

Old School Coaching

- [00:05](#) J: Welcome to compete like a champion. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skill specialist, and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA Player Development. Today we're going to dive into old school coaching and has it seen its day, Larry?
- [00:16](#) L: Yeah. This will get people's attention, right?
- [00:18](#) J: Oh yeah.
- [00:18](#) L: When they see this title
- [00:19](#) J: Very thought provoking.
- [00:21](#) L: Yes. Well, and let me, let me kind of frame this. Uh, recently in the, in the past couple of weeks, there have been five national hockey league coaches fired, not all for inappropriate behavior, but three of the five and my friend who's a great coach, John Heinz with the New Jersey Devils was fired. But that was not for inappropriate behavior. That was performance-based. So sorry, John, you're a great coach. I know you'll get back on your feet with that. But what we're seeing in, in three of the cases, one Bill Peters with the Flames was fired when a player came out recently and said, okay, maybe 10 years ago he used racial slurs against me and multiple times. All right. That coach resigned pretty much immediately. Was forced to resign. We saw with Mike Babcock who was fired with Toronto Maple Leafs for performance reasons, but mainly I think around the players weren't listening to him anymore. And he had a very talented young team that was maybe kind of being mediocre and meddling the season. After he was fired, players come out and said about how he was bullying them. So the perception was that he was bullying them. And there was one story of how Mitch Marner, who's one of the best players on the team on his rookie season, was asked to come in to meet with coach Babcock and was asked to rank the Maple Leafs players from the one that gives the most effort to the one that gives the least effort. Interesting task, right? But in private. So coach then supposedly the report is, he takes that list and he takes it into a team meeting and announces it to everybody. That's, that's tough, right? That's, I mean...
- [01:47](#) J: That's a bold strategy.
- [01:48](#) L: Yeah, that trust is probably broken there. So unfortunate move there. But, and then in a third case, Jim Montgomery who was with the Dallas Stars and we don't know why was just recently fired for inappropriate conduct. We don't know what happened but seems to be, JP, that you know, if you have done something, it's inappropriate, there are no timelines to say, okay, you can't be fired for this. Like the people are going back and...
- [02:14](#) J: 10 years.

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L: 10 years!

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J: On that first example you gave.

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L: 10 years. Whether that's right or wrong, you know, I think it gets us to the idea that as coaches we are very impactful on the people that we coach and make a difference in their lives and of course their performances. But that impact is so great that even 10 years later, you know, the importance of that and what that meant for that player that was treated that way. So we got to realize just how important we are in the lives of our athletes.

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J: Yeah, it's pretty fascinating because I, what comes to mind, and maybe we can touch on this after, after my, what's running through my head with examples is how much of the old school coaching methods, uh, are being, I guess, drowned away because of where we are in now in society and culture. How it's moved forward or accelerated so much in the past 10 years.

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L: Yeah, even in the past two.

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J: Or even the past two. And then how much is because we're just more well informed about what more positive teaching, positive coaching strategies there are now. We're more well-informed of those things. So we're just siding to make those part of how we teach and how we coach. But I want to, you know, a couple of examples I've got here is more of a physically based one and don't know the reasons around it. Maybe it was just a tough strength and conditioning session, but this was very well, well documented and a lot of news articles. It may have even hit ESPN and all that, but the, the university of Houston women's soccer team where they had a strength and conditioning session after practice and 12, they ended up getting 12 cases of rhabdo, which for those that may not know what rhabdo is, it's basically a condition where the body and the muscle tissue breaks down and it can be very life threatening very quickly, but 12 cases in one session.

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L: That probably is maybe a record.

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J: Right, right. Absolutely.

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L: That's crazy.

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J: So, if we look at old school coaching methods, I mean again, we don't know the context around what that session was built around. Was it a hard session due to punishment because of whatever or was it just because they wanted a hard session in strength and conditioning and they wanted to push them and push the mental boundaries and all that. Who knows? Regardless, it's obviously wrong because we had 12 cases of rhabdo, in which case you know you've got 12 sets of very worried parents. I believe that that coach was fired the week after. However, I mean there is an example of, you know, I'm sure there's cases

like this all over the place. There have been other examples of teams or athletes that have got rhabdo from from overdoing it and let's say...

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L: That's true.

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J: But even dropping down to another level is is you still see out there a lot of coaches using physical, physical punishment as a consequence for either not doing something and that even goes on the tennis court to doing something as simple as, okay, if you lose this game or whatever, then the loser has to go and do a suicide. Even something as basic as that, which is, which can only set the tone for that athlete that anything they do when they lose or anything they do that doesn't sort of meet the expectations, whether it's high pressure or low pressure, they're going to be punished physically for it, which turns into a bit of a negative environment for that athlete's experiences. Again, whether it be high pressure or low pressure.

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L: Well, I think what you have to understand that an adverse punishment is an adverse stimulus that you're applying to someone, right? And uh, adversus stimuli cause people to avoid situations, to not want to have that punishment again. So, all right, if you don't want to run or you don't want to do pushups or kangaroo jumps, whatever it is, then you're just going to avoid putting yourself in that situation. Or you're going to do the least riskiest things so you don't have to be punished. Right? So I think that what we miss is that punishment doesn't teach. It just causes fear. It stops behavior immediately, usually. But it doesn't change behavior. Okay? Now what we don't want to do is to necessarily equate old-school coaching with punishment or using fear. Some people think of it that way, but when people, when people use this phrase, old school coaching, what are they talking about, JP? What, what do they mean by an old school coach?

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J: Well, I think what comes to mind with an old school coach is someone that's very tough. Somebody that's willing to use physical punishment as a consequence. Somebody that's pretty hard headed. Some of them might be pretty stubborn about their coaching practices and essentially what all that means is that their practices and everything they do is more coach centered, a coach centered approach versus an athlete centered approach. And maybe you can talk a little bit more about the differences between the two, but a coach centered approach to me means that the coach is developing sessions and acting what they believe is their perceived idea of what should or shouldn't be done and what their ideas are around those sessions as opposed to athlete centered being around what is best for the athletes. And I know that sounds like maybe a tiny bit of a contradiction because maybe the coach feels that what they're doing is best for the athlete. But at the same time we've, you know when you're running sessions and it's on your time or it's on, it's on your time table, it's on your time, the drills that you're doing are changed to fit your demands and your needs. I'm not sure that that is an athlete centered approach on the court. The athlete centered approach needs to take into account a positive coaching, which is positive reinforcement for doing good things and then teaching and learning opportunities when maybe they're not

understanding those elements where we can, we can have teachable moments and so we need to center our strategies around the learning and the teaching of the player or the athlete we're working with as opposed to the coach taking what their perceptions are into taking what their perceptions are without taking the athletes thoughts, feelings, behaviors into account.

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L: And I could see that. And I think there's some confusion when people use the term old school coaching cause I think some coaches use that term not as equating to use of fear punishment, it's my way or the highway, but it is that the coach is controlling the environment and is tough, holds people accountable, makes it very clear what's expected and doesn't, doesn't hold back on what needs to be said. Now to me a lot of those things that's just good coaching whether you call it old school coaching or you know being a player's coach and usually this is the dichotomy that ends up in the media, right, is they're an old school coach or they're a player's coach and I'm not sure that's accurate either, right? Because what you're saying when you say someone's a player's coach is A. will they make it about the players, which is great, what you're talking about is an athlete or a player centered approach there. Everything you do is based on the needs of the athletes, which I believe in philosophically. And at the same time that term usually gets applied to maybe being soft or not holding them accountable for certain behavioral standards, right? Being loose about things. And I think there's a lot of confusion there. And I think we have to look at specific behaviors instead of old school versus player's coach. What are the behaviors that are, first ethical and appropriate, and secondly, are good practice, are good, it's good teaching and coaching, right? And so to me when you talk about coach centered versus athlete centered, athlete centered approach is all about the needs of the athlete. And there's people who would consider themselves old school coaches that do that. And there's people who would say they're not an old school coach that obviously do that, the player's coach. So I think we need to dissect that and say, look, okay, what, what doesn't work first? Well first sports should never be used to, uh, abuse somebody to make them feel worse, to feel lesser. The scoreboard already does enough of that work, right? So we don't need to do that as, as a coach. And I think part of the, the issue is that when we start punishing people and when we start using fear, we're doing it for ourselves. Now we're saying, no, I'm angry. It's something you did. You've cost me, so I'm going to punish you because my time, my status, my record, my ego, right? And we tend to lean on those approaches. But if it's about the athlete, wouldn't you think that you would consider a way to say, and this is not the best thing to make this person do all this running. Now I've just screwed up their strength and conditioning program, right? I probably can't do as much of the tennis training I want to do, and now they're angry at me and or, or down or whatever and I gotta deal with the emotional part now. So I've just created more issues, even though I might get the behavior I want right away, longterm, it doesn't work

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J: Well, I think as you're talking there, what was coming to my mind is more this one size fits all policy. You know that sometimes as coaches we develop our... There's always a good thing in developing our philosophies as coaches. We want

to, and that's sometimes takes a long time. I still think for me, I'm still working on developing my philosophy. It's been very well sort of driven and directed by the work we do with USTA, you know, player development. But you know, we all have our own little individual thoughts and feelings of what our philosophies are and I think we need to make sure as well, especially in individual sport like tennis, that a one size fits all coach where they apply the same things to every player that they work with is not an athlete centered approach. Because every kid, every family has a different dynamic, different personalities. There's so many complex things that go into the mix that we cannot approach, I guess our coaching that way. And I, I maybe feel that obviously our experiences and our philosophies are formed by the knowledge and experience that we've had up until each day, right? So right now I have a philosophy in my mind that's built around all my experiences I've had in my life up until this point as I'm sure you've had, but tomorrow or tonight I might read something that I learn and that helps maybe even change my perception or help me learn on it. So I think, I mean that comes down to being being open and having a bit of a growth mindset, which I know we've talked a lot about in the past, but this comes down to recognizing that being a teacher or coach, being athlete centered means that we are always willing to adapt our style of teaching and coaching based off the person that's in front of us on the other side of the net, which can change from one hour lesson to the next hour lesson to the next group lesson coming out and it, it's for, we need to be very adaptable as coaches to that.

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L: And I think what you're talking about there, JP, is you're talking about the actual concepts or skills that you're teaching tactics and you're basing it on where the athlete is and challenging them, which I think if you care about somebody, you support them and you also challenge them to be better. At the same time, there are certain things, and this is where people will say, Hey, I'm old school would say, okay, we have to make sure that there are certain principles that I believe that are part of my philosophy, like being on time, that are there no matter what. And I think those things can coexist, right? Because good coaches still make sure their players are on time because that creates a better practice, readiness to, to train. And so I think that the messaging here for me is that whether you consider yourself old school or kind of new age, it's gotta be based on the athlete's needs, right? And when it comes to that, I always think about when Rich Rodriguez came to coach Michigan football, I was living in Michigan. He brought in a new style offense and it was nothing like the ground and pound Beauchesne Beckler years, the ground and pound and, and it just didn't, it just didn't jive with Michigan football. It ended up not working. So he tried to lay down his philosophy on a school that had a tradition of playing a certain way and it just didn't jive. And so I'm not sure that he was able to adapt his philosophy to the environment he was in or the kind of athletes he was getting. And yet there's still some principles that like we would call non-negotiables. Like in your mind...

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J: They're our training standards. Our training standards are the way we... I was just saying that though, it's also the way we talk to our athletes is it can be a little different from one to the next. And I'll give a little quick example. When I

was, when I was in college and my brother played on the same college team where we played at the same time, you know, we're in a situation where we can receive coaching in between matches. I was a type of guy that loved somebody getting on me if I wasn't maybe meeting expectations or standards and you know, it didn't happen very frequently. But I also had a coach that I wanted to get in my face to help kind of inspire, motivate me just that little extra percent. Even if I was rolling and doing really well, I wanted a coach in my face going, you know, you can still push, you can still push, you know. Uh, and, but my brother on the other hand, if you got in his face, he didn't like that. He didn't like the way you'd speak, you know, he didn't, he didn't think that that was appropriate way to be spoken to and he was more of a guy that's like just sit down next to me and have a conversation or we can have a conversation. Whereas I was the guy that was like, want to be highly, I was highly motivating myself, but to have a coach kind of on me saying we, you know, we need this, you know, work at your game plan and you know, and say, come on, you know, light a fire, or as coach Hussey said on a previous podcast.

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L: The rocket.

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J: Light a rocket underneath you.

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L: One of our favorites.

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J: You know, so there's ways we talk to athletes individually too that can help get the best out of them. You know, some like the questions, some like to be told what to do, some like to be almost shouted out a little bit. Some just want a human conversation. And that's where understanding the relationship obviously is the key and understanding which is the best approach. But as coaches, we have to be open to also, you know, not just adapting our style of coaching with each individual athlete, but the way that we talk to the athletes leaves a strong impression on each athlete's approach or their mind and how they respond.

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L: Yeah. And I think that's so important is the way we talk to our athletes. And if, again, coaches who are listening, if you consider yourself an old school coach, that's fine. Someone that says they're an old school coach I don't immediately think, Oh God, this is going to be horrible. The point is that that is not licensed to treat people with disrespect, right? Because good old school coaches hold people accountable. They have a strong voice, but they're still respectful, right? And then we've seen examples of coaches who have done it in a disrespectful way and it seems to be in the past you could get away with it, but not anymore. It doesn't seem to work anymore. And you could go back to like Bobby Knight and you're just different examples that the times times have changed. And in many ways for the better. Our athletes share more. They're, they're more open to talking I think. And they also, they're not just going to do something because I'm the coach, do it. Why is this important? What does it matter to me? And I think that, you know, the older they get, they should know why they're doing what they're doing. So I think there's some things that are correlated with this idea of old school coaching, you know, shouting at people, using physical

punishment as a way to get the behaviors that you want. You know, really kind of very much distancing yourself, so not getting into any personal things, just being tough, right? Like kind of the drill sergeant approach. And again, you can be old school but you gotta be respectful. You can yell at times, but as you're saying, Johnny, you can't yell at everybody. And certainly it depends on what age and stage you're working with too. Because to me that's never appropriate with children who don't have the emotional or mental capacity to understand that you're not angry at them personally, you're angry at their behavior and little children can't make that distinction.

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J: Well and then, exactly. And that's when then we need to help them understand that, as opposed to just shouting and saying, because again, like are they going to get the best out of them just by shouting at them and saying that's not good enough. Or pull them aside, help them ask questions, help them learn and understand that yes, that isn't good enough, but how are we going to make those changes? How are we going to deal with this? You know, you get, you're going to go out there right now and have another opportunity. How are you going to approach it so that we meet our standards? It's that learning that needs to take place rather than, going back to the beginning what we about, the assumptions, the perception from the coach, right? That they automatically will understand just by shouting at them. That's not good enough.

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L: Yeah, and I think there's a couple things you know to dig deep into this JP, cause I agree with you, it's, it's about time. You know, sometimes we feel rushed and so we just, I see it with myself, my parenting too. When you get rushed and so you get very militaristic like, Hey, do this, you got to do it right. We've got to go. So there's time, coaches are always under a time crunch because they only get so much time with their athletes. And so that can be a reason why a coach would fall back on. Right?

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J: Well, I'm smiling because I laugh because even this morning, right, where we're here at the national campus, you've got a bit of a bit of an exchange going on between the US kids and the British kids, having a little match play and it's been raining. So we've had to be resilient going inside, not knowing 100% what the plans are and, but the first thing the kids want to know in the morning, Oh are we playing matches today? Or what are we doing? Where are we going? And I'm like, you know, in the past I would've just gone, go there, sit there, wait until I tell you the next step, right? But then here I was like, well, you know what, I actually don't really know the plan right now, so the best thing for us to do is to go inside, let's prepare, let's go through our dynamic and let's just be ready for whatever comes our way. So it's more of approach like, Hey, I know as much as you do and we're in the same boat here, so let's just do what we can control versus just saying, you know, and again, that was the coach centered part of me as maybe somebody new out of, you know, getting into the college realm full time of going, okay, do this, do that, do this. When you're pressured for time or things adjust your plans, whereas now it's actually like let's take an approach where I can help them understand that I actually don't have the answers and that's okay not to have the answers, but we're going to do the best

to find those answers, but what can we do in the meantime until we get to that point? And I think I was just a little bit of a, and I've caught, even now, I catch myself trying to refrain from doing the former and doing more of the latter. But it takes a lot of awareness does and then patience. No time can, even though you may be under a time crunch, I don't think, you know, you can take as much time if it means helping the athletes learn in any situation.

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L: And I appreciate you bringing up that example because that gets, you know, time it gets to uh, you know, coaches feeling comfortable to be questioned or to not perceiving that if a kid asks you a question like, Oh, you're, you're challenging my point of view, you just won't listen to me and I think you have to be aware of that and those things that you said, you have to have some awareness of, of yourself and it's easy to fall back into those things, especially when there are surprises, there's changes in the routine, the, you know, like there is today and, and certainly you, you see people fall back into that behavior because you're just trying to manage behavior at that point versus actually teach.

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J: Yeah, absolutely. And hearing you say that takes me back even further a little bit to some of the coaching I used to as well where, you know, you have an hour lesson with a player and you're spending that time with them, but in that hour you have your lesson plan down that we're going to work on this certain skill, a change of direction with the forehand or a forehand cross-court with spin or taken off the top, whatever it is, it doesn't matter. It's whatever skill it is. And you feel that you've got that hour to really try and make that skill better and improve it and ingrain it. But guess what happens a lot of the time... The athlete doesn't pick it up as quick as you think they're going to do it. So you get to the end of the hour thinking, okay, within this hour they're going to get this and they're going to get this and it's going to be great cause then the next lesson we can move on and we can work on this and you then start rushing, you're feeding a little bit, you start taking less breaks, you start going, we need to get more balls in, we need to do this more because we're not getting it right now as quick as I want it. And then you get to the end of the lesson sometimes, and coaches I'm sure you'll resonate with me out there, you probably leave some hour lessons feeling a little frustrated that your athlete didn't get the skill that you wanted to get in the timeframe that you set.

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L: Sure.

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J: But that's okay. That's absolutely okay because, guess what, the next time you spend with them or maybe you send them home with some reflective learning and they come back with, okay, here's what I feel I can do to be better. You have a quick little discussion around that and then go to work at it again. There's time. There's time and patience because everyone is on their own timetable with their learning. It also gives me time as a coach, I felt, to reflect back on how I could have delivered that session better and maybe my coaching cues could have been more simplified or better to help the athlete learn the player, learn that skill. So it's just, and again, that's to me where it's the difference between

what's the coach centered side or what's the athlete centered side. And you know, as I keep thinking back to when I first started out, your intentions are to be all about like it always has been. It's always about the player. It's always about the person, it's always about the athlete. But sometimes the way we're delivering it doesn't reflect your intention as the teacher or coach. So

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L: No, and I think it's so easy to fall in a trap and I think we all do at times. And so we have to check ourselves on that constantly and be aware. That even gets into our emotions, you know? And I've always said that coaches can get upset. They're human beings. So I'm not saying that you can't get mad or because we all get upset at times, but good coaching is managing that and understanding the response to that emotion is going to be for the benefit of the athlete and at the youngest levels, there's never really a benefit for getting angry at those athletes because of what their capacity is. And I always go back to what Dr. Reiner Martins talked about, and I think we make this mistake a lot, but learning is learning. If it's mastered and they're not doing it, then that's an issue of focus, right? Cause they're not really putting their focus into what they're doing. But they haven't, if they haven't mastered it where they can repeat it automatically and you're getting upset, then that's on you because you're basing on your feelings of where things should be. And so then you need to be aware of that and use that emotion and that energy in a way to support the players to learn, to challenge them to get better in a positive way, to be creative, to do things like you talked about, giving them reflective homework, talking to their parents about things they can do away from the court to be ready for the next session. And you see this, so good coaching is being aware of the athlete, their needs, and what age and stage that they're in. If I have an older athlete or let's say a pro athlete and they're not focused, maybe I can go at them harder but I'm not going to be disrespectful. I'm not going to call them names or things like that, which is going back to the very beginning. This is why people are getting fired but I am going to maybe get louder or be really direct if I have that relationship. If I don't, then it's ineffective. Right? And that player doesn't want to be taught that way. Probably going to be ineffective. So I think good coaching, there's a lot of reading and reacting based on what you understand about your athlete and if you work in team sport, where you understand about your team culture, what you know about yourself and how you're feeling and what you wanted to get done and what's going on there. And it's taking that mixture of things and being able to figure out what's the right way to respond to this. And because it's so complex, you're not always going to get it right. I don't. Right? And so that's okay. You just don't want to make the big mistakes where you break trust, where you do something that the athlete will no longer listen to you. And so again, you go back to, you can consider yourself old school, you can consider yourself kind of player focused, new age, however you consider yourself. But there's certain things that live through both. Athletes always come first. It's about them cause they're playing the game and they deserve to have a good experience. And when they don't deserve to have a good experience for some reason because they're not showing up or they're doing something really incredibly wrong, then in a positive way you need to take away the experience and that comes back to the parents. But again, there's certain things like being

on time, giving effort, that we can be tough on, but what that means, the age and stage is going to look different. If you have a pro player tanking, you can go after him a little bit more. But you're still not going to be disrespectful. You have a young player tanking, you can't really go at them because they, again, they don't understand. They think that you're mad at them and now you're not getting any learning done at all. If the player thinks that you're mad at them, then that's blocking any kind of learning that can occur.

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J: Yeah.

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L: We just have to understand that and so it has to be about the athlete getting better and coach John Wooden said, if the athlete isn't learning, you're not coaching. And so it's, it's understanding your athletes, it's understanding yourself, making it about the athletes, and then having expectations as coach Jose Higuera always says, clear from the front. This is how we go about our business. He has a few rules, expectations, he doesn't have a lot, but he has a couple of really important ones being on time, being respectful, giving your best effort, right? Engagement. And if players can live up to that, then we're good.

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J: Yeah.

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L: And if they can't, he's not going to yell and scream at them. He's just going to respectfully ask them what's going on and how can we get that from you? What is it that you want? And if they can't, then they can leave the court. And that's okay. And In a respectful way.

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J: That's okay because then, you know, we give them time to reflect on that and then see what choice they make when they come to the court the next time though. So I'm going to give you, you're always great at giving me exercises and, you know, your mental skills drills and handbook is something that I ingrained in all my coaching when I was in the private sector, stuff that I use now and always have sort of right there in my mind. So you've given me so many exercises in the past, I'm going to give you an exercise.

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L: I love it. All right, give me one. Is this like planks or something?

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J: You got to do the plank on the studio table right here as we're doing a podcast.

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L: Kate does not want to see that.

[27:17](#)

J: You have a complete blank canvas. You need to paint the perfect picture. Maybe not the perfect picture, but the best picture that you can on what a coach athlete relationship looks like. What does that picture look like?

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L: What age and stage?

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J: Well, let's do, let's maybe go through them and let's start with maybe our space here with like maybe like player ID development space of that 10 to 14, 10 to 15 age.

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L: Yeah. And this won't be perfect by any means because I'm on the spot here. But I think that relationship, there is a lot of structure. The coach is definitely the adult and the communication often is, it's gotta be clear and consistent. Not that it wouldn't be at other stages, but because young players struggle to process a lot of things and they don't always know what they need to do cause they're young, really giving them a lot of structure. That coach athlete relationship is going to be more adult child relationship, like a teacher student relationship. Very much so. And there's gotta be very clear boundaries for many important reasons. So to me those are important considerations. It's also very positive. There's a lot of patience because kids of that age, even if they're extremely talented and hardworking are going to make a lot of mistakes. And you will see, I think in my mind that coach is always explaining in different ways by showing them, by telling them, by showing them video, having them feel it, coming up with creative ways to work at things and taking the time to explain it again and again. Those are tough years because now you're getting into the deliberate practice years where you have to, if you're going to be really good, make all those mistakes so you can become good. And as a coach, I feel like that that is a critical stage. And as a coach you have to be extremely patient, very knowledgeable about how young people learn and how to get the most out of them. So I find that's a critical stage and so that coach is going to be, again, more of that adult figure, clear boundaries, very positive, encouraging for sure. And very rarely get negative because kids are just going to make mistakes. You know they're going to screw up and even from a behavior standpoint and you have to understand that.

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J: So then you, you move to the next wall, you have another canvas. Let's say that those transition years pre-college, pre, well, pre decision of whether they go college or pro 16, 17, 18 how does that adapt?

[29:32](#)

L: Yeah, and this is an interesting kind of thought project here. I believe now as we're talking about adolescents, older teams, right? You know, getting into a young adulthood. Still not fully emotionally developed though. Okay? Still gonna make mistakes. There's a reason why car rental companies don't let you rent a car until you're 25 by the way. They've had it figured out for many years. We're still gonna make mistakes, but they're not going to be as many. And there's a few things as a coach at this level you have to keep in mind, that you know, older teens, teens, young adults are trying to create their own identity separate from their parents, separate from other adults, their peers become more important in terms of their influence on what they think and what they believe. There's a lot of peer pressure as well. So as a coach, I'm trying to be aware of all of those changes that are going on and they're trying to take control in their lives in this crazy world, this tumultuous emotional world, right? And so now, whereas when they're younger, I might be kind of pulling them along and I'm creating the structure and I'm leading almost everything. At this point in time

now it's a slow progression. Gradual progression is a better word. I'm really kind of walking more side by side with a player and collaborating more. And I'm asking them, what do you think we should work on and what do you, what are you feeling there and what decision, you made that decision and why. I'm not saying don't ask questions of the younger ones. You need to start to develop this ability to think critically and to make decisions and to be independent. But you see that approach now where the coach is treating them more like a young adult. Now it's tricky because I've even done some research like in inner city Detroit where kids get to about 14 and suddenly we think that, okay, 14-15 they kind of look like little adults now. So they should act like adults. Big mistake. You still gotta be patient. You gotta realize they're gonna make mistakes, but they should be able to have the capacity to really learn and improve fast. Young kids improve really fast many times. This is going to continue and I think that at this stage, a coach is really still leading, still creating structure, but giving the player more voice. Letting them have a say in what they're working on, more goals, because they have a great working knowledge now. If they'd been doing tennis for five, six, seven, eight years, pretty good understanding. And wouldn't you want to certainly take that understanding to another level by letting them try out things, letting them try out some of their ideas and asking what they want to do.

[32:01](#)

J: It's like they're truly on the road to autonomy. We're guiding them through that. Yeah, go on.

[32:08](#)

L: And someone I met recently, Dr. Richard Lerner, you know, in some of his research he talks about how you need to give young people an environment where they're working on something important and then give them some help, but the autonomy to do it, don't try and do everything for them. Let them figure it out. But they still need a structure, if that makes sense. So we're still setting up the practices probably, right? And we're still making sure everything runs. But as they get into those older teen years and young adults, we're leaning on them more and more, not only for their ideas and things that they want to work on and how things feel, but also ways to help them, ways to run the practice.

[32:46](#)

J: You know, it's funny, there's an example I got that actually is a bit backwards to what you were just saying and...

[32:52](#)

L: So he doesn't believe me?

[32:52](#)

J: No, I 100% believe you. My example confirms what you've just said. I saw a young boy, must've been around 12 or 13 and he was out hitting on a wall, you know, just working on his slice or volleys or, you know, just generally just doing stuff. But he looked like he was hitting on the wall with purpose, which was great to see. But it was just him out there, him alone out there and just hitting on a wall. And then a few days later I saw an adult player. Must've been about, I dunno, early twenties.

[33:21](#)

L: Ah, so it wasn't me?

[33:21](#)

J: It wasn't you, no. Uh, early twenties, and who was there right alongside hovering over was either the parent or the coach, like right there with them. But when you associate that, I mean that's a good thing for the kid that's younger or maybe not such a good thing for the kid that's older, but wouldn't you love to see in both examples where the player is just out there by themselves not having someone over them? I mean you would have thought that maybe the pro that was out there on, well I don't know if it's a pro or not, just whoever was out there, the young adult would be out there by themselves and it would usually be the, the child, the kid, the 12 year old that would have the parent or the coach right by them telling them what to do. You would think it would be that way around, right? But it was complete flip reverse, which I thought was, A. really cool for that 12, 13 year old and whatever. But then I was like, wow, like that, that young adult, having someone hovered over them even just with an exercise of hitting against a wall. It's like, are they really on the path to autonomy? If they can't, if they can't be there by themselves hitting against the wall, working on something, I don't know.

[34:21](#)

L: Yeah. It's one data point, but it makes you wonder and it gets this idea, you know, of feedback and overcoaching and overinvolvement and yeah, I don't want anybody to get the idea that I think that children shouldn't have the time to pay attention to what they're feeling as they're hitting the ball or as they're moving because that sensory information is so important for them to learn the game and learn the skills. So we have to get out of the way as coaches of that. But we do need to give more feedback when a skill is not mastered. So we're going to be a little closer and be teaching more. But if the person's more experienced, then we should be able to back out of there a little bit, let them figure some things out and then if they're struggling with it and then come in with a question or come in with an idea. Right? And, and I think you see that coaches do that more as players get more experienced and get older. So it's interesting what you're pointing out with that story.

[35:13](#)

J: Well Larry, maybe some, I mean that the exercise we just did, we're painting a picture with some very good advice I think to coaches, parents and players out there. And...

[35:21](#)

L: That was a tough one. I had to think about it. Thank you for that. That was good.

[35:25](#)

J: Well, your question I've got written down here was something like, yeah, well let's look into uh, basically our thinking, oh, you paint the foundations, the structure of a house. We want nice clear skies. We want everything, you know. But the reality is is that maybe that picture in those younger years does look a little cloudy cause uh, you know, there's a lot more complex things going on in terms of skill development with, with their tennis skill, physical skill, mental emotional skills. As they get a little bit older, if we've done it in the right way an we're helping those players adapt in the right way, that path to autonomy becomes a lot clearer and those skies start to part and we get that nice blue sky where the athlete is able to think clearly, able to make better, more well

informed decisions. And ultimately that's what it's about is, is our style of coaching whether old school or new age as you say. Because I think probably, you know, if we look at the ideal situation, learning from past examples from guys like John Wooden and then looking at modern day or new age type coaching, you probably want to take a bit of both. You know, you probably want to, because the lessons you can learn from guys like John Wooden, it's just priceless. And that's, that's actually paved the way to where we are at in the coaching world now. Well, a lot of great good examples about the attention to detail with the coaching and it's about, and it's actually not just coaching, it's teaching well, learning skills and we want to take those elements along with what it means to hold players accountable to standards and non negotiable. So, you know, I think, you know, the way I see it is we, it'd be great, you know, we want to forge our coaching around little bit of old school, good stuff around the old school coaching with some of the new age of what we know now with regards to the impact of positive teaching and positive coaching style. Empathetic coaching, if you want to call it that, you know. And so now you've got a little bit of a balance between the two that seems to not only have a stronger effect on the learning of the athlete but also for the health and wellbeing of that athlete.

[37:20](#)

L: Yeah, I think, uh, there's a great swim coach, Doc Counselman, figured out this idea many years ago. Over 30 years ago about how I, he said, I'm paraphrasing now, but you get a lot more from the athletes when, when you treat them well then when you're going to the stick and kind of just hitting them and punishing them, you know, metaphorically speaking.

[37:39](#)

J: Okay, I get it. Just checking.

[37:41](#)

L: Yes. And so this idea that you know, people, they want to enjoy what they're doing and that enjoyment, part of that is that coach athlete relationship. And it can be done in ways where the coach still has a boundary and it's not buddy buddy. And it can be looking like old school where there are expectations, people are engaged, they're working hard, people are being held accountable. That's still good coaching and teaching. And then we got into the many ways that you know is not good. And you know, letting your emotions dictate how you act, going too much to yelling, using punishment, whether or not you consider those things old school, they're just ineffective and, and certainly when you're talking about children, wrong. Just wrong. So that stuff just has to be cut out. So, and I know probably a lot of our listeners probably agree with that. I hope it gets to the people who think that, you know, young people, you have to really break them down to then build them up. It doesn't work. I, I've seen people try to do it and they believe it works because it works, like you said, you know, might've worked for you in some ways, so people could be hard on you and, but for most children today, it doesn't work because of the way their parented and certainly it's never worked. It's always been about attrition. I look at the one where it worked, well that kid can do it. What about these other 25? They don't have it. They don't. No. You found one kid who could take it. Okay? And it worked. But what about the other 25, so now your record's 1 and 25. It's

not that one, you lost the other 25 and so don't be confused by the fact that, well, you know, so and so she had it because she could handle this tough coaching. She would've succeeded without you probably. With another coach. It's the other ones who didn't succeed because of the way you coach them that you should be worried about, that you should be thinking about. Because as a coach, players should always feel like they've been respected, that we're making every effort to make them better. Okay. And that they got a say in the deal.

[39:37](#)

J: Yeah. I was just going to say their voice matters. What they feel matters. So that's a really, really great point of putting it, Larry. And on that note, we're running short of time here, but I think that's a really good drop the mic moment. Yeah, bang. That's awesome. I mean that's really good to dive into that. And it's always great talking about the lessons that we can take from the past, old school coaching, whatever that means, both positive, negative or neutral and what we're experiencing now. And so it's really important for us to be aware of that, understand it, and be informed as to how we move forward with that information. So that basically concludes today's episode of compete like a champion. If you enjoyed today's episode, go down to the bottom of the page and give us a rating. We like reviews. We also like...

[40:21](#)

L: A good rating would be nice. Honesty is always important.

[40:24](#)

J: Please make sure as well if you like to hear us speak about a particular topic, leave a comment and we will read through those and be sure to satisfy any requests or comments. We had one last week about equipment. We've had that a couple of times and we will work on getting a great guest in that could talk through equipment and the impact that has on a player's mindsets and performance. But until next week, Dr. Larry and I are checking out.