
4.

LEADING YOURSELF

“The most effective way to lead is to lead from within.”

– Lolly Daskal

“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself”

– Leo Tolstoy

“Players who get bored in practice don’t really want to be good. Champions get better. Losers get bored.”

– Anonymous

“Champions never complain. They are too busy getting better.”

– John Wooden

“Mastery of others is strength. Mastery of self is true power.”

– Lao Tzu

“Coaches shouldn’t have to push you to work hard, you should push yourself to work hard because you want to be a great player.”

– Bobby Knight

“I am who I am today because of the choices I made yesterday.”

– Eleanor Roosevelt

Sometimes the hardest person to lead is yourself. That is where everything starts. Remember what John C. Maxwell said about a leader knowing the way, showing the way and going the way? If you don't show and go the right way yourself then you will never experience the success that you are capable of achieving.

Strengthening your core values and your foundational principles that you learned about in chapter 2 are necessary for maximizing your potential and that of the team. You will make choices every day and so you need to know the way so that you can go the way. Sometimes the best leaders are those who follow. Wait, what?!? That's right. Remember leadership is just one person influencing another. Sometimes when you follow the directions of your coach, captain or a teammate – who are leading by example – you can then influence others to follow suit. But first, you have to do what's right and lead yourself.

YOU WILL NEVER PLAY VARSITY

When I went to college to play basketball, there was a sophomore on the team named Scottie Moore. Scottie had played on the junior varsity the year before. At the end-of-the-year evaluation meeting with the coach after his freshman year, he was told that he would never play varsity. He was too short, too slow and lacking varsity ability. In fact, he might not even make the JV if he came back.

That summer, Scottie dedicated himself to strengthening his game and his body. That next year, to the amazement of the coaches, he made the varsity. By the time, Scottie graduated he would finish his career as a 1,000-point scorer (remember he didn't play varsity as a freshman) and the 16th leading scorer in school history. Not bad for an out-of-shape 5'10" shooting guard who was told he probably wouldn't even make the team.

What a great story of someone that didn't quit and didn't play the victim card. When he didn't agree with his coach's assessment, he merely went out and worked harder on his game to prove the coach wrong. I don't remember him talking bad about the coaching staff during my time playing with him. He went about his business and continued to work to prove the doubters wrong. How about you? Will you be the kid that quits, transfers or criticizes the coach? Or will you be like Scottie Moore, that used it as motivation to achieve his maximum potential?

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

On January 12, 2015, the Ohio State Buckeyes won the inaugural College Football Playoffs when they defeated the explosive and exciting Oregon Ducks 42-20. It was impressive that the #1 and #2 teams squared off against each other in the Championship game. But maybe more impressive was the fact that both teams had prominent examples of players who took advantage of opportunities presented to them and didn't quit or become disruptive to their teams.

It is always difficult to see a student-athlete get disgruntled over playing time or their role on the team. Unfortunately, in most cases, the player quits. Oh, they might not physically quit the team but slowly and surely, they cash out mentally. Instead of seeing the opportunity in every challenge, as the great British statesman Winston Churchill used to say, they see the difficulty in every opportunity. Unfortunately, instead of persevering, they make excuses and take on a victim mentality.

Talk about preparing for an opportunity and being ready when it presents itself, one has to look no further than the guy that won the 2014 Heisman Trophy. Oregon's quarterback, Marcus Mariota earned the biggest award a college football player can receive. He was the best college football player in the nation that year, but he didn't start for his high school team until his senior year.

Stop and think about that for a moment. The best player in all of college football didn't just become the best player overnight. He was very talented in high school, but he didn't start. There was a quarterback starting ahead of him that would end up playing at the NCAA Division I level. Mariota kept working and preparing for his time. I believe Sir Winston Churchill or Abraham Lincoln would be proud of the way he didn't give up or fester a bad attitude. He waited patiently, prepared and then took advantage of his opportunity.

On the opposite sideline from Oregon in that first College Football Playoff Championship game was Ohio State who had a very interesting story at their quarterback position. Early in the 2014 season, the Buckeyes lost the Big 10's two-time offensive player of the year when quarterback Braxton Miller suffered an injury. That should have been the end of the Buckeyes championship hopes. Teams don't recover from losing a player that good, especially at the quarterback position. However, J.T. Barrett was ready. In fact, he was more than ready. All he did was dominate that year.

He would play so well during the regular season that he would finish 5th in the Heisman voting.

During the Michigan-Ohio State rivalry game on Thanksgiving Weekend, the game was close early in the fourth quarter and could go either way but then Barrett got hurt and had to leave the game. Barrett was the backup. Michigan fans had hope because they were thinking there was no way the backup to the backup could hurt them. They were wrong. Cardale Jones, Ohio State's third-string quarterback at the start of the year, came in and orchestrated a convincing fourth quarter offensive display. Not only did he close the door on Michigan in relief but won his next three starts.

The third-stringer dominated Wisconsin in the Big 10 Championship Game, Alabama in the National Semi-Final Game and Oregon in the National Championship game. That season was his third year at Ohio State and he came into the season as the third string. He (and all Buckeye fans) are probably glad that he didn't quit or stop preparing. There was no way a third-string quarterback would ever be counted on to win a National Championship, right?!? But Jones continued to prepare and was ready for the opportunity.

When preparation meets opportunity, the possibility of success is enormous. Thomas Edison had it right when he said,

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

That quote is just as appropriate today as when he was inventing the light bulb. We constantly choose our actions and attitudes. Think of how much college football history could be different if J.T. Barrett, Cardale Jones or Marcus Mariota had chosen to take the all-too-familiar approach of complaining about their current situation instead of preparing for their future situation. They were ready to answer the door when opportunity knocked. What about you? Will you be ready for your opportunity when it comes?

PENALTY COSTS A TEAM THE GAME

During an NFL wildcard playoff game in January of 2016, two division rivals, the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Cincinnati Bengals faced off. The Bengals took a 16-15 lead with less than two minutes remaining in the

game. The Steelers' star quarterback Ben Roethlisberger was hobbling around but was able to lead his team down the field. ON a 4th-and-3 play, he hit Antonio Brown for a completion at the 47-yard line. Bengals linebacker Vontaze Burfict was called for a 15-yard penalty on a malicious head-to-head hit on the reception. Antonio Brown would be knocked out of the game as a result of this hit.

This would put the Steelers' kicker Chris Boswell in range for a game-winning field goal, though the 50-yarder was no guarantee since his career long was 51 yards. There was also no guarantee that the Steelers would be able to get close enough with a very injured Roethlisberger and no Antonio Brown. None of this matter as the Bengals Adam "Pacman" Jones would enter the equation and provide late Christmas gift for the Steelers.

Jones completely lost his temper and went crazy on the officials. This would result in an additional 15-yard penalty and then give the Steelers an easy 35-yard field goal. All in all, the Steelers were awarded 30 free yards on their game-winning drive because of the lack of discipline and bone-headed plays by a couple of Bengals players.

Players get technical fouls or penalties all the time in sports but will almost always say they wouldn't do it when it matters most during crunch time. However, what you repeatedly do becomes who you are. These two players for the Bengals had a history of poor decisions. They did not have good habits and when it mattered most, they were not able to control themselves.

It has often been said that sports build character. Sports allow people to learn many lessons. The games themselves, though, don't necessarily build character. Instead, they reveal character. Just like a test that you might take in school doesn't build your knowledge base, but it reveals what you already know. The homework that you've done or not done is revealed when you take a test. In the same way, what you've done in practice and your workouts are revealed during the games. Your habits can make or break you. These two Bengals players failed to develop their daily habits. They failed to develop a strength of character that would allow them to stay focused on their goals.

To make matters worse, Jones had an explicit rant after the game blaming everybody but himself. His lack of responsibility further proved that he was in the wrong and had poor habits. We know a tree by the fruit that it produces. It is the same with a person. Sports can reveal the content

of a person's character. What are you doing to develop a character that will help you (and your team) be successful?

DAK PRESCOTT'S CUP

On November 20, 2016, Dak Prescott, the starting quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys, threw for 300 yards and 3 touchdowns against the Baltimore Ravens. One of his highlights went viral that day. However, it wasn't for anything that he did on-the-field. The CBS cameras caught him doing something that every athlete in America does on a regular basis – he tried to throw a paper cup into a trash bucket about six feet away. Just like nearly every athlete in American, he missed. But unlike nearly every athlete in America, he got up and went over to the trash can and picked the paper cup up off the ground and put it in the trash can.

At that moment, he wasn't thinking that millions of people were watching him. He wasn't doing it for show. He did the right thing. Dak Prescott made a mess, so he cleaned it up. Yes, there are equipment managers and custodians that can clean things up but that doesn't mean we have to add to their workload. That little gesture went a long way toward demonstrating what kind of character Dak Prescott has.

Think about your bench area, dugout, sidelines or locker rooms. There are probably cups and athletic tapes littered all over the place. If your team doesn't care enough about that, then will they really care enough about doing the little things it takes to win games. Taking pride in the little things is how big things are accomplished. It has often been said that how you do anything is how you do everything. It is always the right time to do the right thing.

MICHAEL JORDAN

When Michael Jordan came to the NBA, he was known as just a great athlete and scorer. Defenses were backing off of him and daring him to shoot jumpers. During his first five years in the league, he only made 58 total three-pointers, while shooting a terrible 20.2%. His Chicago Bulls were falling short in the playoffs and not winning as much as their talent suggested. Jordan decided to do something about it and work on his weakness.

In his sixth year, he shot 37.6% and made a total of 92 three-pointers in that season, which was way more than in his previous five seasons

combined. He also led the Bulls to the conference championship game during that sixth year and then the NBA Championship the next year. Many players have been prolific scorers and dunkers, but few have been deadly from any area on the court. He listened to his coaches and eventually became, arguably, the greatest player in NBA history.

JULIO JONES HUSTLE

Do you do what's right no matter the situation? If you are a wide receiver, do you come off the line the same whether you are running a pass pattern or blocking for a running back? If you are a baseball hitter, do you run out ground balls to second base as hard as you do when you hit a long grounder to the third baseman? Little daily positive habits lead to long-term success.

The best players do not turn their hustle, talent or work ethic on or off like a light switch. Atlanta Falcons star wide receiver, Julio Jones, is an example of a player that goes hard regardless of the situation or the role that he is asked to play. His offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan believed that Jones' intangibles are what made him stand apart from others,

"He's fearless. He doesn't mind the physicality of the game. I think he's one of the best-blocking receivers around. You've seen him on picks (against the Falcons), looking like a cyborg going down the field making tackles."

In 2015 against Tampa Bay, Kwon Alexander intercepted a pass 5 yards deep in the end zone and took off the other way. Jones sprinted after him and finally chasing down the linebacker at Atlanta's 12-yard line, running more than 90 yards to make the tackle. The play was nullified by an offside penalty on the Buccaneers, but Atlanta Falcons safety Ricardo Allen noticed something about Julio Jones on that play,

"He clearly saw the flag was thrown. But the thing he was putting out: You're not going to take the ball from us and go score. You're not going to do that. He didn't have to do that. He could've saved his energy. He could've sat back and watched. But that's just the type of person he is. When he comes to practice, he's running full speed like it's the fourth quarter of the championship game."

COACH DOESN'T GIVE ME CHANCE

Noted philosopher and scholar, Captain Jack Sparrow from the Pirates of the Caribbean, made a statement that is very applicable to sports. He said, "The problem is not the problem. The problem is our attitude toward the problem."

A lot of players are going to get frustrated with their playing time. They are going to disagree with a coach. They are going to struggle in their relationships with teammates. Those are problems that will exist. However, the problem is our attitude toward those adversities. In the story below, two players had problems. One chose to maintain a positive attitude about the problem and the other choose to feel sorry for herself,

As a coach, I didn't play a lot of players. My starters received the bulk of the minutes. This had a tendency to cause some frustration for the reserves. However, it also showed me which players were team players and which players were more concerned about themselves. It also showed me which players would continue to work on their games and which would play the victim card, letting the situation dictate their behavior.

In two separate years, I had backup shooting guards (we'll call them Becky and Sadaria). The one year, Becky was playing behind an All-American receiving very little playing time. She thought that she should be playing more and continued to work on her game. She wanted to be ready when her time came, which would eventually happen. The starter was hurt and couldn't play against a nationally-ranked team. Becky stepped in and scored a career-high 28 points on 7 three-pointers. She was ready for her opportunity.

In another year, a similar situation emerged and Sadaria then got her chance to show me what she was capable of. She scored zero points in 28 minutes of playing time. She didn't add much of value in any other areas either. This was not surprising because once she realized that she wasn't going to play much, she stopped working on her game. Every day after practice she would be one of the first to leave. She wasn't prepared for her opportunity and then proved me right as a coach.

RAY ALLEN

On June 19, 2013, it appeared that the San Antonio Spurs were going to win another NBA Championship. They were up 3-2 in the series and were

leading the Miami Heat 94-89 with only 0:28 remaining in Game 6. NBA league officials had already brought the Championship trophy to the court for the awards ceremony. Miami clawed its way back in the last half-minute and Ray Allen eventually hit his only three-pointer of the game to force overtime. The Heat would go on to win the game and then win Game 7 to claim the Championship. Game 6 was so epic that the game would eventually receive ESPN's 2013 ESPY award for Best Game.

Even though Ray Allen was toward the end of his career when he joined the Miami Heat and didn't start a single game during that 2012-2013 Championship series, he stayed ready for his opportunity to help his team. He was famous for being the first player to arrive at the gym and the last to leave. His shooting workouts were legendary. It was said that he worked just as hard at the end of his career as he did at the peak of his career. In retrospect, would Miami have won the Championship if Ray Allen hadn't prepared for every game?

Abraham Lincoln has a number of famous quotes about preparation including,

"I will prepare and someday my chance may come."

"If I had 6 hours to cut down a tree, I'd spend the first 4 hours sharpening my blade."

It would seem that Ray Allen took these Abe Lincoln quotes to heart. In an article by Zach Buckley, he presents a story in which Heat coach Erik Spoelstra recalls Allen's preparation,

"He would lay on the floor, pop up, backpedal, have the presence of mind to have his feet set and not out of bounds and have a coach throw him the ball. Afterward, I said, 'That seemed like a crazy drill.' Why would he do something like that—lay down in the middle of the floor?

He said, 'It's extreme, but I want to prepare myself for when I'm in the lane, I hit the floor, I'm on the ground, offensive rebound that I have the fundamentals to be able to backpedal stay in bounds and be able to knock down shots.'

"It was an incredible thing to see, but that's how Ray Allen was with his workouts. It was on all levels—his conditioning, his shooting, tying it all together, his footwork."

If you watch the clip of the last play in regulation of Game 6, you will see Ray Allen get knocked off balance in the lane on a rebound attempt and then backpedal out to the corner to hit the game-tying three-pointer. His preparation ended up paying off. In fact, it was very similar to the exact drill he regularly practiced.

Ray Allen was a future Hall of Famer that was coming off the bench. He was relegated to being a role player but he played the role perfectly because the goal of winning a championship was much more important than the role that he wanted to play.

KWAHI LEONARD

During the 2015-2016, Kwahi Leonard shot 44.3% from the three-point arc. Only J.J. Redick and Steph Curry shot better. Considering that Leonard was First-Team All-NBA, that hardly seemed strange. However, a few years earlier he had been a very poor shooter. In his two years at San Diego State University, he shot 20.5% and 29.1% from the three-point arc.

It is a testament to his Leonard's coachability and work ethic that he was willing to honestly evaluate his game and his goals. He wanted to help his team win so much that he was willing to admit his weaknesses and improve on them. When you consider the NBA has better defenders and the line is farther back, Leonard's percentage improvement is even more impressive.

COACH PLAYS FAVORITES

Maybe you've heard someone say, "Coach plays favorites". Maybe you've even said it once or twice? The reality is your coach probably does play favorites. Your coach's favorite players are the ones that do what they are supposed to do.

I had a player whom I coached in Tennessee. She was a talented player who loved to shoot three-pointers. However, the strength of our team was our inside game. We were tough to stop inside, and we tried to take

advantage of this whenever possible. Our rule for three-point shots was that you could only take them if it was called for in a play or if the ball was passed out of the paint. This talented guard that I had did not like my rule. She wanted to “play her game”. We had many discussions about this behind closed doors.

It was very clear that she disagreed with me. But you know what? She did what I asked of her and sacrificed for the betterment of the team. Because of this, she became one of my favorite players. She played nearly 40 minutes per game. I rarely took her out because I could rely on her to do what I asked of her even though I knew that she disagreed. She became a favorite of mine because she led herself by doing what was right. Her example also rubbed off on other players.

STEPH CURRY EJECTION

In Game 6 of the 2016 NBA Finals, the league’s first-ever unanimous MVP, Steph Curry was ejected. He was frustrated because his team was losing the game, as well as its’ grip on the entire series. Curry didn’t agree with the officiating and was playing bad.

Overall, he did not handle the situation very well resulting in his night ending early with an ejection. This behavior was not appropriate for a leader as it showed he had lost focus on his goal and instead, started to get distracted by peripheral things. But it was Curry’s comments afterward that were most concerning to me.

Good leaders take responsibility for their actions and understand that they, and only they, control their behaviors. His comments reminded me of my pre-marital counseling.

Our pastor said to never follow up an apology with the word “but”. It devalues the apology. It minimizes the sentiment and the meaning of saying “I’m sorry”. How many times have we said something like the following statement? “Babe, I am sorry that I yelled at you, but if only you _____, then I wouldn’t have had to set you straight.” As a coach, I saw this often ...

“I am sorry that I was late but my roommate didn’t set the alarm clock.”

“I am sorry that I didn’t do well on that test but the teacher

didn't remind us about it.”

“I am sorry that I was sluggish in the game today but it was just hard to get going early since we started off playing zone.”

“I should have been ready when you sent me into the game but I didn't expect to play.”

Why do we say “but” after an apology or a statement? It is normally because we are trying to make ourselves look better. We are probably trying to have our cake and eat it too. We want to appear that we are sorry while at the same time making an excuse.

So, coming back to Steph Curry and his comments. For the record, I am a Curry fan. I admire the way he works. I normally like his attitude and often use positive stories about him. So what did Steph Curry say that got me all riled up after he was ejected for throwing his mouthpiece? Here it is,

“I definitely didn't mean to throw it at a fan, but it happened. I went over and apologized to him because that's obviously not where I was trying to take my frustration out. But the last two fouls I had I thought were — I didn't think I fouled either Kyrie [Irving] or LeBron. That's just kind of my perception of the plays and I had a reaction to it.”

You might not think this is bad. However, being a leader is all about having a champion's mindset and taking full responsibility for your actions. The official didn't make him throw a mouthpiece. Curry choose to throw the mouthpiece because he had lost focus. We control our actions. Do I think some of the fouls were suspect? Yes, I do. I also know for a fact that he gets away from fouls that aren't called, but you don't see him talk about those and thank the officials for not calling them. Players too often focus on the wrong things. We must always be in control of our actions.

Bottom line take away? If we truly want to be more successful, we must take full responsibility for our actions. When you add a “but” into your statements or make excuses, you don't fully maximize your opportunities.

ANTONIO BROWN FACEBOOK LIVE

On January 15, 2016, after a Pittsburgh Steeler's playoff win to set up an AFC Championship matchup with the New England Patriots, star wide receiver Antonio Brown broadcast coach Mike Tomlin's post-game speech. This speech was like most locker room speeches – obscenity-laced, brutally honest, and most importantly, only intended for his team—his family. During the speech, Tomlin had a number of negative things to say about the New England Patriots, while attempting to motivate his guys for the upcoming week. The 17-minute long live video also showed teammates undressing.

Clearly, this was a lapse in judgment by Brown, but it also showed that he was thinking only of himself at that moment and not how his actions could affect the rest of his team. Stunts like this can cause a player to lose the respect of his teammates, thus minimizing his power to positively influence others. It can also serve to give another team like the Patriots, bulletin board material.

Ben Roethlisberger, the Steelers quarterback, summed up the thoughts of many of his teammates when he went on 93.7 the Fan in Pittsburgh and said,

“It’s an unfortunate situation that we’ve got to deal with right now. That’s a sacred place where things are said and hugs and tears, and it’s kind of a special place. So a little disappointed with AB for that...Coach talks and then I talk, and you just don’t want everyone to know what’s going on in there with the family. And also, I wish AB would have been listening to Coach and myself instead of being on the other side of the locker room filming.”

Brown wasn't leading himself or doing what was right because he wasn't paying attention to his coach. But he also put the team in jeopardy for the next game by providing bulletin board material for the Patriots and took advantage of his teammate's trust by filming the locker room, a sacred and intimate place for teams. Brown later apologized to the team, but the damage had been done and a sacred trust had already been broken.

In his apology, he used a word that is one of the biggest team-killers,

“distraction”. Brown said that he was “sorry to them for letting it become a distraction and something that they’ve had to answer questions about while we’re preparing for a big game on Sunday.” Distractions are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal. Brown’s focus turned to himself and he provided a distraction that consumed the Steeler’s locker room and practice time for an entire week.

In the AFC Championship, the New England Patriots defeated the Pittsburgh Steelers 36-17 and Brown was held to only 77 yards receiving after averaging 116 yards in the previous two playoff games.

BILLY DONOVAN

Billy Donovan is now known as a successful NBA coach and a former National Championship basketball coach at the University of Florida. However, he first came to the public’s eye when he led the underdog Providence Friars to the 1987 NCAA Final Four. He would eventually go on to play in the NBA.

However, his career didn’t start off on a good note. Donovan averaged just two points per game as a sophomore. He was out of shape and had a new coach. That new coach, Rick Pitino, told him he had to lose a bunch of weight and get himself in shape if he was going to play in his up-tempo system.

Instead of getting mad and transferring, which he was considering, Donovan decided to stick it out and do what the coach was asking. This paid off as he was a Final Four hero and NBA player. Nobody ever said it would be easy, but it is almost always worth it.

PATIENCE REWARDED

Things don’t always go the way we would like them to go. When this happens, we have a choice to make. We can quit or make the best of it. Basketball player Frank Kaminsky chose to make the best of it. In Kaminsky’s first two seasons, he played only 9 minutes per game averaging 2.9 PPG and 1.5 RPG.

The 7-footer also endured criticism for his lack of production. He didn’t transfer. He didn’t quit. He didn’t bad mouth his coach in the media. He didn’t sub-tweet his feelings. No, he just worked harder on his game, stayed focused on his and the team’s goals and waited for his opportunity.

Boy, did it pay off as his game blossomed and the right opportunity

came his way. During his junior and senior year of college, he led Wisconsin to back-to-back Final Fours. During his senior year, he was college basketball's unanimous Player of the Year and selected 9th in the NBA draft.

Kaminsky is a great example of persevering through adversity and choosing to make the best of difficult situations. He kept preparing so that he could be ready for when his opportunity came. It also reminds me of Luke Maye's story when he became a college basketball legend.

During the 2017 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, Kentucky and North Carolina went back and forth for 40 minutes in an Elite Eight game. When Kentucky's freshman sensation Malik Monk hit a crazy, contested, off-balance three-pointer with 7.2 seconds remaining to tie the game, it looked like the fans would be treated to bonus basketball in this instant classic.

However, a former UNC walk-on had something else in mind. Luke Maye, who was averaging only 5.5 PPG while playing only 14 minutes per game, hit a buzzer-beating jump shot to win the game for the Tarheels and send them to the Championship game, which they would eventually win. Luke Maye was the eighth-leading scorer for UNC. He was not quite the guy you would expect to be on the court in a crucial situation, let alone become an instant legend for a traditional powerhouse.

Shortly after UNC's last-second loss to Villanova in the 2016 NCAA Championship game, Maye visited coach Roy Williams and vowed to work harder than any player in the program during the offseason. Maye averaged just 1.2 points as a freshman. After his legendary shot, Maye commented about his improvement,

"Coach always preaches sweat and putting in the time. I put a lot of hours in the gym doing extra shooting, whatever it takes. I always wanted to be ready for a moment like this."

There is no guarantee that if you prepare then your chance will come, however, you can be certain that if you don't prepare then you will not be ready when your opportunity happens to come.

THREE BRICKLAYERS

In his book, *Winning Every Day*, former Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz told a story about three bricklayers who were asked what they were doing. It is a good illustration of the integrity principle we talked about in chapter 2 and the importance of leading ourselves well,

The first responded, "I am laying bricks." The second said, "I am making \$17.50 an hour." The third said I'm building the most beautiful cathedral in town. Years from now people will be able to come here and worship." Which individual do you think understood his sense of purpose? Which one do you think brought more to his job?

Are you just playing your sport for fun? Are you just doing what coach tells you to do because you are obedient or are you seeing the bigger picture and seeking excellence for yourself and your teammates? There is a related story about an elderly carpenter that was due to retire.

The elderly carpenter told his employer of his plans to leave the business and start a life of leisure with his wife and extended family.

He would miss the money, but the time was right and he was ready to hang up his hammer. His boss was disappointed as the carpenter had been a loyal and diligent worker for many years and was sad to see him go.

The boss asked for one last favor, requesting that the carpenter could build one last house before retiring. The tradesman agreed, but it was soon clear that his heart wasn't in it.

He took shortcuts, used inferior materials and put in a half-hearted effort. In the end, the final product was well short of his usual standards, a disappointing way to end his career.

When the job was finished, the employer came to inspect the work. After taking a look around, he handed the keys to the carpenter and said, "This is your house, it's my gift to you."

The carpenter was shocked and embarrassed. If only he had known, he would have made sure that everything was perfect. If he had known the consequences, he would have demanded excellence from himself.

We are all building something with our lives day by day. Every day we

build a wall, lay a brick, construct a house, hammer a nail but are we putting our all into it? Life is oftentimes a DIY project. What you do today makes you who you are tomorrow.

Your attitude can determine the success of a project. Taking pride in a task and having enthusiasm will show in your work. You can't always control the project you're assigned, the drill that you have to do, or the play that coach calls, but you can always control your attitude and your own actions. You can always lead yourself.

TWO PLAYERS MISSING PRACTICE

I once had two different players miss the first practice after Christmas break. They were unrelated and had different reasons for missing. They both came to see me within an hour after practice ended. As I talked with each of the players as they arrived, I found that they had two entirely different approaches and demeanors toward missing practice.

Hannah told me that she was very mad at her parents because they were supposed to wake her up but didn't. Even when I pointed out that she was 21 years old and an adult, she continued to blame her parents. She never once genuinely apologized for missing practice, nor took responsibility for her actions.

Sade was very apologetic. She said that she had no excuse and that she had just failed to wake up on time and that it would never happen again. Two different players. Two different approaches. One took responsibility for her actions. One blamed others.

PERSEVERANCE AND FRUSTRATION

Sometimes you will be frustrated with your season. You might even have a sense of despair or feel there is little hope. Whether these feelings are related to your team or they are because of your own role or performance, you should remember Jacob Riis' and his quote concerning rock sculptures,

“Look at a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred-and-first blow, it will split in two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it, but all that had gone before”.

Just like the stone cutter, you don't always know when good will come but you do know that if you quit, it will never come. Abe Lincoln lost 2 sons and countless political races but persevered through disappointment to become arguably the greatest president in U.S. History. Moses stuttered but overcame that obstacle to become one of the greatest Biblical leaders. Michael Jordan got cut from the team during his sophomore year of high school, yet became a Hall of Fame basketball player.

These are just a few examples of individuals failing forward – of people refusing to quit. What about you? Are you going to keep persevering or are you Darby? You see, R.U. Darby went to California in search of gold and untold riches during the 1800's gold rush.

Every day he got up early in the morning and walked to the hills in search of his "fortune". He dug and dug with his simple tools. He found some gold here and there. But never anything to write home about.

Darby ended up giving up because he was convinced that he would never find the true mother-load that he was searching for. He ended up selling all his tools to another prospector. Picking up where Darby left off, the new prospector discovered that R.U. Darby had been three feet from where the real gold deposit was.

Darby had such high hopes and had sacrificed so much but had quit too early. He was literally three feet away from his dreams. He was so close to the gold, he could reach out and touch it. But there was no way he could know this because he gave up too soon.

Are you Darby or do you have a champion's mindset? You face choices every moment of every day. Will you win the play? Will you win the day? You can choose your actions. You can create your own luck. You can create what happens to you, based on your decisions. You create your future, both by your actions and non-actions. You control you. You have an influence on your friends. You choose to do things the right way. Are you losing the game badly? Are you in the midst of a losing streak? You can still play every play like it is the most important play in the Super Bowl.

One spring day when I was an athletic director, I was watching a baseball game in which we were losing big. Our baseball team was doing better than they had done in many years but still had a losing season. In this particular game, Eli Foreman, our best pitcher, was struggling. Late in the game, he ended up coming to the plate for his turn to hit. He hit a routine ground ball to the shortstop. He was definitely going to be out but he

busted his tail down to first base. He was out by a mile but I vividly remember him having the personal integrity to play every play like it mattered. He was having a rough day on the mound and the team was losing. However, I will always remember that Eli gave his all when it would have been easy to just coast and go through the motions or felt sorry for himself.

Feeling sorry for one's self is not the way to handle frustrations or disappointing seasons. It reminded me of a story that I heard in church concerning Karl Menninger. Menninger was a world-class psychologist who was on the cover of Time Magazine at one point. He was speaking to a large college class once and afterward, someone asked him what they should do if they were depressed or distraught. Instead of mentioning counseling, he said to "board up the house, go across the street, find someone in need and go help them."

The only way to beat despair or frustrations is through engagement. Get out of your own little world. Stop being selfish. Help others. Don't point fingers. Add value to others. Do you feel like the coach doesn't praise you enough? Then praise others. Find ways to help and lift up others. Leadership begins with you. I encourage you to make a beautiful stone sculpture today by continuing to chip away and pound the rock.