

Traits of Successful Coaching

Contrary to what people might believe, a consistently successful athletic program does not just depend upon the skills of its good athletes, and successful programs are not always composed of superior players. Although skilled players are certainly a key factor to success, it is evident that there are common traits shared by coaches who oversee successful programs. Over the years, I have informally identified some key traits possessed by coaches who run consistently successful programs. My observations are outlined below.

KNOWLEDGE SEEKER

Everyone would agree that good coaches are knowledgeable in their sport. However, great coaches will continue to pursue additional insights. They often continue to improve their sport-specific knowledge by reading, observing, attending clinics, holding clinics, and in general, exposing themselves to a variety of new ideas. A coach who thinks he has nothing more to learn will generally not help his program grow.

GOOD ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

Organizational skills are also an important coaching trait. An effective coach will have a practice plans for the day, the week, the year, and beyond. Details regarding equipment, schedules, transportation, and other seemingly ordinary concerns are also the domain of the coach of a smooth running organization. Players find it frustrating when a coach is unprepared to meet unexpected contingencies, and good coaches prepare for everything.

HARD WORKING

Having a strong work ethic is a quality that cannot be overemphasized. Coaches must be willing to put forth as much time and effort as they demand from their players. Being prepared to “outwork” opponents by putting in additional time will pay off for a team. Being persistent and tough minded, a quality I call the “bulldog” attitude, is also part of a solid work ethic. A coach who possesses this quality will never give in to failure, and can serve as an inspiration to his players. The players believe they can trust their coach to help them to “find a way” to succeed.

COMMUNICATOR

The ability to communicate effectively with the coaching staff, players, parents, and fan is also a trait that most successful coaches possess. The coach must transfer knowledge and technique to his players and staff. He needs to let them know what is expected of them and how they can accomplish their goals. The successful coach also needs to communicate and generate support for his program. The ability to communicate intangible qualities, such as a positive attitude, enthusiasm, concerns, and humor are all keys to success. Enthusiasm is contagious and can rub off on players, coaches, and fans. A team is a reflection of the coach and you can't afford to lose the spark that keeps things moving.

APPROACHABLE AND CARING

Showing players that the coach has a human side is also a good idea. A coach should find time to laugh with the players and show them he has a sense of humor. Being too serious can kill players' enthusiasm for a game. We all know of potentially good athletes who get burned out too early because coaches forgot that sports should be enjoyable. We need to show that we care about our players as people and not just as athletes. It is good to acknowledge our human qualities, to show that we can make mistakes, but we learn to bounce back and overcome them. Players need to believe they can also overcome a bad play or a bad day, and they will, if the coach is willing to demonstrate the same quality.

HONEST AND FAIR

The last and most important trait for a coach to possess is integrity, which is comprised of several components. Loyalty is critically important. As coaches we are part of a big fraternity, and we must stick together, especially in public. Problems and concerns that exist among a coaching staff should remain behind closed doors. We owe our players this same loyalty if we want their respect. Being honest and fair is also components integrity. Coaches should be up-front and honest with their players. Players should know their role, and where they stand with the

coach and the program. Players might not always like what they hear, but they and the program will benefit in the long run if expectations are spelled out early.

The most important commodity the coach possesses is his reputation. Coaches should not comment on an opponent's calls, ethics, or coaching ability unless it is in a complimentary manner. This goes beyond loyalty and is an integral part of a coach's philosophy.

Overall it is the coach who sets the tone and leads by example for their players. It is how the coach lives and what he or she stands for those players will remember in the future. An athlete may not remember a certain play or call, but he will remember how the coach handled it. All young people need positive role models, and coaches are often placed in a position to lead by example. It is a large and rewarding opportunity.

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