

The "No-Excuse" Way, A Must Read

Winning, in its simplest form, is what all athletes want to do—they want to win. The sheer nature of competitive sports being competitive brings forth these winning aspirations; it's simply part of the "game." If this were not the case, then there would be no reason to keep score.

And whether one participates in team sports or individual sports, winning does take precedence over losing—no question about that. But should winning "a game", "an event" take precedence over everything?

Winning and the overemphasis on it, can blind athletes, coaches, and parents to the narrowness it can bring to the table.

What I mean by this is that one's vision and/or focus can become limited in scope as it constitutes an emphasis that tends to prioritize winning as the main or only priority. Narrowing focus to one game or even one season, can limit the potential of an athlete's overall career.

Individuals whose mindset leans this way are more inclined to concentrate largely on what one needs to do in order to defeat their next opponent, they miss the "big-picture." Alternately a comprehensive view, sees all the pieces and how they fit into the overall scheme of developing athletes and teams to reach their full potential.

Putting it another way, "small-picture" athletes, coaches and parents put too little emphasis on the foundations, fundamentals and team dynamics that are the cornerstones of future athletic possibilities and accomplishments. The "win" becomes the only goal rather than simply an outcome of putting the right training pieces together, or the right efforts in the right places.

So what does this mean in a practical sense? Here are a few things to help clarify:

- Always spend some training time on the fundamentals of the game, the basics (both technically and strategically) you need to play your sport. They are the pieces of the sport that without, the game cannot be played (i.e. ball handling and passing in basketball, overhand and underhand passing in volleyball, working on your non-dominant hand in lacrosse, etc.)
- Build a practice plan that focuses on continually developing your skill-set (skills of the game), always working to master your strengths and improve on your weaknesses.
- Set aside specific and concentrated training time for conditioning; always looking toward improving your fitness capabilities in the manner in which your sport is played.

Not meant to be a comprehensive list, but these should get you thinking and moving in the right direction.

One individual who I believe embodied this concept of striving to reach one's potential as priority one (working toward being the best one can be), and winning as an outcome of this, was coach John Wooden.

"Coach," as many so affectionately called him, is the former coach of the UCLA Bruins (1948 – 1975). His accomplishments include four 30-0 seasons, winning ten collegiate Division I National Championships (seven of which were consecutive), winning 81% of the games he coached for UCLA, and being one of only three individuals ever inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame both as a player and as a coach, just to name a few.

And his coaching style centered on the statement I mentioned above- [always] working toward being the best one can be, both on the inside and out. He believed that this built the foundation for winning, as he spent much less time concerning himself with his next opponent. Developing every athlete's potential on the team, both physically and mentally, was his major focus.

Still relative today (maybe even more so than yesteryear), it is Coach Wooden's foundational concepts that, in my mind, that separate Coach Wooden from all others. Prioritizing the long-term aspects of potential, always striving to be the best one can be, over the short-term gratification of winning as the only goal, is an aspect seemingly lost in today's sports and youth sports culture.

Coaches, athletes, and/or parents should take a note right out of Coach Wooden's playbook and build the physical (skill-set, conditioning, etc.) and mental (industriousness, intentness, leadership, initiative, enthusiasm, etc.) as a priority and strive to reach your full potential. Rest assured, winning will come; it certainly did for teams under Wooden's tutelage.