a kid who has just goofed up. I’d much rather see a coach wait until the player comes into the dugout and talk to him on the bench so that the whole world isn’t tuned in. You don’t need a megaphone to correct him. There’s so much failure in sports, we need coaches who can lift up their players after they fall.

Author Dave Zimmer wrote about a coach who understood his priorities and used his position to grasp a teaching opportunity in an article entitled, “A lesson learned from Little League.” Zimmer was at his 10-year-
old son’s baseball game, when he saw his kid get hit in the arm by what he guesses was a 38-mph fastball. Not hurt, his son ran to first base. The writer then looked across the field and noticed the opposing coach signaling something to his pitcher. He wasn’t ripping on him for hitting the kid or yelling at him to throw strikes. At the coaches’ request, that boy left the mound, ran over to first base, shook the other player’s hand and told him he was sorry.

“At that moment, baseball really did not matter. That act of sportsmanship was more important than the game,” Zimmer wrote. “It also pointed out the importance of a coach with values and his priorities in order.” His son’s team went on to win that game. But the big winners were the opposing coach and the pitcher, who turned an accidental bad throw into a heart-warming learning experience for everybody involved – players,
coaches and spectators. This is a great example of creating an atmosphere in which players can learn.

For 40 years Dean Smith coached the University of North Carolina basketball team with unsurpassed success. In his book, ‘The Carolina Way’ he explains how he developed the unique Carolina atmosphere. “Play hard; play smart; play together. That was our philosophy; we believed that if we kept our focus on those tenets, success would follow. Our North Carolina players seldom heard me or my assistants talk about winning. Winning would be the by-product of the process. There could be no shortcuts. Making winning the ultimate goal isn’t good teaching.”

Good leadership is all about helping those around you to succeed. Your team will flourish in a positive environment and they will underachieve in a negative environment. The challenge is in figuring out what you can do to create this type of atmosphere. Let your players know that you believe in them, that you respect them, and that you want them to learn. Your example of leadership will serve your players not only on the field but in life as well.

No. 2: Teach proper fundamentals.

Just because I emphasize that winning and performance aren’t everything does not mean that I condone losing and sloppy play. I enjoyed playing baseball in the beginning because I was having fun with my friends. After a couple of years I began to enjoy it for other reasons as well. My sense of thrill was enhanced by making good plays, not just by playing. Kids will inevitably find much more pleasure in sports or other activities if their skills are progressing. That’s where coaching comes in. They might accidentally get better on their own, but they can improve to a much greater degree under your guidance.

Just as yelling from the dugout is counter-productive, so is coaching new concepts during a game. That’s what
practice is for. How many times have we seen a Little League practice where one kid is working on hitting while the other 14 players stand around and pick at the outfield grass? Planning an efficient practice session is a big-time challenge for a coach. It will help to direct your energy towards the improvement of players instead of getting frustrated with their inadequacies. I have found that those who lose their temper most often are usually the coaches who have done the least amount of teaching to their team. Former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach nailed it on the head when he said, “In business or in football, it takes a lot of unspectacular preparation to produce spectacular results.”

That “unspectacular preparation” can be enjoyable, though. And it should include everyone. Find drills that put the fun in fundamentals for your players. Be careful not to just focus on one player, position or concept. Jack Dunn taught our teams a lot of inside stuff about the game of baseball and helped us learn to play each position. We had a lot of fun because he was an insightful and entertaining instructor. When a coach is dedicated to teaching the game it becomes much more interesting.

During a game, try taking notes – or have an assistant jot some down – when you see aspects that need to be worked on. This will help you to be effective in your practices. The less-talented players are the ones who especially suffer when coaches don’t have efficient practices. Helping them improve is a great way of showing that you care about them. Many coaches have competitions during practice that allow the lesser skilled players to feel victorious. Having your worst player hit a free throw to end practice early is a great way for him to feel like a big part of the team. His teammates will look at him with a newfound respect and most importantly, he will feel good about his contribution.

These same concepts apply throughout all education
channels. Did you ever have a history teacher who had a knack for bringing centuries-old characters to life? Or a science teacher who made it fun to learn about biology or chemistry? I loved the 1988 movie “Stand and Deliver” because of how it brilliantly portrayed this concept. Edward James Olmos played the role of Jaime Escalante, a calculus teacher at a rough Los Angeles school. Though his class included a bunch of misfits and gangsters, he was so dedicated in helping them that their self-esteem and math skills shot up dramatically. The transformation from near-drop-outs to math experts wasn’t an easy one. It required a lot of studying, a lot of chalk talk, homework and tutoring. After a while, the students were doing so well on tests they were accused of cheating. The movie was based on a true story. It was inspiring how he helped them believe they could succeed. Even though he was a math teacher, it is a perfect example of the difference one person – one coach – can make.

No. 3: Demonstrate to each player that you care.

World-famous motivational speaker Zig Ziglar coined a now-popular phrase: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Truer words have never been spoken in regards to coaching. Their styles varied, but that was something all my best coaches shared. Sometimes we were the recipients of some tough love. But even then, the chasiment or constructive criticism was more palpable because you knew the coach was doing it for your own good and the good of the team.

   It can be absolutely demoralizing for younger kids to go to practice and do everything the coach asks of them only to be seated by the water jug during games because they aren’t as talented as Bobby and Billy. Put yourself in their shoes. Would you respect someone who never trusted you? When we don’t give playing time we are, in
Pay special attention to your less talented players. Make sure they get in the game.

essence, telling the player that we just don’t trust them enough to put them in. They lose hope and your lack of confidence can be destructive on the field as well as off. Look, you only have a limited number of players on your team so why destroy their confidence? Letting your players know that you believe in them is more important than winning. The critics will cry, “Why did you put that kid in the game? He can’t play.” I would respond by saying, “Oh, yes he can play. I put him in the game because I believe in him.” Youth sports have different objectives than pro sports. You won’t get fired because of your winning percentage. If parents find out that you
are the type of coach who believes in your players than they will be banging down your door for their child to play for you. The best way a coach can show his young players that he cares about them is by giving them a chance to play.

My kids’ football league has a mandatory play rule. Each kid must take part in at least eight plays per game. So what often happens is that the boys who are the best play 95 percent of the time. Meanwhile, the guys who aren’t as big or as fast stand with their helmets in their hands cheering on the “stars” except for those eight required plays. Personally, I’d much rather see bigger

“In high school, I had a coach who told me I was much better than I thought I was, and would make me do more in a positive sense. He was the first person who taught me not to be afraid of failure.”

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI
teams split up so more kids could be on the field. If this isn’t feasible I’d encourage every coach to try to get the non-stars into the game. Any kid who gives hours of dedication in practice deserves to play a role on that team. Coaches who show they trust their players by letting them play more will make a lasting impact on those athletes. And it won’t hurt for the most talented players to watch the action from the bench once in a while. This can help keep egos under control as well.

And, who knows, the kids at the end of the bench may very well surprise you when given more playing time. Remember, it wasn’t Michael Jordan or Scottie Pippen who hit the winning shot to win the 1998 NBA Finals. It was Steve Kerr – a role player who had the confidence of his coach and fellow players. There really is no better feeling than coming up big for your team, but that can only happen if opportunities are granted.

The best example I’ve ever heard about somebody getting a chance to get off the bench and rise to the occasion happened at the end of the 2005-06 high school basketball season. Funny thing, he wasn’t even a player. He was the team manager. It’s a story worth repeating.

Jason McElwain, a 17-year-old senior at Greece Athena High School in upstate New York was the loyal and enthusiastic team manager for the varsity squad. Though autistic, he showed up every day to help things run smoothly for the team – a team he tried out for but didn’t make, by the way. Players appreciated him and Coach Jim Johnson loved having him around. He was so thankful and impressed by McElwain’s devotion to the team that he told him to swap his normal white shirt and tie for a uniform for the last home game of the season. The Trojans were in a battle for a division title, so Johnson didn’t make any playing promises. But he told him to be ready just in case.

McElwain was a popular kid around Greece Athena,
and some of the crowd came equipped with cut-out pictures of “J-Mac” on Popsicle sticks and signs of support. Finally, with about four minutes left and the Trojans holding a big lead against rival Spencerport High School, Coach Johnson signaled for McElwain to enter the game. He hopped off the bench and the crowd went crazy.

McElwain, a 5-foot-6 guard, wasted little time in attempting his first shot. It was an anti-climactic air ball, and by a long shot. He then missed a layup attempt. But that didn’t deter McElwain, a fact that was hardly surprising to his father. David McElwain told the Associated Press, “The thing about Jason is he isn’t afraid of anything. He doesn’t care what people think about him. He is his own person.” And on this occasion, his coach allowed him to fail without fear.

The story, of course, turned out to have a Hollywood ending. McElwain got the ball again the next time down the court, but this time his 3-pointer hit nothing but net. The next trip down, you guessed it, he nailed another three. Then he did it again. And again. By the time he was done shooting, McElwain had racked up a game-high 20 points on 6-of-10 shooting from 3-point land. He capped off his amazing performance with a buzzer-beater from beyond the arc. The crowd stormed the court and, fittingly, he was hoisted up on players’ shoulders like a hero.

His mother, Debbie McElwain, told CBS’ “The Early Show” that, “This is the first moment Jason has ever succeeded (and could be) proud of himself. I look at autism as the Berlin Wall, and he cracked it.”

When replays were shown on the news highlights, everybody who saw it had a similar thought: This should be made into a movie. Sure enough, Hollywood came calling. Columbia Pictures acquired the rights to McElwain’s life story, and former Laker legend Magic Johnson signed on as an executive producer for the
movie. But this one magical moment might even be tough for Magic’s crew to top. Still, the retired NBA superstar was so impressed and inspired he felt he had to get involved with telling the story on the silver screen.

“When I first saw the highlights on ESPN and then heard Jason’s story, I said, ‘Man, I’ve got to be a part of this,’” Johnson was quoted as saying in a Hollywood Reporter article. “This story touched me, my kids, my wife. When we go to the movies, this is the type of story we want to see.”

Not every benchwarmer will come out and have such
a heart-warming story. Wouldn’t that be incredible, though! You’ll never know unless you get them off the bench and into the game. Plus, a youngster doesn’t need to have a movie-worthy outing to make playing a few minutes or so here and there meaningful experiences.

It’s also important for coaches to let players know what is expected of them. It helps if their roles are defined. Open communication can assist a player to develop quicker and clear any confusion. Coach Johnson and Jason McElwain gave us another good example. Though he lit up the scoreboard, McElwain realized his role in the upcoming playoffs would be to return to the bench, hand out drinks, take stats and resume his managerial responsibilities. No problem. He told the AP that he realized that and was OK with his behind-the-scenes role because “trying to win a sectional title for the team” was most important. Johnson couldn’t have been more proud of his manager. “It was as touching as any moment I have ever had in sports,” he told the Canandaigua (N.Y.) Daily Messenger.

Coaches need to help players learn their roles and know what their duties are. Not doing so and then throwing them in a game situation would be like telling your child to go weed the garden without first showing him what the weeds look like. Who’s really to blame if he goes and pulls out all the carrots instead of the weeds? Baseball Almanac tells the story of a lack of communication when Joe Pepitone started playing with the Chicago Cubs. He let manager Leo Durocher know that he was a good base-stealer. So, when he made it safely to first, his third-base coach, Peanuts Lowery, gave him the stealing sign: a wink. The pitch was delivered, but Pepitone didn’t make a move. His coach winked again, but he still didn’t try to steal second. Lowery then winked for a third time. Finally, Pepitone reacted. He blew the coach a kiss.
There is a growing movement around the country of people who are trying to give youth sports back to the kids. One such organization is called the Positive Coaching Alliance. Based out of Stanford University’s Department of Athletics, PCA adheres to the excellent motto, “Transforming youth sports so sports can transform youth.” Their National Advisory Board looks like a “Who’s Who” of the sports world. Los Angeles Lakers coach Phil Jackson is the national spokesperson. Other sports celebrities on the board include: NBA coach Doc Rivers, NFL coach Herm Edwards, Olympic gold medalist Summer Sanders, soccer superstar Alexi Lalas, Oakland A’s ace pitcher Barry Zito, and North Carolina basketball coaching great Dean Smith. It also consists of renowned authors, experts, academic minds and sports officials.

Through much research and experience, the group has formulated what it calls a “Positive Coach Mental Model.” It aims to help all youth sports coaches become “Double-Goal” coaches. This means that a coach would help his team try to win and learn life lessons, with the latter being the most important goal. PCA also has a three-element “job description” for a Positive Coach that’s worth sharing:

1. Redefines “Winner:” This step involves changing one’s mindset to thinking of winning as being “a mastery, rather than a scoreboard, orientation. He sees victory as a by-product of the pursuit of excellence. He focuses on effort rather than outcome and on learning rather than comparison to others.” He also helps athletes learn from mistakes, to become the best player and person they can be, and also teaches that giving full effort is in essence winning.
2. Fills Players’ Emotional Tanks: Instead of motivating through “fear, intimidation, or shame,” a Positive Coach fills players’ emotional tanks (like a gas tank for the soul) with compliments, praise, respect and positive recognition, along with honest and constructive feedback. PCA suggests coaches strive to give a 5:1 ratio of praise to correction. This includes staying positive while maintaining order, staying disciplined, keeping open lines of communication and involving players in decision-making processes.

3. Honors the Game: PCA uses the acronym “ROOTS” to teach this concept. That reminds coaches and players to honor Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates and Self. By teaching this through example, coaches help athletes cherish the sport and play by the spirit and the letter of the rules. Kids learn that worthy opponents can push them to become better. They can show sportsmanship to all involved, including officials, by not disagreeing with their calls.

(Positive Coaching Alliance, The Positive Coach Mental Model, www.positivecoach.org)

In an interview with PCA founder and executive director Jim Thompson, former San Francisco 49ers coach Bill Walsh talked about the importance of positive coaching. He said he tried to build up every player he had through positive reinforcement. And when he had to criticize them, he didn’t make it personal. “You can really embarrass the athlete, but in reality you’re embarrassing yourself as a coach when you do that,” he told Thompson.

Because of their sometimes delicate mental states, children need to be treated in the same positive manner, even moreso, than Walsh showed his pros. “The young men and women beginning a sport are in a very vulnerable position. As much as they have aspired to participate and waited until they had a chance, the coach can...
suck the energy right out of them by mistreating them early. The coach who’s trying to prove something to himself rather than develop players has got to realize how fragile young people are when suddenly criticism is heaped all over them about something they’ve been waiting to do for a long time.

“So, from out of nowhere they’re just being ridiculed and criticized and they’re not ready for it. So many young men leave youth football, because of that,” Walsh added. “The coach has to understand he’s dealing with very young, fragile minds when it comes to competition. So the key is to make the experience positive and for the athlete to feel that he belongs.”

USC football coach Pete Carroll has been a refreshing face in the coaching ranks. So many coaches try to motivate their players through intimidation. I think that most of the time that philosophy only works in the movies. How many Bobby Knight wannabes are out there? Too many. Instead, the best way to coach is to be yourself with your players. Read the following excerpt taken from John Saraceno’s USA Today article, “I genuinely love listening to Pete Carroll. The 54-year-old coach is not only — pardon the word — great for USC, he’s great for college football. It needs more Pete Carrolls. So many coaches operate out of fear, burdening their players with their own barely concealed insecurities.

“I’ve never seen him in a foul mood,” insisted Trojans receiver Dwayne Jarrett.

Heisman Trophy winner Reggie Bush had this to say about Coach Carroll,

“He makes it fun for our team. Everybody loves playing for him. That’s one of the key things – it doesn’t have to always be about just business. We do have times when it’s time to work and we have times when it’s time to play. At practice we have fun competing against each other. Our practices are intense, but they’re fun at the
same time. We’re all jumping around. You would think that we’re playing a real game out there at our practices.”

We have arrived at Carroll’s true genius.

“The idea of creating an experience with these kids that we can share is really important,” he said. “It’s part of the process of connecting and bonding, and gives that sense that you’ve got something special.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH PARENTS

Anyone who has ever coached knows how hard it is to please the parents of their players. Emotions run high when a parent feels that their child has been wronged. This instinct to protect their children causes some parents to do and say things to a coach that they otherwise would never do or say under normal circumstances. Resolving these parental issues is important to the success of your team. Here are my suggestions:

• Communicate your philosophy. At the beginning of the season communicate your philosophy to the parents and players. They appreciate this opportunity to catch a glimpse of what to expect from you as their coach. After such a meeting you will have built a foundation to refer to when problems arise.

• Walk the talk. Not living up to your coaching philosophy will cause problems with both the player and the parents. Be sure to practice what you preach. A good philosophy is only good when it is executed.

• Decide when you will speak with upset parents. I like to use the 24-hour rule, asking parents to wait for at least 24 hours after the game before talking to the coach. This simple guideline eliminates 99% of the out-of-control confrontations between coaches and parents. This rule goes for both wins and losses. Even after a great win there might be parents who only care
that their child didn’t play as much as they had hoped. Twenty-four hours should give both of you enough time to calm down and think through the situation.

• Watch what you say. Never speak negatively about a young athlete. Any conversation that you have with a parent needs to be optimistic. Any critical comments can immediately put them on the defensive. Instead of talking about what a particular player doesn’t do, talk first about what he can do.

MESSAGE TO A COACH OF A CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM

There’s no denying it can be a thrill to win. Just enjoy the winning while it lasts, and don’t forget that it’s not everything. When things are clicking on the field you need to make sure things are clicking for those on the bench as well. Kids won’t remember the thrill of the championship if they had a lousy experience. Sometimes winning has a way of deceiving us. We get lost in the momentum and lose track of the most important objectives.

A characteristic of a classy winner is one who stays humble. This goes for coaches as well as players. Every coach worth his salt will claim that it was the players who carried the team to the top of the standings. You may have a great program, but without hard-working, talented, dedicated players, it’s likely your system won’t get you on the winner’s podium. And some years the ball just bounces your way and things work well when only a year earlier the exact same play calls yielded far different results.

The biggest piece of advice I can give to coaches of the successful teams is this: Do not try to win championships at the risk of ruining the experience for some kids. It simply isn’t worth it. If you take home the first-place trophy, but you ignored even one of your players
and kept him at the end of the bench all season, leaving him feeling dejected and maybe even depressed, to me that is a meaningless award.

This is where I seriously disagree with the oft-spouted phrase credited to Vince Lombardi that claims: “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” Consider this: Lombardi said this phrase repeatedly, and it took the sports world by storm. Coaches, players and fans quoted it like it was a scriptural verse. Many still do. It infiltrated into the culture away from sports. But after receiving criticism for that victory-or-vanquished attitude, Lombardi ended up regretting that he said it. He even tried to convince the public that what he meant was: “Winning is not everything, but making the effort to win is.” Whether that was what he really intended to say can be left for debate. All I know is, that version works best for me.

At any rate, I much prefer the ways of thinking of Grantland Rice, considered to be the dean of American sports writers, who’s credited for the “It’s not whether you win or lose, it’s how you play the game” thought.

I won’t claim it’s easy for coaches to figure out how to try to win while helping everybody on the team improve and develop. It’s a big responsibility, but it’s a great opportunity for you to show how much you care about people instead of trophies. There is a lot of pressure to perform, but keeping that perspective about teaching life lessons will help you win something far greater than any trophy.

And, please, remember that kid at the end of your bench. He will probably remember this season more than the superstar. In fact, your impact on him might be greater than the impact you have on your best player. So make sure you are not just treating him like a piece of practice equipment.
MESSAGE TO A COACH OF A LOSING TEAM

Let’s be honest about it. Nobody likes to lose. Not too many athletes brag about being cellar-dwellers. We all have the inner drive to win. Competitive juices get flowing and you want to be ahead when the final out is made or the buzzer goes off. That’s a natural feeling. I would never tell anybody to not try to win. I love the perspective Penn State’s famous coach gives us on suffering setbacks. “Losing a game is heartbreaking,” Joe Paterno said. “Losing your sense of excellence or worth is a tragedy.”

Coaches and athletes involved in pro and college sports can lose their jobs and scholarships because of losing games, so a lot is on the line for them regarding the final outcome. Unfortunately, similar pressures and attitudes trickled down into youth sports a long time ago, and it only seems to be getting worse. Tennis legend Chris Evert scored an ace in my book with her outlook on this topic. “If you can react the same way to winning and losing, that’s a big accomplishment,” Evert said. “That quality is important because it stays with you the rest of your life, and there’s going to be a life after tennis that’s a lot longer than your tennis life.”

It’s a coach’s job to help kids realize that there really will be life after a loss. The sun will rise the next morning. I hope that this chapter will help you to see that even if you lose a few games you can still accomplish even more important things. In the same way that winning can deceive us, so can losing. You are not a failure. It doesn’t have to be miserable. It all goes back to attitude – and that starts with the coach.

In my four-plus decades of being involved in the sport of baseball, I’ve been a part of a lot of losing teams. As a matter of fact, I was only on a first-place team once
in my 18-year Major League career. Only one! And that was toward the beginning – in 1982 when the Atlanta Braves won the Western Division for the first time since 1969. From 1985 to 1990, however, we came in last place four times in Atlanta. And we finished second-to-last the other two years. In all my years of professional baseball I never made it to the World Series. The hundreds of losses gave me a chance to put Ernie Banks’ theory to the test. “The only way to prove you’re a good sport,” he said, “is to lose.”

• Stay positive. Criticism and negativity will kill your team’s spirit and demoralize individuals.
• Keep perspective. Use the opportunity to explain that there is deeper meaning to life than the standings.
• Measure success in different ways. Talk about improvements. Move the focus away from wins and losses.
• Have fun experiences outside of the competitive realm as a team.
• Switch up the positions for added development and excitement.
• Remember you’re not alone – every league has last-place teams. Plus, losing can make you appreciate winning all the more.
• Stay true to what you believe in. Don’t change your core philosophy unless it needs some tweaking.
• Never, ever, give up. That is the one road to utter failure.
• Work on building relationships.

This final item will create some of the most lasting memories for you and your athletes. Screaming things like “What are you thinking, Johnny? What are you doing? Do you have a brain in that helmet?” will result in resentment, not respect. I know it’s not easy to keep your cool amidst a losing stretch but you must control your emotions.
It sounds simple, but another characteristic of Bobby Cox is that he talks to players and treats them like human beings. He handles himself with players in a good, positive manner. He builds a relationship’s foundation out of respect. And he did that in the pre-Tomahawk Chop era, when wins were hard to come by in Atlanta.

On every level, coaches have the responsibility to keep things as fun and simple as possible. This especially goes for youth sports. Shield them from inner-politics and parental spats. Don’t make them “Adult-run sports for youth.” Make them “Youth sports run by adults.” The kids should always come first during winning and losing seasons.

When losing there is perhaps no greater time for coaches to remember this thought by Jackie Robinson: “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.”

A MESSAGE TO HIGH SCHOOL COACHES

High school coaches nowadays find themselves in a tricky position. You have to win enough to keep the athletic director, principal, student body and alumni happy, or you risk getting run out of town. But you’re also the leader of teenagers who are often still trying to find themselves and figure out who they are and what they want to be when they grow up. They’re on the bridge between childhood and adulthood, and you are one of the key adults in their lives teaching them how to get across safely.

Finding a balance between trying to rack up victories while also attempting to really make a positive difference in teens’ lives is not an easy task. But simply realizing the powerful influence you have over these kids is a good place to begin.
Consider the following when coaching your student-athletes:

Proper perspective: Despite current trends, high school sports should not be regarded as a minor-league system for the pros. For one thing, according to Northeastern University’s Center for the Study of Sports in Society, 49,999 of 50,000 student-athletes will never become professional athletes. Those odds are staggering. Coaches need to help athletes be students first. They can have big dreams, but they need to be reminded to have a solid back-up plan.

This brings to mind a humorous story told by former U.S. Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who played some semi-pro ball. “When I was a small boy in Kansas, a friend of mine and I went fishing and as we sat there in the warmth of the summer afternoon on a river bank, we talked about what we wanted to do when we grew up. I told him that I wanted to be a real major league baseball player, a genuine professional like Honus Wagner. My friend said that he’d like to be President of the United States. Neither of us got our wish.” (Baseball Almanac, www.baseball-almanac.com, U.S. Presidents and Baseball)

High school athletics shouldn’t be thought of as a springboard into college athletics. The recruiting landscape has changed. Scouts no longer use high school games as their primary source of talent evaluation. This now occurs in specialized settings such as showcases or national tournaments, where they can watch all of the high level players compete against one another in a centralized location. Not only does this cut down on their travel and time commitments but it is also a more efficient way to judge ability. In a high school game it is tough to gauge performance because the competition levels vary. In fact, most of the times that a college coach attends a high school game it is so they can be seen by
a potential recruit. Usually he has already seen the player multiple times and wants to show his support by attending a game. High school athletics is a community program, it is funded by taxpayers and should be inclusive to all kids, not just the elite. You are part of a system set up to allow teenage boys and girls to compete, have fun, learn, boost school and personal pride, develop skills and, of course, play.

KidsHealth reports that 59 percent of high school football and basketball players believe they will get a college scholarship. When reality strikes, however, only 1-2% actually receive a Division-I athletic scholarship. I will paint an all-too-common scenario for you. A high school basketball coach worked for 20 years and usually kept 2-3 seniors in his program. The logic behind this was to give only the elite players the playing time-this coach didn’t want to waste any time; he wanted to maximize his chance to win, win, win. In 20 years he cut more than 125 seniors. Young men who had come up through the frosh/soph and JV levels and had dreams of representing their school. In those same 20 years he retained only 45 seniors. Not one of these 45 went on to play college basketball, and to make matters worse, he only had a few winning seasons. At the end of his coaching career he finished with seven winning seasons, too many enemies, and hundreds of lost opportunities. Don’t let the same be said about you.

Playing time: Little League coaches should definitely spread out the opportunities between the hard hitters and those who can hardly hit. It wouldn’t hurt high school coaches to take a step back and think about doing this as well. Time after time I have seen a losing team decide to use their bench more often and they begin to win. I like the following game recap with the headline:
OREM — Brooks Shankle, the Orem Owlz reserve first baseman, hasn’t had many chances this season to deliver a game-winning hit.

And playing in only 15 of Orem’s 37 games, he also has had much need for redemption. But for a short time Saturday he was looking like the goat after dropping a throw from pitcher Aaron Cook in the eighth inning, an error that resulted in a key run for the Idaho Falls Chukars and had the game knotted heading into Orem’s final at bat.

In the bottom of the ninth, however, the husky right-handed hitter became the hero when he ripped a one-out double into the right-field gap to score Darrell Sales all the way from first base in Orem’s 3-2 win. It marked the third game in the past week that the Owlz have won in walk-off fashion.

Shankle entered the game hitting only .170 and was hitless Saturday prior to the clutch game-winner. It was only his third RBI of the season.

What’s it going to hurt to let more kids play? Believe in your players and they will come through. Look for those opportune moments during a game to give everyone some playing time. If your MVP’s scoring average dips a bit, so what? Think of the positive effect that playing will have on the kid who works hard at practice every day but never gets to play in front of the fans.

Give them a break: It is one thing to demand a lot out of student-athletes during the season. It’s another to gobble up their precious time all year round. But that’s happening more and more. Kids aren’t being encouraged enough to play different sports or try new activities. The days of the multi-sport athlete seems, in many areas, to be a thing of the past. That can be a positive in the sense that more students get to play more sports. It also has negative repercussions that can outweigh the good.
There’s such an emphasis on specializing that we have 12-year-olds who are playing 100-plus baseball games around-the-calendar. They are worried about what the high school coach thinks of them. Some high school coaches don’t mind this because they have finely tuned athletes coming up through their school system. But that type of mindset is all about the coach. I’d encourage coaches to take the higher road. Athletes shouldn’t feel pressure to not play other sports so they can focus on one. In fact, the exact opposite should be happening. Even kids who only want to play one sport should find other sources of entertainment or activity. The more well-rounded youth are, the better adjusted they’ll be in society. It will also help them avoid burn-out and make new friends.

In professional athletics we have a huge problem with life after retirement. Guys have a hard time adjusting to the fact that what they do after their athletic career doesn’t include the game, the fans, or the fame. Unfortunately some turn to drugs, many divorce, others become depressed, and some even contemplate suicide. On a smaller scale the same thing can happen to high school athletes. If they haven’t had other hobbies and interests during high school they will have a very difficult adjustment ahead. Be aware of this future obstacle and try to help these young men and women see that the game isn’t necessarily about wins and losses. You can’t take those with you. The experience should teach life lessons that will be forever ingrained in your players.

Be positive: It isn’t just little 9-year-olds who need to hear compliments and who are harmed by constant criticism. Teenagers also need encouragement and praise mixed in with the admonishing and correcting. They are in high school, one of the most fun times of their lives. Do you want to be known as the ornery old cuss who ruined it for them? We have high school reunions our
whole lives because these are special years to remember. Coaches can play a huge factor and make a big difference in kids’ lives. You have an enormous influence over your team – for good and for bad.

It helps to remind yourself about why you got involved in youth sports in the first place. Was it to be in the spotlight and to make big bucks? Probably not. Teachers generally earn modest salaries, and coaching doesn’t add much on top of that. It’s my guess most coaches got involved simply because they love the sport and they want to help kids play, improve and win.

Be a teacher: It’s never too late to impress upon youth the importance of learning life’s lessons in the sports arena. In fact, this very well could be when kids’ minds are most ripe for learning. This starts by coaches practicing what they preach. An education received in a fun environment – like sports ought to be – can be one of the most lasting memories of his life. Carefully monitor your players’ progress in the schoolroom, as well. A respected coach can help nudge a struggling student to work harder, perhaps even more than other teachers can. Hey, if a calculus teacher can inspire kids who didn’t care about math to learn to love it, it seems coaches should certainly be able to enthuse players to learn from sports and school.

Be personable: The majority of your players only get to play varsity for one year. Do whatever you can to make it a memorable one. Some coaches don’t like to get close with their players but I consider that philosophy to be a wasted opportunity. Chad Lewis, a veteran tight end in the NFL, shared an example of what his coach did for him. He said, “I’ve been so blessed. I have had the greatest string of coaches that any player has ever had. One of them was Dick Vermeil. He’s a powerful, powerful person. I didn’t want to play for him at first. When I was a free agent, I read the stories about how brutal his train-
ing camps were. They had a team mutiny the second week of the season. But the Rams were my only option. I developed great respect for Coach Vermeil that season. He cares so much about his players. He has every player to his house for dinner in the offseason and he cooks for them — 8-10 players at a time with their wives or girlfriends. That’s just how he is. He just cares about every person who plays for him in a way that most coaches are afraid to expose themselves. Players love Dick Vermeil.

When he cut me during Week 9 of that season, he had no choice. He had to make a roster spot available. When I went in his office, he was crying. He had to walk to the corner of his office to compose himself. I told him, ‘Coach, it’s OK. I love you.’ He told me, ‘I did not want to do this. I love having you around. I know we’re going to win the Super Bowl and I wanted to put you on the injured reserve for that, but the more I thought about that it wasn’t fair to you. I know you’re going to do great things. I want you to have that opportunity. I’m going to do what I can to get you a job.’

I flew to Philadelphia the next day and Coach Vermeil called my wife and asked her if there was anything he could do to help her. No one does that! He was telling her, ‘I’m sorry. Chad is going to be fine.’ And it wasn’t just me; he was like that with his players. I’ve talked to him several times since. It’s always a handshake and a hug.”

FINAL MESSAGE FOR ALL COACHES

It will help all coaches to keep in mind what’s really important in the grand scheme of things. Players will remember how they felt a lot more than they’ll remember wins and losses. Memories of simply participating whether positive or negative, will stick with them a whole lot longer than any statistic.
Terry Orchard has been coaching Little League football for 35 years. After some rumors spread about him possibly retiring from coaching, he dispelled them in the paper. He simply enjoys molding boys into men too much. “I thought about it (retiring),” he said in a local newspaper article. “I struggle with it a little bit, but I go to practice and see some guys’ faces beam, and I say, ‘Hey, this is where I need to be.’” (Deseret Morning News, “Coach Orchard: Teaching X’s, O’s and life,” Sept. 30, 2005, Page N7)

Orchard could coach at a higher level – he’s been offered collegiate positions in the past – but he prefers working with the younger players. That, despite zero monetary compensation. “I get paid all the hours I want,” he jokes. One of Orchard’s former players who now has a son playing for him told the newspaper that he still has fond memories of the coach. The article says, he “vividly remembers from his young playing days that Orchard would pound deep in their helmets the point that what goes on in the classroom and the home is more important than what happens on the gridiron.”

In fact, Steve Knighton said he learned about as much about how to live outside the white lines than how to play within them from this great example of a coach. “He teaches them the game, but he teaches them life lessons,” Knighton said. “He puts so much effort into teaching kids good ethics, good values, family and academics first. I think he just enjoys making young kids into good people if he can. You’d have to, to spend 35 years with young kids like that.”

The reward wasn’t fame and fortune for Orchard. It was the satisfaction of being a good example and a father figure to boys in need.

“The biggest thrill is seeing them come back and be good fathers,” Orchard told the Deseret Morning News. “We try to teach them to take responsibility for their
actions. We’re constantly telling them not to do something stupid, to keep grades, that there’s more to life than sports and football when it’s all said and done.”

By caring, showing respect, setting attainable goals, maintaining open communication, keeping perspective, being a good example, having fun and staying true to your philosophy, the sport and the athlete, you can have an unbelievable influence on a young life. That’s as honorable a duty as there is. You could be rewarded with many lifelong friends. But even if you never see your athletes again, you’ll have the self-satisfaction of knowing you did your best and that they received special care while under your wing.

And, if you ever forget how influential you really are in a child’s life, just remember this: Coaches can get kids to run wind sprints. Parents feel lucky if they can get the same children to put their dirty clothes in the hamper.
A COACH’S PERSPECTIVE

Billy Hicks, a high school basketball coach for Cave Spring High School in Roanoke, Va., graciously agreed to be interviewed for this book. His expertise on coaching and youth sports are included in the following thought-provoking Q&A session.

Hicks has coached for 18 years, including the past 10 as the Knights’ head coach. His most famous former student-athlete is NBA shooting guard J.J. Redick, the 2005-06 NCAA college basketball player of the year with Duke. Redick played for Hicks from 1998 to 2002, when he became the school’s all-time scoring leader, helped win its first-ever state championship and became a McDonald’s All-American.

Coach Hicks (Cave Springs, 1984) lives in the Roanoke area with his wife, Cherie, and his four children, Cager, Brody, Dawson and Ainslee. A stay-at-home Mr. Mom since 2003, he coaches but doesn’t teach at Cave Springs. He told “The Roanoke Times’ that family and basketball are his two favorite things.)

**Question:** In your opinion, what is the importance of youth sports?

**Hicks:** The importance? I have four children, 9, 8, 6 and 4, the three oldest are boys. They have been involved in youth sports for varying amounts of time, very involved. I do have a little different view than a lot of people who know me would think I would. I don’t think a kid needs to start right away in every sport and jump into it.

There are some positives and negatives, too. The state youth sports is in today, you see a lot of poor sportsmanship from the stands. That kinda leaks over. Bad examples are being set. Improper things are being taught. I would want to make sure before kids get involved in something that a coach is qualified – somebody with
Coach Billy Hicks presenting JJ Redick with the 2006 Rupp award (nation’s top men’s basketball player).

integrity, with an emphasis first and foremost to have fun and teach the rules of the game, sportsmanship and those types of things. Anything they learn from a fundamental standpoint is a bonus. They’ll learn those things over the years.

I’ve seen enough youth games over time that I like it when the emphasis is on fun and not winning.

**Question:** To what extent can you emphasize that — having fun, not necessarily winning — at your level of coaching?

**Hicks:** Most of the pressure I have to win is pressure I put on myself, to field a competitive team. Bobby Knight said that high school coaching is the truest form of
coaching. You take what the neighborhood gives you and you go from there. In public high school, which is what we are, some years we have an abundance of talent, other years we don’t. We can’t always make winning the focus. We want to win as bad as anybody. We are as competitive as anybody. We keep score. We talk about the banners in our gym. The bottom line is, you have to prepare kids to go on to different things. Not many are going to have a career in pro sports, but all are going to have a career in life. We emphasize those things and hopefully winning is a byproduct.

**Question:** You mentioned the negative aspect of the state of youth sports. Do you have any examples?

**Hicks:** I’ve seen peewee football coaches grab kids by the face mask. I’ve seen parents yelling obscenities at refs and other team members, being very negative from a fan’s standpoint. I think that trickles down. A kid sees his parent showing a coach or a referee disrespect, they’re going to emulate it and think it’s OK. It will carry over into life with the whole authority thing.

I sit on my hands during my kids’ games. My wife and I try to cheer for both teams when somebody does something well. You certainly have pride when your child does something great. You stand up and cheer, and that’s great. But I don’t like taunting. It’s showing up somebody instead of showing sportsmanship. (dunking, standing over a guy after he’s tackled.)

We have some tremendous youth coaches. My son is playing for a man who has coached 6-7-year-old T-ball for 20 years. He comes three times a week, gives it his all, gives every kid a chance. He’s a true teacher and a mentor for those kids. We have our share of good guys. But at a young age, it only takes one negative experience to turn a kid off.

A guy called me whose daughter is involved in a rec
league for 9-year-old fourth-grade girls. The coach is running them to death, yelling at them. A boys team came at the end of practice, and he lined them up and screamed at them for 10-15 minutes. His daughter didn’t want to go back to practice. As much as we talk about sportsmanship and being good role models, there are still some rotten eggs out there.

In our area, NASCAR is a huge thing. It used to be a gentleman’s sport. My dad used to take me to the Martinsville Speedway. We’d go to a local restaurant, and the drivers used to come by, pat you on the head and sign autographs. Now you have their girlfriends fighting in the stand, drivers saying bad things about each other in the newspaper.

**Question:** Why did you get into coaching?

**Hicks:** As far as high school goes, it’s my dream job. I’ve always wanted to be a high school coach. College coaching is something I’ve looked into … but right now I’m very happy doing what I’m doing.

I love the game of basketball. And I felt like to stay in it, I really wanted to work with young people to be a mentor, a role model and teach the game I love.

(At the end of the season, we sit down and reflect on the season and how it’s gone. Never once have we talked about not winning enough. We discuss relationships. Have we been a good role model and mentor?)

Nothing pleases me more than when a former athlete seeks my advice. I had two weddings last year. It’s great to know you had a positive impact on their life. Not too many jobs do you have that. Being a high school guy, I’m not making a ton of money. I have friends from high school and college who say, “You go to work every day, do something you love and impact people’s lives.” They’re envious that I have a job that I love.
**Question:** What is your coaching philosophy?

**Hicks:** To build relationships with players and build character. The first thing I look for is their character. We want to try to do things throughout the season and their career to enhance that. My No. 1 philosophy is that if you do right by the kids then other things, win-loss percentage, will take care of themselves over the long haul. In high school, it’s going to be cyclical no matter how good a coach you are. We try to be the best we can be every year and try not to worry about how good other teams are. We try to reach our potential.

We have coaching cornerstones – good kids, good role models, develop relationships. Those things are never going to waiver, never going to change. And then we’ll go from there with the talent that we have.

We’ve done things that reinforced those (cornerstones). We’ve let kids go that were good enough to make the team but were not good in character. They were tough decisions. They might have hurt our chance to win and our winning percentage. We felt good while me made them. You’ve gotta put team first. You’ve gotta do what’s best for the team and help the individual while you can. We try not to wavier from those things there.

Every year we change Xs and Os, things like that. We don’t change how we treat kids or what our real goals are. Of course, from time to time, we lose sight, get involved in the season, worrying about the next conference game and what our record is, ask are we going to make the playoffs.

**Question:** Where did you get your philosophy?

**Hicks:** Over time, a bunch of different people influenced me. The books I read, John Wooden, Coach K (Mike Krzyzewski), my junior high coach…

I’ve developed them (philosophies) over time. That’s the
kind of coach I would have wanted to play for. I consider myself a player’s coach. Anybody can learn Xs and Os, not everybody can be a true coach and mentor. Building relationships is one of my strengths.