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# TEAMWORK

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*“Coming together is a beginning.  
Keeping together is progress.  
Working together is success.”*  
– **Henry Ford**

*“The main ingredient to stardom is the rest of the team.”*  
– **John Wooden**

*“Your team doesn’t care if you are a superstar. They care if you  
are a super teammate.”*  
– **Jon Gordon**

*“You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do.  
Together we can do great things.”*  
– **Mother Teresa**

*“The greatest compliment to any player is he’s a great  
teammate. We can’t all be great players, but we can all be great  
teammates.”*  
– **Jay Bilas**

**T**he old acronym of T.E.A.M in which together everyone achieves more is true more often than not. Players need teammates that are willing and able to do the things that they can't or don't want to do. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Just like the strength of each wolf is the wolfpack and the strength of the wolfpack is each individual wolf, so it is on teams. Each team has players with different strengths and weaknesses.

The best teams have players that understand that they all fit together like a puzzle. Even the most talented softball pitcher can't strike out every batter. They need competent fielders to make plays in the field when the batter hits the ball. A talented outside hitter in volleyball knows that their skills are not maximized if they don't have a good setter.

A team-first mentality and understanding of how crucial every member of a team can be to achieving a common goal is a must in utilizing your leadership potential. The more you respect and praise the various roles on a team, the greater your opportunity for influence will be.

### **THE TEAM! THE TEAM! THE TEAM!**

Regardless of whether you are a fan of the Michigan Wolverines, Ohio State Buckeyes or the Alabama Crimson Tide, you can appreciate the importance of teamwork and how it is crucial for your favorite team to play in an important bowl game or contend for a championship. Bo Schembechler played football at Miami of Ohio for the legendary Woody Hayes. He would also be an assistant coach for Hayes at Ohio State.

When Schembechler took over as head coach at the University of Michigan, he and Hayes embarked on a fierce rivalry that came to be known as the "Ten-Year War." Overall, Schembechler ended his college career with a 234-65-8 record. He ended his career as an athletic director at Michigan and then president of the Detroit Tigers. Schembechler was a fiery coach known for his motivational speeches. One of his most popular has come to be known as "The Team The Team The Team" and it is a good reminder of how special it is to be a part of a team,

"We want the Big Ten championship and we're gonna win it as a Team. They can throw out all those great backs, and great quarterbacks, and great defensive players,

throughout the country and in this conference, but there's gonna be one Team that's gonna play solely as a Team.

No man is more important than The Team. No coach is more important than The Team. The Team, The Team, The Team, and if we think that way, all of us, everything that you do, you take into consideration what effect does it have on my Team? Because you can go into professional football, you can go anywhere you want to play after you leave here. You will never play for a Team again. You'll play for a contract. You'll play for this. You'll play for that. You'll play for everything except the team, and think what a great thing it is to be a part of something that is The Team.

We're gonna win it. We're gonna win the championship again because we're gonna play as a team, better than anybody else in this conference, we're gonna play together as a team. We're gonna believe in each other, we're not gonna criticize each other, we're not gonna talk about each other, we're gonna encourage each other. And when we play as a team, when the old season is over, you and I know, it's gonna be Michigan again, Michigan."

## **EVERY ROLE IS IMPORTANT**

What kind of role do you have on your team right now? Are you happy with your role? Maybe you are the team's star or maybe you are "just a role player". Whenever you start to think that you are the most important person on the team or, unfortunately, that you are not important because your role is not glamorous, then think about cars.

Think about the most beautiful car with a big strong engine. Now think about what happens to that shiny fast car that gets everyone's attention if the spark plug is faulty. A \$100,000 car can be sidelined by a bad spark plug that costs \$10. Cars need all the parts working together properly for them to operate effectively. It is the same with teams. No role is more important than another. Here is a story that Kevin Templeton told in his book *To The Hilt* that really drives this point home in an unforgettable way,

Charlie Plumb graduated from the US Naval Academy. He was a fighter pilot who helped start the "Top Gun" school in Miramar, California. He flew seventy-five missions in F-4 and F-14 Tomcat Phantom jets over Hanoi off the USS Kitty Hawk.

On his seventy-fifth mission, just five days before he was to rotate off active duty, Plumb's plane was hit by a surface-to-air missile. The plane was on fire and would not respond. The stick was frozen. Finally, Charlie and his radar man ejected from the F-4 and parachuted, to be captured by angry North Vietnamese soldiers. Captain Plumb spent almost six years at the Hanoi Hilton, a notoriously tough prison. There he faced torture, hunger, filth, and oppressive jungle heat. he went into prison at twenty-four years of age and was released at age thirty after a prisoner exchange.

Charlie was eating dinner at a Kansas City restaurant when a guy a couple of tables over was staring at him. The stranger got up and approached Charlie's table. he said, "You're Charlie Plumb. You flew seventy-four successful missions off the USS Kitty Hawk. On your seventy-fifth mission, you were shot down over Hanoi and captured. You spent six years as a POW at the Hanoi Hilton. You got out when they had a prisoner exchange."

Charlie told the man that he was right. But there were hundreds of men on that ship. An aircraft carrier is huge. It's like a floating city. He was sorry, but he didn't remember the stranger. "Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm the man who packed your parachute," the man answered. Charlie thanked him for doing his job well. He asked him if he knew how many parachutes he had packed. The man said, "No, I never counted. I was just glad I had the opportunity to serve."

Think about that for a moment. The famous and glamorous fighter pilot was saved because an ordinary unknown guy packed his parachute correctly on that particular mission. Can you imagine if the parachute packer had felt sorry for himself because of his lowly job? What if he resented going to work that day because he wanted to be a fighter pilot? What if he wanted to wear the fancy uniform and sunglasses and get all of the attention? What if he had said to himself, ‘what does it matter, if a pilot gets shot down, they probably won’t survive anyways?’

Parachute packers weren’t famous and they didn’t get any glory. They sound a little bit like basketball players that set screens, softball players that lay down sacrifice bunts, or football players that block. However, a team cannot be successful without these people. The media will highlight the player that scores the points but will rarely talk about the people that help make those points possible.

If you are a “parachute packer” on your team, then take inspiration from this story. True, your role won’t include saving someone’s life but it certainly entails helping your team win. Whatever parachute you are asked to pack for your team, do it with the attitude of knowing that, though unglamorous, it is every bit as important for your team’s success.

If you are like Charlie Plumb and you are a pilot on your team. If you are a star, then understand that you are not the only important person on the team. Legendary hall of fame basketball coach John Wooden used to say that it takes ten hands to make a basket. Be the first one to high-five the parachute packers on your team. Be the first one to praise them during an interview after the game.

Charlie Plumb, a star pilot, owed his life to a role player that was a star in his role – a role player that took pride in his role regardless of whether he would ever be recognized for it. If Charlie Plumb had died that day, no one would have blamed the parachute packer. All eyes would have been on what the pilot could have done better. Just like in a basketball game, no one notices a bad screen being set or when a pass is a little off target but they do see the shot is missed. If you are in a team sport, it takes every player to do their job in order to achieve success.

## **CRAB MENTALITY**

The opposite of adding value to your teammates is that of having a crab

mentality. The following story highlights the crab principle, which can be true in both sports and in life.

A man was walking along the beach and saw another man fishing in the surf with a bait bucket beside him. As he drew closer, he saw that the bait bucket had no lid and had live crabs inside.

"Why don't you cover your bait bucket so the crabs won't escape?", he said.

"You don't understand.", the man replied, "If there is one crab in the bucket it would surely crawl out very quickly. However, when there are many crabs in the bucket, if one tries to crawl up the side, the others grab hold of it and pull it back down so that it will share the same fate as the rest of them."

When you have a crab mentality, you are only out for yourself. You are going to "get yours" or "play your game." If individuals are not working as a team and are refusing to help one another other out, then a crab mentality is taking place.

## **OLD WARWICK**

When you take a shot in basketball, it probably makes you feel more confident if you know that your teammates will go and rebound the shot if you miss. If you are playing baseball and the hit-and-run play is on, you will feel better as a base runner if you know that the batter swings and makes contact with the ball. If you are a quarterback in football, you want to know that the offensive lineman will be protecting your blindside. Here is a little story about accomplishing more as a team courtesy of coach Shane Dreiling from his blog *Life Lessons in Words*,

A man became lost while driving through the country. As he tried to read a map, he accidentally drove off the road into a ditch. Though he wasn't injured, his car was stuck deep in the mud. Seeing a farmhouse just down the road, the man walked over to ask for help.

"Warwick can get you out of the ditch," the farmer said, pointing to an old mule standing in the field. The man looked at the haggard mule, and then looked at the farmer, who just stood there nodding. "Yep, old Warwick can do

the job.”

The man figured he had nothing to lose, so the two men and Warwick made their way back to the ditch.

After the farmer hitched the old mule to the car, he snapped the reins and shouted, “Pull, Fred! Pull, Jack! Pull Ted! Pull, Warwick!” With very little effort, the lone mule pulled the car from the ditch.

The man was amazed. He thanked the farmer, patted the mule, and asked, “Why did you call out all those other names before you called Warwick?”

The farmer grinned and said, “Old Warwick is just about blind. As long as he believes he is part of a team, he doesn’t mind pulling.”

When we play sports, we know that we need others in order to experience the most amount of success. When we play together, we are able to accomplish more. A play works better when all the team members do their jobs.

## **ENERGY VAMPIRES**

Jon Gordon has written a number of best-sellers on leadership, personal growth, and teamwork. In one of his books, *The Energy Bus*, the main characters are discussing a part of teamwork that is crucial to success. You have choices every day whether you are going to add value to others or look out for yourself only. Are you going to be positive or negative? Are you going to encourage others and energize your team or will you suck the life out of them,

“You asked about the negative people and I’m going to be straight up with you, George. This rule is not for the faint of heart. It’s not easy to deal with the negativity in the world but it’s something that’s got to be done. Your success and life are so important that you must surround yourself with a

positive support team. No one creates success in a vacuum and the people we surround ourselves with have a big influence on the life and success we create.

If you want to be successful you have to be very careful about who is on your bus. After all, there are people who increase your energy and there are people who drain your energy. I call the people who drain your energy Energy Vampires and they will suck the life out of you and your goals and vision if you let them. They will cause an engine leak, make your ride miserable, or even worse slash your tires.

But remember, George, don't take it personally. They are just part of the negativity that exists in the world. Your job is to do your best to eliminate any negativity on your bus and this includes negative people, no matter who they are. This is rule #6 and it's big time."

If you are ever in a position to have a say in who your teammates will be, try to avoid energy vampires at all costs. If you are a college player and have a bad feeling about one of the recruits (and potential future teammate), then let your coach know of your concerns. If you have a teammate already that is an energy vampire then do all within your power to counteract their negativity with your own positivity.

Enthusiasm is contagious. People will oftentimes gravitate toward your positive attitude because it is refreshing and respected. If you have a strong relationship with the energy vampire then try to talk with them at an appropriate time to let them know how this might be affecting the team. Even though enthusiasm is contagious, sometimes negativity can be also if left unchecked.

## **REDWOOD TREES**

If you have been to California, you might have seen the world's biggest trees, the Sequoia redwoods. Redwoods grow hundreds of feet in the air, with the tallest rising nearly 300 feet above the ground. These trees survive for thousands of years even when floods, strong winds, earthquakes or fire



come their way. The way that they are able to do that is because of their root system. Amazingly, their roots don't go down very far but they spread out up to 100 feet from the tree. As they spread out, they get mixed up with the roots from their neighbors.

Essentially, these trees support one another, not only from the elements but also in sharing water and other nutrients crucial to survival. This strong foundation and interconnectedness allow the redwoods to survive and thrive even in the harshest of conditions. The example of the redwoods is a great illustration for our teams and what a healthy team looks like.

To have a functional and successful team, you must have members that hold each other up, work together and share in each other's strengths to hide weaknesses. Just like the redwoods, our team can be stronger together than we are individually. Even though a redwood is the world's largest tree, without the support of its' neighbors, it would not last very long. The most talented players don't achieve sustained success without the help of their teammates.

## **DETROIT PISTONS**

Many NBA championships have been won by teams with talent that was superior to their opponents. Most casual fans can name the stars on NBA Championships of the past – Michael Jordan and the Bulls, Steph Curry with Golden State, Lebron and the Cavs and Heat, Kobe and Shaq with the Lakers, Tim Duncan with the Spurs and Hakeem Olajuwon with the Houston Rockets. However, there is a team that is often forgotten and hard to identify a star player because they were a true team. They might be skipped over in the talk of greatest teams ever but they all have championship rings and can call themselves “Champions.”

The Goin' to Work Pistons won the NBA Title in 2004 when they defeated the Lakers. They then followed it up with another finals appearance the next year when they narrowly lost to the San Antonio Spurs in seven games.

Ben Wallace was the NBA's Defensive Player of the Year four times and he said this in a Keith Langlois article on *NBA.com*,

“I don't think there are too many teams in any sport that ever won a championship with a team like we had. Guys that

truly cared about each other and didn't care who scores as long as the points were going up on the board, don't care who's getting the stops as long as they're not scoring."

Their mantra and visual that they relied upon was that of an iron fist – five fingers coming together and becoming one iron fist, rather than five individual fingers. Though the starting five of Ben Wallace, Rasheed Wallace, Rip Hamilton, Tayshaun Prince, and Chauncey Billups were all accomplished individual players in the NBA, they were better together than they were individually. The whole was greater than the sum of the individual parts. They all had a chip on their shoulder of overcoming obstacles in the NBA. They all had something to prove and instead of proving it on their own, they became one unit focused on a common goal. In the same article, the point guard, Chauncey Billups gave his opinion on one of the reasons they were such a good team when he said,

"We all literally became brothers. People say that. It's a good cliché, but it was real with us. It was real. Maybe I'm biased, but I don't ever see that happening like we did it. I think that's the last time it'll happen like that."

They might not have had superstars but they had talented players that meshed together. The Goin' to Work Pistons might not have been the five best players in the NBA but they were the best five that you could put together in 2004.

## **ANDRE IGUODOLA**

All players say that they want to win but their actions and attitude may say something different when they actually have to demonstrate this. Andre Iguodala was a star player for the Philadelphia 76ers and Denver Nuggets. He averaged 15.1 points, 5.8 rebounds and 4.9 assists per game in his first nine seasons with the Philadelphia 76ers and the Denver Nuggets. During those nine years, he was oftentimes the star player as he took 11.5 shots per game.

In fact, one of the most impressive things from Iguodala's career was that he started all 695 regular season games. Outside of his rookie season, he never played fewer than 34 minutes per game. He might not have been a

Kobe Bryant or LeBron James, but he was an NBA star. However, Iguodala wanted more – not more points, shots or playing time – but more wins. He wanted to contend for championships, so he joined the Golden State Warriors in 2013.

During that first season with the Warriors, he started every game as usual, but the team didn't advance past the first round. During his second year with the Warriors, he was relegated to the bench for the first time in his career. After starting every game of his career for 10 straight years, Andre Iguodala would not hear his name called by the public-address announcer prior to the game. But that didn't matter to him. Remember, he wanted more. He wanted to be a part of something bigger than himself.

A strange thing happened during the first year of Iguodala's career that he served in the role of reserve - The Golden State Warriors won the NBA Championship and he was named the 2015 NBA Finals MVP. His sacrifice paid off. In his first four years with the Warriors, his stats were at an all-time low as he only averaged 7.9 points per game and took only 6 shots per game, but he earned two championship rings and the respect of an entire league.

In 2015, in a poll of all the NBA's general managers, they overwhelmingly selected him as the league's best role player. His role was no longer to be the leading scorer, but it was no less important. In his world, the goal of winning a championship or multiple championships was much more important than being an all-star or scoring points.

## **SCOTTIE PIPPEN**

Scottie Pippen is in the Basketball Hall of Fame. He was also named as one of the NBA's Top-50 players of all-time, but to many people, the six-time NBA champion is still remembered for the time that he wasn't on the court. He is remembered for a moment in time when he was guilty of performing one of the Top-50 most unsportsmanlike acts of all time, according to the website *complex.com*.

The New York Knicks were leading Pippen's Chicago Bulls 2-0 in the 1994 Eastern Conference semifinals. Game Three was tied at 102 with just 1.8 seconds left in the game. This should have been Scottie Pippen's time to shine since Michael Jordan was no longer playing basketball as he was taking time away to take a swing at playing professional baseball. Pippen would average 22 points, 8.7 rebounds, 5.6 assists and 2.9 steals per game as

he would finish that year as third in the MVP voting. But in this situation, coach Phil Jackson chose to have Pippen inbound the ball and it would be Toni Kukoc, the new budding star, that would take the last shot. Pippen was furious and refused to go into the game. Phil Jackson had to call a second timeout once he realized that there were only four Chicago Bulls on the floor. Once play resumed, Kukoc hit the game-winning fadeaway 22-foot shot at the buzzer.

It was rumored that Pippen resented or was jealous of “the Croatian Sensation”, who ended up being named Second-Team All-Rookie that year. Regardless of his feelings for Kukoc, it was evident that Pippen was selfish and lost focus of the goal for at least one moment in one game. Basketball is a true team sport and it requires five players to play as one unit. There are five players and only one ball. The team goal must be more important than the role.

Pippen might have been one of the greatest but in this situation, it was determined that he could better serve the team as the inbounder. He might have been the team’s best inbounder. The coach might have determined that nobody else could inbound the ball or make the proper decision as well as Pippen but that someone might have the ability to hit a shot. A coach’s job is to make the best decision with the information available to them at that moment. A player’s job is to buy into the concept of the team and be willing to play the role to accomplish the team’s goal.

## **MIRACLE ON ICE**

One of the most dominating teams in the history of sports was the Soviet Union’s hockey team. Coming into the 1980 Winter Olympics, they had won the gold medal in the four previous Olympic games. In a three-game series in 1979 against an NHL All-Star team that featured 20 future Hall of Famers, the Soviets won two of three including the final game 6-0. They also had their backup goalie in the net for that game.

It didn’t appear that any team could defeat the Soviets, especially the Americans, who had the youngest team in the Olympics. In fact, less than two weeks prior to the 1980 Olympic games in Lake Placid, the two teams faced off in an exhibition game at the Madison Square Garden. The Soviets won 10-3 in a game that probably wasn’t even that close. However, Coach Herb Brooks had a master plan of how to mold his individual players to become a team capable of beating the Soviet machine.

Brooks was once quoted as saying that he didn't want the best players, but that he wanted the right players. Not only was the team the youngest but it was made up of college players mainly from the University of Minnesota and Boston University. These two programs were extremely successful. They were also bitter rivals and hated one another – even having a big fight prior to their 1976 NCAA semifinal matchup.

Early on in the practice sessions, Coach Brooks would ask his players who they played for and the responses were always the same, "I'm so-and-so and I play at such-and-such college." This went on for many weeks. After one particular exhibition game in which they played terribly, Coach Brooks made them do sprints after the game. It was grueling and tempers were flaring. Eventually, captain Mike Eruzione would stand up and say "My name is Mike Eruzione...and I play for Team USA." That was what Coach Brooks wanted to hear. He ended the sprints and the players truly came together for the first time and skated off the ice as a team.

This group of guys that not only hated one another but were like everyone else in that they thought the Soviets were invincible eventually came together as one unit. They defeated the Soviets 4-3 in the semifinals and would go on to defeat Finland in the gold medal game. The "Miracle on Ice" was named the "Greatest Moment in Sports History" by Sports Illustrated.

Did someone on your team steal your girlfriend or boyfriend? Did someone say something mean to you? Does a certain team member annoy you? So what? The University of Minnesota and Boston University hockey players hated each other but eventually came together as teammates and pulled off the greatest upset in sports history. If they can do it, why can't you? When you come to practice, you are a team, not a collection of individuals. When it's game time, your opponent is in the other colored jersey, not your teammates.

1000:1 underdog 1980 Olympic hockey team proved that it is possible to overcome any challenge and defeat any opponent if you come together as a team and completely buy into a common goal.

## **MIAMI DOLPHINS – NO NAME DEFENSE**

The 1972 Miami Dolphins are the only team in NFL history to go undefeated for the entire season and win the Super Bowl in the same year. The 2007 New England Patriots also went undefeated in the regular season

but they were not able to win the Super Bowl that year. The '72 Dolphins were led by a unit called the No-Name Defense. They could have been called the Team-First Defense, No-Ego Defense, or the Together Defense because they played as one unit and didn't care who got the credit as long as they were performing together and helping the Dolphins win.

Many of those players were not famous names on their own but they ended up getting recognized with awards because they played on a defense that got a lot of publicity. Each player became better and more famous because of the team that they played on, not the other way around. Without the chemistry and unselfish nature of those players, the Dolphins defense would not have been as good because they were better together than they were individually. By checking their egos at the door, that team made history and became, arguably, the greatest team of all-time.

## **CRYING IN THE LOCKER ROOM**

My team was coming off a tough loss against a team that we were supposed to defeat. The next game was on the road against a team that was very talented and had beaten us the year before. We went into that game trying to bounce back from our upset loss two days earlier. Everything seemed to go right for us in the first half. Our defense was creating turnovers and it seemed like our basket was twice as big as we made an incredibly high percentage of shots. Halftime came and we were winning by 30 points! I always give the team about five minutes by themselves at halftime. After talking with my assistants and giving the team their normal five minutes, I went into the locker room. What I saw was completely unexpected.

We were up by 30 points on the road against a good team. Instead of smiles, there were plenty of concerned faces. In the corner was one of our starters crying. Shawna was surrounded by many of her teammates. Immediately I tried to find out what was wrong. Had she checked her cell phone and found out that a friend or relative had died? Was she sick? Did she have some personal problems going on? No, it wasn't any of that. Shawna was upset because she was playing badly and hadn't received as much playing time. She was embarrassed at how badly she had played. Remember, we are winning by 30 points against a good team. Not only was she not focused at the moment, but she had dragged a number of her teammates down with her.

Instead of celebrating the good things that we had done in the first

half and confirming what was needed in the second half, we were spending our energies on a player that was only concerned about herself. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, she should have been high-fiving and applauding her teammates for playing so well. She could even have thanked them for having her back and picking up the slack since she didn't play her best.

Instead of reinforcing and reminding the team of our game plan for the second half, we spent the entire halftime dealing with a player that was focused only on herself. We still managed to win the game but we played terribly and allowed the other team to make it close toward the end. It is hard to maximize your team's potential and lift your teammates up when you are only focused on yourself.

### **MARION BASKETBALL**

One of the best examples that I have seen of a team coming together when it mattered most was the 2016 Marion Giants boys basketball team. Marion has a long and storied tradition of success in the state of Indiana. "Hoosier Hysteria" is alive and well in the Marion community, as they have the world's 5<sup>th</sup> largest high school gym with a seating capacity of 7,500 and have won seven state titles. Marion is home to Naismith Basketball Hall of Famer Stretch Murphy and professional players Zach Randolph, Julius Mays, Scott Wood, Jay Edwards and James Blackmon, Jr. In 2011, James Blackmon, Sr. came back to his hometown to coach Marion after winning two State Championships at another school. Going into the 2015-16 season, hopes were high as the Giants had a talented group of players.

Unfortunately, these talented players were just not able to jell during the regular season. Despite having plenty of college coaches attending each game, the Marion Giants lost 7 games during the regular season. After being one of the preseason favorites, they now found themselves on the outside of the top-10. In fact, they finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in their conference. It seemed that the players were all playing for themselves and worried about their individual statistics. Many players would drop their shoulders and pout when a teammate would shoot the ball. They would argue with one another during games – not just on the bench, but on the court, as well. They were more concerned about their roles than they were about achieving their stated goal of winning a state championship.

Going into the state tournament, Coach Blackmon met with his players and laid out what was at stake in the next few weeks. He helped

them refocus on their goals. He helped show them that by playing team ball and by putting their selfish desires aside, that they actually would put themselves in a better position to get a college scholarship. The more they won and kept playing, the more impressive they would appear to college scouts. Additionally, the longer that they played in the tournament, the more exposure that they would get to college scouts that might be seeing them for the first time.

He reminded them that they had a chance to make history. If they won an 8<sup>th</sup> state championship, no team in Indiana would have more. This was an opportunity that they would look back upon with pride for the rest of their life. The Marion Giants, led by future Division I players Reggie Jones and Vijay Blackmon, played inspired, and most importantly, unselfish basketball for seven straight games and won a State Championship.

There are two main traits at the core of all losing teams – lack of ability and selfishness. The Marion Giants certainly were not lacking talent. When they played for themselves, they had a disappointing regular season. However, when they came together with a common goal, their talent was able to thrive and they were able to maximize their potential. They also added a new piece of jewelry to their collection as they earned a championship ring.

## **TONY ROMO/DAK PRESCOTT**

Tony Romo became the Dallas Cowboys starting quarterback in 2006. In the next ten years, he would lead the Cowboys to the playoffs four times. In a franchise that has had some legendary quarterbacks, Romo would go on to set many team records, including most touchdown passes, most passing yards and most games of 300+ passing yards. In a 2016 preseason game, Romo would, unfortunately, break his collarbone. As a result of this freak injury, rookie Dak Prescott, a 4<sup>th</sup> round draft pick out of Mississippi State University, would take over the reins until Romo was ready to return.

Even though it appeared that Romo was healthy enough to return, he held a press conference on November 15, 2016. On November 15, 2016, the Cowboys had an 8-1 record with the rookie quarterback. However, there were some serious questions concerning the immediate future. Romo appeared to be healthy and he was, after all, one of the greatest quarterbacks in Cowboys history. A promising season might be torpedoed by a quarterback controversy.



But on this day, the four-time Pro Bowler, Tony Romo would call a press conference and provide one of the greatest examples of leadership. His sincere and unselfish words would be applauded. Two tweets by television sports personalities, in particular, were representative of the general sentiment regarding Romo's leadership example:

Real leaders are those who lead when it's not about them. Tony Romo is exhibiting real leadership right now. (Trey Wingo, ESPN personality)

Just watched Romo. Talk about impressive. How hard must that be for him? In 11 weeks, from irreplaceable guy to "carry the clipboard, pal." (Peter King from the MMQB)

Here is what Romo said at his press conference in its' entirety because it bears repeating. There are a lot of good lessons to learn from this speech:

To say the first half of this season has been emotional would be a huge understatement. Getting hurt when you feel like you have the best team you've ever had is a soul-crushing moment for me. Then to learn it's not three to four weeks but 10 is another blow. And through it all, you have a tremendous amount of guilt on having let your teammates, fans, and organization down. After all, they were depending on you to bring them a championship.

That's what quarterbacks are supposed to do. That's how we're judged. I love that. I still do. But then here you are, sidelined, without any real ability to help your teammates win on the field. That's when you're forced to come face to face with what's happening.

Seasons are fleeting. Games become more precious. Chances for success diminish. Your potential successor has arrived. Injured two years in a row, and now in your mid-30s. The press is whispering, everyone has doubts, you spent

your career working to get here. Now we have to start all over.

You almost feel like an outsider. The coaches are sympathetic, but they still have to coach and you're not there. It's a dark place, probably the darkest it's ever been. You're sad and down and out and you ask yourself why did this have to happen. It's at this moment that you find out who you really are and what you're really about.

You see football is a meritocracy. You aren't handed anything. You earn everything, every single day, over and over again, you have to prove it. That's the way the NFL, that's the way football works.

A great example of this is Dak Prescott and what he's done. He's earned the right to be our quarterback. As hard as that is for me to say, he's earned that right. He's guided our team to an 8-1 record and that's hard to do. If you think for a second that I don't want to be out there, then you've probably never felt the pure ecstasy of competing and winning. That hasn't left me. In fact, it may burn more now than ever.

It's not always easy to watch. I think anybody who has been in this position understands that. But what is clear is that I was that kid once, stepping in having to prove yourself. I remember the feeling like it was yesterday. It really is an incredible time in your life.

And if I remember one thing from back then it's the people who helped me along when I was young, and if I can be that to Dak, you know, I've tried to be and I will be going forward.

I think you all know something magical is happening to our team. I'm not going to allow this situation to negatively

affect Dak or this football team by becoming a constant distraction. I think Dak knows that I have his back and I think he knows that I have mine.

Ultimately, it's about the team. It's what we've preached our entire lives. I can remember when I was a kid just starting out and wanting to be part of something bigger than myself, for every high school kid out there or college player, there's greatness in being the kind of teammate who truly wants to be part of a team. Everyone wants to be the reason they're winning or losing. Every single one of us wants to be that person. But there are special moments that come from a shared commitment to play a role while doing it together.

That's what you remember. Not your stats or your prestige. But the relationships and the achievement that you created through a group. It's hard to do but there is great joy in that. And all the while your desire burns to be the best you've ever been. You can be both. I've figured that out in this process. It's what separates sports from everything else. It's why we love it. It's why we trust it. It's why I still want to play and compete.

Lastly, I just want to leave you with something I've learned in this process as well. I feel like we all have two battles, or two enemies going on, one with the man across from you, the second is with the man inside of you. I think once you control the one inside of you, the one across from you really doesn't matter. I think that's what we're all trying to do.

Thank you, guys. Appreciate it.

If this speech doesn't make you appreciate and respect a guy, then I am not sure anything would. Romo was capable of playing but chose the high road. He made a difficult decision that was not in his best interest, but it was what the team needed. You are either being a positive or negative leader. There is no staying neutral. Romo's situation was a classic example

of this. He could have stayed quiet and let the media firestorm continue, which would only put more undue pressure on Dak Prescott or he could choose to do something about it.

With the best offensive line in the NFL, the NFL's leading rusher at running back and plenty of weapons to throw to, there is little doubt that Tony Romo would have led the Cowboys to a great season. But it would be Prescott who would end up having the magical season and leading the Cowboys to a 13-3 record. Along the way, he would break Tom Brady's record for most consecutive pass attempts without an interception to start a career. Prescott would also be named the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year.

We can only speculate what would have happened if Tony Romo had not supported Prescott. However, we can probably accurately guess that it would have made everyone's job harder and taken the focus off of the goal of winning. Romo understood that the role is more important than the goal.

## **KENTUCKY BASKETBALL**

During the 2012 season, the Kentucky Wildcats had two extremely talented players that would end up going #1 and #2 in the upcoming NBA draft. Essentially, UK had the two best players according to the NBA. Anthony Davis and Michael Kidd-Gilchrist were considered the two best professional basketball prospects – and they were on the same team. There was a lot of talent. A lot of mouths to feed. Surely, Davis and Kidd-Gilchrist would lead the way since they were the clear-cut best players on the team, right? They did lead the way, but not in the way that you would think.

They led by putting the team-first, not their individual goals. Davis ended up being fourth on the Wildcats in field-goal attempts. Kidd-Gilchrist was fifth on the team in field-goal attempts. On most teams, that wouldn't fly. On most teams with this much talent, players would be bickering about playing time and shot distribution, but not these guys. The two top NBA prospects were 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> on their team in shots. They didn't want shots, they wanted ships ... championships. By buying into the team concept and sacrificing individual goals, they helped Kentucky win a national championship. In doing so, they also demonstrated that they weren't just talented but that they were winners.

## CHANNING FRYE

Here's a question to consider. Let's say that you are a talented basketball player. You are not starting but you are in the regular rotation, averaging nearly 9 points per game. During the playoffs, you make 7 of 9 three-pointers in a key game to propel your team to the next round. However, during the first four games of the seven-game Championship series, you only play a TOTAL of 33 minutes and your team lost three of those four games. Not only have you not been playing much in those first four games, but your coach decides to bench you for the remaining three games. Remember, you were a big part of helping them get to the Championship series.

How would you react? Would you be happy? Where would your focus be? The general idea of this hypothetical situation is played out often across the country every day. An important player is benched. How does that player react? Does that player then sabotage the team or does that player provide the encouragement and support needed?

The situation described above is an actual situation that occurred during the 2016 NBA playoffs to Channing Frye, a 6'11" former 1<sup>st</sup> round draft pick and 10-year NBA veteran. Reflecting on the 2016 season with the Cleveland Cavs, Frye summarized his thoughts in *The Player's Tribune*,

As we approached the Finals, we were cutting down the rotations; we wanted to stick to who we were defensively, and that involved going with more physical lineups against the Warriors. I knew there were going to be fewer opportunities for me, but I was cool. I'd be watching from the front row with my brothers.

I think that closeness showed up in Game 7, which was the greatest game I've ever watched in my life. I was like, You know what? I gotta go to the back. I understood my role: Be a good teammate, stay ready for anything and support your bros.

That game was epic.

We just never gave up on each other, even when we got

down momentarily. It was like, think about everything you've done all summer, all year — your whole life, my whole life. We deserve this!

I was so into the game that when Steph Curry missed at the end and Mo Speights got the ball — and LeBron put his arms up — I was screaming, “Contest the shot!” And someone said, “We're up four.” And I realized, Holy shit, we're going to win!

When the clock hit zero, I looked around and thought, Who am I supposed to hug? I hugged my friend Bret Brielmaier, I hugged Richard. I was hugging everyone I could find, the owners' wives, everybody. The magnitude of what we did didn't hit me till days later, and I lost it.

TTY

This summer, I taught her (Margaux, his daughter) and my son, Hendrix, “What do we call Daddy now?”

They say, “Champion.”

Channing Frye couldn't have been happy to be benched. If it wasn't for Frye, Cleveland may not have even been in the Finals. Players want to play, but Frye wanted to be more than a player. He wanted to be a champion and that would take more than demonstrating his talents on the court. It took him demonstrating his leadership talents on the bench and in the locker room. His positive attitude and ability to put the goal above his desired role made him a champion.

## **BE A STAR IN YOUR ROLE**

The Cleveland Cavaliers won the 2016 NBA Championship after they came back from a seemingly insurmountable 3-1 deficit against the Golden State Warriors. The Warriors had the home-court advantage after winning the most regular season games in NBA history. The Cavs were led by LeBron James but they needed more than a superstar to win the series. Winning three in a row to close out the series was unprecedented, but the Cavs did it, not just because of a superstar but because of another kind of star. All

year Tristan Thompson remained in the shadow of his superstar teammates, James, Kevin Love, and Kyrie Irving, doing the dirty work. The NBA finals were no exception, rather just with more at stake, and he responded. Here is how Michael Singer of *USA Today* described his Game-6 performance,

He didn't overwhelm the Golden State Warriors like LeBron James did, and he didn't confound their defense like Kyrie Irving did, but Cleveland Cavaliers forward Tristan Thompson played his role, and he played it to perfection in the Cavs' Game 6 rout.

...Thompson's value is in the dirty work. He's not the type to post 41 points like James, and he'll never engender the defensive attention of a ball-handler like Irving. But it's his consistent effort that his teammates have learned to rely on.

...The Cavs forced a Game 7 with their 115-101 victory over the Warriors, and Thompson, behind 15 points and 16 rebounds, had a team-high plus-32 in plus-minus.

In the press conference after that Game 6 performance, Tristan Thompson talked about his mentality,

“Like LeBron and Kyrie said, be a star in your role. Be a star in your role, and for me, that's high energy, use my motor, just play hard. Play hard, be relentless, and that's what I bring to this team. That's my job, just be a star in your role.”

Tristan Thompson's huge double-double in Game 6 of the 2016 NBA Finals and unselfish play in all of the games helped lead the Cleveland Cavs to the World Championship. Good thing for Cavs fans and players that he didn't pout about his boring and un-glamorous role. He might not have been a star but he was a star in his role. He might not be LeBron James, but he will always be able to call himself a CHAMPION!