

COACHING  
BASEBALL  
SUCCESSFULLY



Foreword by  
Sparky Anderson



ANDY LOPEZ  
with John Kirkland

# **Coaching Baseball Successfully**

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with  
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*To my children, Kristi Louise, Kerri Lynne,  
Michael Andrew, and David Arthur Lopez.  
Each of you is a very special gift from the Lord.*

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## FOREWORD

I coached baseball at the major-league level for 27 years, and people always ask how I stayed so enthusiastic. I give them three reasons. One, my love of the game. Two, the enjoyment and satisfaction of working with players. And three, the competition each season to be the best.

All three of these factors are important to effective coaching, as Andy Lopez makes clear in *Coaching Baseball Successfully*. Andy's enthusiasm for the game is as apparent in the pages that follow as it is when you see him work with his team on the field.

If you're enthused about what you do, you'll make the time and the effort to do it well. And doing it well means continuing to learn and improve, no matter how many years you've coached. Even at the major-league level, the challenge is to better yourself—to improve your knowledge and skills each season.

Andy Lopez's enthusiasm has translated into high achievement as a coach. He had the desire to do what it takes to climb the ranks from the high school to junior college to major college level. At each level his teams have excelled, reaching championship form. And Andy kept learning all along the way.

In *Coaching Baseball Successfully* Coach Lopez presents the stuff from which championships are made: good teaching of skills and strategies; good practice coaching; good philosophy, communication, and motivation; good game coaching; and good evaluation of performance. If you already have covered all these bases, you're probably pretty successful. But my guess is that—like every other baseball coach and manager—you could improve in one or more of these areas.

You are fortunate in that for at least part of each day during the season, the ballpark is your office and your classroom. Be as organized as the top CEOs and as instructive as the best teachers. Take your job seriously, but remember to put the development of your athletes ahead of personal honors. This book will help. Even if you use only three or four key ideas from *Coaching Baseball Successfully* next season, you'll be a better coach.

Coaching young men is an important job. Take the opportunity to learn from Coach Lopez's experiences. With enough enthusiasm, discipline, preparation, knowledge, and skill, you too will be highly successful.

GEORGE "SPARKY" ANDERSON  
FORMER MANAGER,  
DETROIT TIGERS AND CINCINNATI REDS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank John Kirkgard for his great friendship, as well as his pride of workmanship in putting the material for this book into manuscript form; Mike Zapolski and Steve McClain for their expert assistance throughout the book; and every coach, player, professional scout, and institution that have been a positive influence in my life.

To Dr. Isaac Canales, who in June of 1982 challenged me to be a man of God.

To my sister, Teresa Connelly, and my brother, John Lopez, for their love and direction toward their younger brother; my mother, Consuelo Morales Lopez, and my father, Arturo Lopez, for their patient, kind, yet strong, hands of guidance and love; and my wife, Linda, who possesses the wisdom, love, patience, and support to enable me to pursue a career in baseball.

Above all to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If I have accomplished anything at all it is by his grace.—Jer. 9:23

## INTRODUCTION

In my home and office libraries, I have dozens of instructional baseball books, many of which I have used to develop my approach to coaching. So why write another? I saw a need for a baseball book that goes beyond the technical, beyond even the fundamentals of the game, a book that would lend itself to the fundamentals of life and to the development of players as people and athletes. As coaches we often get overly concerned with the trivial aspects of our jobs and lose sight of the impact we have on the lives of those around us.

Much of the success with which I have been blessed comes as the result of an emphasis on my athletes becoming men. Over the years our desire is for our players to develop into successful husbands and fathers and leaders in the community, business world, their churches, and other organizations.

"If you have run with men on foot and they have worn you out, how then can you compete with the horses of excellence?" (Jeremiah 12:5). Much of my philosophy comes from a sound belief in biblical principles and my faith in God. The statement from the Book of Jeremiah serves as a constant reminder of the standard of excellence for which I should strive in my relationships with my family, friends, peers, athletes, and also in my profession.

*Coaching Baseball Successfully* covers the fundamental skills, strategies, and drills of the game. In addition, I've included sections that transcend the X's and O's of baseball. The coaching philosophy section of this book applies to anyone in a position to manage and motivate others. It is interesting for me to observe friends in the business world applying these principles with their employees. Philosophy, communication, motivation, and program development are essentials of leadership, and they are covered in Part I. From these guiding principles, effective coaches establish their specific ideas and methods for coaching.

Part II covers planning, an essential ingredient in any coach's success. From preseason administrative details to actual examples of practice plans, this section presents the process and people involved in planning, preparing, and organizing for a successful season.

The bulk of the book focuses on baseball techniques and tactics, and the keys to teaching them to players. Parts III and IV deal with every offensive and defensive area of the game. Baseball skills and how to teach them are a constant, but strategy often changes with the personnel you have. I try to give you the basics, and then I help you to develop a strategy that will work best with the athletes on your club.

Part V takes you from the practice field into the game itself. Featured here are methods of scouting, personnel management, game day motivation, and specific game strategies. I also offer suggestions about an area in which we can all improve—how to win *and* lose with dignity.

The last section explains how, when, what, and who a coach should evaluate. The ability to correctly evaluate your athletes' on-field performance and off-field conduct is a valuable skill for any coach. Unless you can monitor and pin-point problem areas, you'll never have a top-flight program.

The ideas in this book are those that I have used throughout my career. My practice plans today at Florida are much the same as those I used early in my career at Mira Costa High School (Manhattan Beach, CA), at California State University, Dominguez Hills (Carson, CA), and Pepperdine University (Malibu, CA).

My experiences at all three levels of coaching (high school and NCAA Divisions I and II) have been similar. At Mira Costa, our ball club reached the final California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) championship game played in Dodger Stadium. It happened in our fifth year. At Cal State Dominguez Hills, the program developed into a contender for the NCAA Division II championship, finishing third nationally in 1988, our fifth year at that school. In my fourth year at Pepperdine, we had the privilege to play for and win the NCAA Division I championship. The content of *Coaching Baseball Successfully* is an approach that has been proven successful at all levels of the game of baseball. I trust it will be applicable to your coaching situation.

It is my sincere desire and prayer that in some way this book will have an impact on your life, that it will not only develop your knowledge of baseball, but also impress upon you the importance of having a positive impact on those around you. Above all else, I would like this book to honor the Lord, to whom I give full credit for my life, my abilities, and all my blessings.

**PART I—  
COACHING FOUNDATION**

## Chapter 1— Developing a Baseball Coaching Philosophy



Becoming a baseball coach was not always my goal. I did not grow up with a passion to coach at the major college level and to win a national championship. On the contrary, I had many career paths from which to choose. Professional baseball was an option. Selling life insurance was my first career pursuit. I also desired to be a youth pastor. It was a combination of these other pursuits, coupled with my upbringing as a child influenced by godly parents, that encompasses the development of my coaching philosophy.

Each coach must have a philosophy to be successful. Knowledge of the game and its fundamentals only takes your ball club so far without the foundation of a consistent philosophy. Each coach's philosophy will be different, influenced by a lifetime of experiences and information.

In this chapter I'll share my coaching philosophy, describing some of my background and highlighting what I believe are the keys to an approach that results in consistent success. I won't try to change your way of thinking or your way of doing things, but you might just find something you can use.

### **Roots of a Coaching Philosophy**

How we choose to work with people and our perspective of coaching develop well before

we make out our first lineup card. So it's not surprising that my mom's and dad's personalities, how and where I was raised, my social experiences as a youth, and my playing career helped shape my philosophy.

### ***Parents' Influence***

My parents have had the greatest influence on my approach to life. They both immigrated to the United States from Mexico and met while working in the cannery industry in the Port of Los Angeles, SanPedro, California.

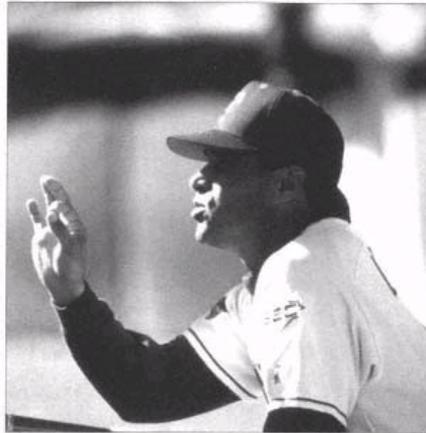
My father and mother are both godly people. They are humble and hard working. They have a phenomenal work ethic. They have taught me much, including the basics of what is now a part of my coaching philosophy. I learned that nothing will ever be handed to you, to deal with people honestly, to work hard and put in a full day's work, to put your name on everything you do, and if you are going to do something, do it right.

My father served in the South Pacific during World War II. Despite being a quiet, humble man of God, he was a successful soldier and was promoted to the rank of sergeant. As quickly as he was promoted, he was demoted, not because he wasn't doing a good job but because he would not yell at his men!

I don't ever remember my dad raising his voice as I grew up, yet he was a powerful leader. He is a man I love dearly and if I have any patience or poise in my life it's because of my father.

On the other hand. Mom is a fighter! I still remember her chasing me down the street with discipline on her mind. In front of all my friends she caught me and gave me a good (and no doubt deserved) spanking. I was 13 at the time, and I am still not sure how she caught me. But her determination and wisdom in knowing her son needed the foolishness driven from him is a strong memory that will always remain with me.

It is interesting that although my mom is a strong, brave woman, she is also afraid of many things. She fears flying, driving, and the water to name a few. Yet from her I've learned that it's okay to be scared, as long as you pursue your fears and conquer them. I'll never forget her flying to Omaha, Nebraska, to see us play in the College World Series. She overcame yet another fear so she could be there.



### **TAKING CARE OF DETAILS**

When I was nine, I remember my parents taking me to the Blue Chip Stamp Store in San Pedro and getting a brand new baseball glove. My world was complete except that I was still learning the importance of taking care of my school clothes, putting toys away, and things of that nature. Just weeks after I received the glove, I left it outside one night. My mom desired to teach me a valuable lesson and said I would get the glove back when I showed I was really ready to handle the responsibility. For a long time I was forced to borrow gloves every practice and game I played. When the glove was finally returned to me, I had learned the lesson of taking care of things that are given to me. I can't remember the last thing I have lost. I don't lose keys; I don't lose notes; I don't miss appointments. I'm on time. My parents taught me the importance of details.

### ***Street Experiences***

My parents raised me in San Pedro, California, a small port town outside of Los Angeles, which bred a pretty good group of ballplayers. Brian Harper (Twins), Joe Amalfitano (Dodgers), Garry Maddox (Phillies), and Alan Ashby

(Astros) are a few of the prominent names. More than any other sport, baseball was big in our city.

Yet baseball was not the sole interest in my life. I was also involved with a gang called the Persuasions, and we hung out together on the city streets. There were about 12 of us involved. I was with this gang for 2-½ years between the ages of 15 and 17. Even though I was younger than most of the other members, I remember being the leader. I became streetwise, and my perspective on life was shaped by these experiences. I did what was necessary to survive on the streets, actions of which I am not proud.

I grew up living with con men. There wasn't much truth in the streets. So I grew up doubting the sincerity of most people. Because of this experience. I attempt to be as honest with others as possible.

God gave me the option of athletics, which allowed me a way off the streets. A gang lifestyle is a dead end, literally. Some of the Persuasions are no longer alive. It's sad to see the degree to which gangs have grown and harmed today's society.

### ***Playing Career***

Despite the street influence, I was fortunate to have the option of athletics and pursued it with a passion. I was successful in my years at San Pedro High School, and upon graduating in 1971 I pursued my athletic career at Los Angeles Harbor Junior College. I was fortunate to make some all-state teams and then went on to play at UCLA in 1974–75. The Detroit Tigers made me their ninth-round draft pick in 1975.

My playing career was unique. I was a shortstop, yet I caught in high school and at UCLA. I caught about 30 games for UCLA as a junior. I played short, third, center field, and like everyone else, I pitched as a youngster. In fact, first base is the only position I never played.

My street personality surfaced in negotiations with the Tigers. Since my collegiate eligibility was over, the Tigers negotiated with me from the perspective that they felt I had no other options. Call it stubbornness, but I did not appreciate being told I had no options other than to sign the contract. I thought I did and decided to walk away from professional baseball.

At that time I had one more quarter term of school needed for my degree at UCLA, and was fortunate enough to be asked by Coach Jim O'Brien to assist him at L.A. Harbor Community College. This is where my coaching career began. Lord only knew then that my career would take me to Mira Costa High School (1978–82), California State University at Dominguez Hills (1982–88), Pepperdine University (1988–93), and the University of Florida in 1994.

### ***First Coaching Job***

Some people know at an early age exactly what they want to do for a career. Others bounce from job to job, praying that the next position will be the dream job. I have pursued and interviewed for only one job in my life. Believe it or not, it was an insurance sales position. I did the interview, took the test, and tried everything to convince the company that I was the man for the job, but they still didn't hire me. About that time, a career in coaching and teaching began looking much more attractive.

My first head coaching job at Mira Costa lasted five years. During that time I realized three important things that affected my coaching philosophy and probably have much to do with why I have continued to coach through all of these years:

- I was blessed with an ability to communicate with my players. If there's one single thing that I enjoy about coaching, it is being able to interact on a daily basis with the young men on my team.
- I gained confidence that I could coach. The team's success, including playing for the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) 4A championship in my fifth season, removed even my own doubts that I could do the job.
- I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ personally in my life. Among other things, this has helped me to better prioritize my work and to give greater value to the well-being of others. It is these three experiences that are the deep roots of any success I have experienced.

## Coaching Mentors

Coaching did not come to me automatically. I have been fortunate to have access to fine coaches and to their knowledge of the game. I have learned from many. In fact, I have *had* to learn from many. Following only one year as an assistant, I became a head coach. Most would consider this very little experience! It has been quite necessary to draw upon the knowledge of other coaches throughout my career.

My coach at San Pedro High School was Jerry Lovarov. Although I was ignorant of it at the time. Jerry taught me the importance of allowing good players to play. His team was loaded with good players. He let us play and we were successful. He did not overcoach us. We won three high school championships in my time there and always played in the city playoffs. He showed wisdom in letting us play, which is now part of my philosophy—to let good players play and to not overcoach them.

A gentleman who was way ahead of his time was my junior college coach. Norm Jacot. He was an outstanding hitting instructor, one of the better I have been around. Back in the early '70s and before VCRs became popular and affordable. Norm showed us films of our swings to help us correct hitting flaws. He was innovative and he left me with an openness to new ideas and innovations.

Jerry Kindall, at the University of Arizona, has been a great example for me. A few years back he went through a tragic time in losing his wife to Lou Gehrig's disease, and I remember watching him very closely. I wanted to see how he handled a life situation that was far more difficult than any game experience. Anybody knows that during a game you can feel the crunch. If you allow it, you can feel the pressure. So I watched Coach. I observed the way he handled himself and how he handled his clubs. He is a very consistent man. I don't think I have ever been able to detect whether he has won or lost after a game when I've played him. His body language is on an even keel. He is competitive yet poised. I admire that and have tried to emulate that over the last seven or eight years.

Jim O'Brien, the first coach I worked for at L.A. Harbor, was a tremendous influence on my competitive approach. By the sheer force of his personality he showed me how to compete. I have met few men with as intense a desire to come out on top as Coach O'Brien. His focus was simply to be the best. He wanted his clubs to be the very best. His clubs always played hard and excelled. I would say Jim introduced me to a new level of competitiveness.

Several coaches have instilled in me the importance of sharing time and knowledge with others. You will find it difficult to improve without the ability to pursue others in your field and seek their insight. Dennis Rogers, currently at Riverside City College, comes to mind. He has a unique background, having been part of several outstanding baseball programs, such as the Oakland A's and the Pittsburgh Pirates. He played and coached under John Scolinos. Dennis and I get together yearly to share ideas. The late Joe Hicks, a legend in southern California, also confirmed the value of getting help from other coaches.

Finally, I must come back to John Scolinos (Cal Poly Pomona). I would like to emulate this man. He is a gentleman who takes his faith in God seriously yet still competes hard. He also influences his players beyond the field and into their daily lives. He is a consistent man, unwavering in his beliefs. I have seen him win national championships and have seen him lose 30 to 40 games. By his response you could not tell the difference. These are all qualities that someday I would like to have attributed to me.

Every coach I have played for and every coach I have played against has been a source of learning for me. From Coach Lovarov's lesson of letting his players play to Coach Scolinos's unwavering class and dignity, I have continued to learn from other individuals.

Pursue ideas of others and adapt them to your approach. If you can learn at least one thing from an individual, which is often the case, do it. Consider, for example, a drill that my college teammate Dave Norris taught me in 1974. It involves spreading the feet, putting the bat on the shoulder, and pulling every pitch to develop quickness in the hands.

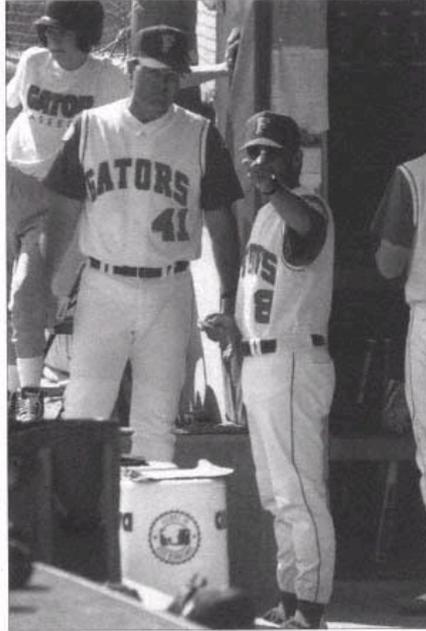
Where he got that drill I do not know, but I still use it today.

### **Developing a Philosophy**

If you believe that a philosophy must have no apparent inconsistencies, then you'll be disappointed to learn that mine mixes intense competition with gentle communication. But these two components *can* coexist in an overall philosophy.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples that he is sending them out among the wolves, and therefore they must be as shrewd as serpents yet as gentle as doves (Matthew 10:16). It is this balance that best describes my approach to coaching.

Do not take this wrong. I am not saying coaches are a pack of wolves, but the profession is a competitive one, and the setting in which we work is a competitive arena. There-fore, I try to get our players to be tough competitors (as shrewd as serpents) to compete on a daily basis. On the other hand, I insist that we also show humility, class, and compassion (as gentle as doves). These are valuable behaviors that our society fails to nurture like it should.



Adhering to this competitive yet compassionate philosophy is much like walking a tightrope between two distinct beliefs. Yet it is a tightrope I have tried to walk at all levels of coaching, day by day, often minute by minute.

### ***Keeping Baseball in Perspective***

Let me give you another example of walking a tightrope. Our goal is to win a national championship. Within that goal I make a very important statement regarding our time on the field. The statement is this: "It's not life or death for the next two hours, it's *more* important than that." Then I take the concept further by making sure my athletes understand that when practice or the game is over, baseball becomes what it truly is—trivial. The results are trivial. The game is trivial relative to the bigger issues of life, trivial in the sense that it cannot consume you at the sacrifice of other important aspects of your life.

Is it a contradiction to say that baseball is more important than life or death, and then to claim it is trivial? No. It's a matter of when and in what situation you take one of these two perspectives and how well you integrate them into your athletic, social, academic, family, and religious lives.

We need the full effort on the field. If a player has a family problem, it can't affect him. If he just flunked a test, he can't be affected by it. If he broke up with his girlfriend, he can't be affected. Actually nothing should take him out of his game, not a thing for the next two hours. But when the two hours end, the game cannot destroy the player's life. In its purest sense it's just a game.

#### **REAL LIFE OR DEATH**

I had an experience that illustrates the previous points, an event that I would have traded the national title for along with every coaching

win I have ever had. My wife was found to have a tumor in her throat, and the first diagnosis was that the growth was malignant. Thank God it was benign. But during the three days prior to surgery I would have traded my accomplishments for her health.

The day before the surgery, I met with a recruit's family and worked as hard as I ever had to get the commitment. The athlete signed a letter of intent. The only reason that I did a good job in that situation was that I tried to live my philosophy. Baseball is not life or death; it's more than life or death at a given moment.

After I left my office and was driving home, I realized it did not really matter if the recruit committed or not. What really mattered was that my wife be healthy. The recruiting process was important only when it was taking place. It was trivial relative to the essential aspects of life.

I want to teach my athletes not to be double minded. This philosophy works well off the field, too. If someone wants to be an athlete, he should not confuse the issues. When he shows up for practice, he should be an athlete. When he's in the classroom, he should be a student. When he's on a date, he should focus on his relationship with the other person.

For about two or three hours every day during practice, I demand that all players and coaches be completely focused. As a coach, I must also separate my work and family times—and be absorbed in each when the time calls for it.

### ***Winning in Life***

I do not believe my value as a human being is dictated by my win-loss record. I do not believe having won a national title makes me a genius. I want to be in the group of coaches who are driven to be successful yet are driven to do things right, driven to develop young athletes into solid citizens later in life. Yes, I want to win another national title, but my value as a father, husband, Christian, and coach is not a direct result of winning 40 games every year. I hope I can teach that to my athletes.

All of us in coaching know that some of our colleagues base their success and worth as a coach and as a person on how big a number they have in their win column. How many wins? How many championships? Their philosophy: "Let's do whatever it takes to win regardless of long-term consequences." This perspective is rooted in ego and self-promotion.

I strive to be a part of the coaching community that says, "Let's be successful; let's develop athletes; let's mold young men to grow up mature and do things right." We need to understand that baseball is trivial and say to ourselves, "I'm not going to base my self-worth on this. I'm not going to destroy my life. I'm not going to destroy my marriage. I'm not going to destroy my relationship with my kids. I'm simply not going to allow this white ball with red seams to control my life."

### ***Be Yourself***

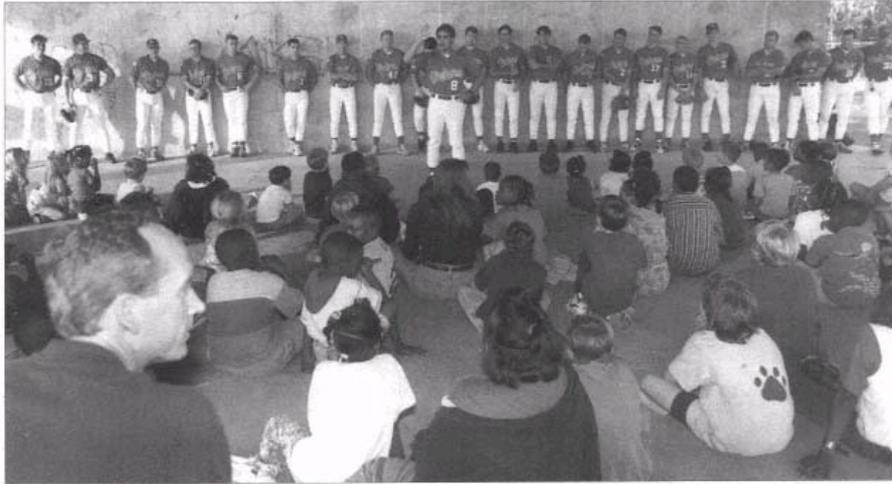
The single most important suggestion I can make to a young coach developing a philosophy is to be yourself. You have to be comfortable in your approach to coaching.

I have the utmost respect for former UCLA basketball coach John Wooden. When I was younger, I thought I would adopt Coach Wooden's coaching style. As I watched him, I admired the way he sat on the bench: poised and quiet, the only hint of anxiety the rolled-up program clutched tightly in one hand. Be calm and collected like Coach Wooden and you'll succeed, I thought. So I tried it; the exgang member from San Pedro tried to imitate the gentlemanly, Midwestern demeanor of Saint John Wooden. It didn't work. The style wasn't comfortable for me. I tend to raise my voice occasionally and show emotion often. That's who I am. And I'm sure that my approach might be uncomfortable for other coaches.

The key to being yourself is to know yourself. Discover who you are. What are your strengths? Your weaknesses? What do you stand for? These questions need to be answered as you develop your own philosophy of coaching. I would like to challenge anyone reading this book to examine why you do what you do. Combine your roots, personality, and the direction you have received from your coaching mentors to develop your philosophy.

It might be comforting to note that I did not answer most of these questions until well into my coaching career. Now I humbly be-

lieve I know who I am as a coach, my strengths and weaknesses. I discovered much of this while I was at California State University at Dominguez Hills—ironically, not because of success but because of failure. Hard times do bring out character.



### **Benefiting from a Balanced Philosophy**

How does a balanced philosophy work? I'm convinced that the most tangible results come when you begin setting objectives for your athletes and for yourself.

We begin establishing objectives with our athletes with two simple rules: Be on time and do things right. Being on time is a very easy rule. Doing things right is a day-to-day process that influences one's social life, athletics, and academics.

### ***Social Maturity***

I work at a university that demands a high level of ethics. I am proud of that, and we like to think none of our athletes is involved in drinking, drugs, or anything that would be titled a social detriment. Yet the reality of the '90s is that I do have athletes who are involved in these areas. I am not proud of it and do teach alternatives.

Looking at myself, it is obvious that there is wrong in my life. The reason I accepted the Lord back in 1980 was that I could not correct the wrong in my life alone. This is the wonderful concept of grace, the opportunity to change despite many mistakes. So I have a sensitive spot in my heart if one of my athletes is caught drinking or in an uncomfortable situation. I know I was given an opportunity to change and took advantage of it. I want my athletes to be provided the same opportunity.

From a social standpoint, I try to educate our athletes that the quicker they get into a mature state of mind, the better off they will be. I'll address the ball club on the field and say, "You must play like men. If you play like boys, you will get beat." I can then relate it socially, "If you act like a boy, you're going to end up in trouble. You must act like a man." Show me some mature qualities on the field and off the field. I used this approach at both the high school and college levels.

Many coaches would be able to produce a page of rules and expectations, 15 to 20 rules long. I do not have that. I basically say, "Let's do things right." It is my job to expose them to what I now know to be right after four decades on this earth—what is right and

what is wrong. Our athletes need guidance not only on drugs and alcohol, but also on relationships, goals, and how to handle authority.

Unfortunately, in our society it's not cool to honor positions of authority. It's more cool to fight it, even though we know the more we fight, the tougher it gets. Even if we believe the authority is making the wrong decision, we need to honor it. I've disagreed with my athletic director at times over a denied road trip or new uniform purchases, yet I've had to honor the position of authority. Both my program and I have been blessed as a result. We try to teach social skills to our athletes on a daily basis.

### ***Academic Integrity***

Doing things right academically includes getting a degree. To get a degree, athletes need to go to class. One really can't put a dollar value on a college education. At Florida our athletes are there to get a degree. Baseball will take care of itself. We monitor our athletes' academic progress every four weeks. Although we have a study hall, it is not mandatory. If an athlete shows it needs to be mandatory, it then becomes mandatory.

I would be less than honest if I told you I didn't have players in my program who are just getting through the academic experience to get an opportunity to play pro ball. Personally, I did that my first year at UCLA. Yet it ties in to the idea of doing things the right way. I've had freshmen who were horrible students, but by their senior year they were very good students. If I had made a quick decision, dismissing them for poor academics, I would never have seen them develop into the mature individuals of their senior year. Our goals are that we want to see them get their degrees, but we also need to have patience.

### ***Athletic Focus***

No matter what it is our athletes are doing, we want them to be focused, remaining in the present tense. They are not to be in the past tense or the future tense. We make this a prominent concept in our program because seldom do we live life in the present. Most people can't forget the past or are overly concerned about the future.



This kind of thinking can be devastating for a pitching staff. You need to get your pitchers to stay in the present tense. But what typically happens is this: A pitcher will make a pretty good pitch and then jump into the future tense and say, "Well, that was a good pitch so I'm probably going to throw an even better pitch." Instead, he hangs the next pitch and it's hit out of the park. Or the other side of the coin: He throws a poor pitch and it's crushed; it's 1-0 in the first inning. If he can't get right back into the present tense, he will stay in the past tense and one pitch will now probably dictate the next two innings. At this point, he may not get out of the third inning simply because of one pitch.

We teach staying in the present tense diligently in our program. The past tense is usually centered on guilt. The future tense is usually centered on anxiety. We believe our people have a pretty good chance of controlling the present tense.

### **GULF WAR FOCUS**

When our country decided to react to Iraq's military aggressiveness in 1991, the effect was

very close to home. The father of one of our pitchers, Jeff Myers, was in charge of one of the U.S. ground forces in Iraq. As the news was announced on the television in our clubhouse, we were stunned. Jeff and I spent considerable time behind closed doors shedding tears and praying for his father's safety.

I fondly remember Jeff's efforts during our next few workouts. He was able to separate his off-field concerns about his father's well-being and totally focus on the baseball task at hand. In fact, I might dare say they were the best workouts he had for us.

### **Continuing to Learn**

As a coach I make it a goal to keep getting better. I read that each year John Wooden would pick one facet of the game of basketball and study it to improve in that area. I try to do the same. Each summer I will pick a part of the game and through other coaches and books immerse myself into that area. This practice keeps me constantly improving.

I also want to be constantly aware of my definition of winning. Some of this is again borrowed from Coach Wooden, but winning to me is having the peace of mind of knowing you've stayed in the present tense and you've given everything you have to give. I like Lou Holtz's description of "Win—what's important now?" Are you giving everything you have to be as good as you can be right this minute? I believe I have been a winning coach even when I have had a losing record. If you've done it right from the first day; if you've been honest, fair, and a person of integrity; if you've communicated well with your athletes, given an honest effort, and served them well; then you're a winner.

### **Putting Your Philosophy to Work**

A coaching philosophy is only as good as the impact it has on those associated with the program. These are the qualities we try to possess and transmit throughout our program and within our players.

1. **Honesty.** Be honest not only within your program but also with yourself. Understand who you are and know your strengths as a coach.
2. **Consistency.** Be consistent in all areas during joyful times as well as difficult moments. This will allow your ball club to become familiar with your reactions to circumstances, and they can grow to trust how you will react in all situations. There is a real joy in knowing that your leader is consistent.
3. **Aggressive approach.** This simply means that in addition to being humble, compassionate, sincere, and honest (qualities that will make you successful in all walks of life), you must also teach aggressiveness, competitiveness, and the strength to never be intimidated by an opponent. This aggressiveness must be taught every day.
4. **Inner-confidence.** Develop an inner-confidence in your coaching abilities. At one time in my career I knew little about pitching. I had to decide whether to hire a pitching coach or to throw myself into the study of pitching. I chose to learn the pitching game, and by approaching it with a sincere heart I developed an inner-confidence in my ability to teach this skill.
5. **Strong thinking.** Athletes have told me they must wear a particular number to be successful. They believed somehow their performance was tied to wearing a favorite number. This is weak thinking. A weak thinker will concern himself with his number, the temperature at game time, field conditions, and other aspects he cannot control. Superstition is usually evident in a weak thinker. I want our athletes to have the inner-confidence that if they perform to their abilities, they will be successful. It will not matter that it is hot at game time, or that the playing surface is bad, or that they are wearing the wrong numbers. With inner-confidence comes the ability to be a strong thinker.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the development of my coaching philosophy. Key aspects of this philosophy are these:

- Each coach's philosophy is different, influenced by a lifetime of experiences and information.
- Learn from others. Confer with other coaches often.
- Know yourself. Discover who you are. Know what you believe and stand for.
- Coaching demands that you be competitive, but that you balance it with gentleness.
- Belong to the coaching philosophy camp that is committed to doing it right.
- Have your athletes do things right—athletically, academically, and socially.
- Make your time on the field more important than life or death, but when the game is over realize that baseball is trivial.
- Remain in the present tense at all times.
- Honesty, consistency, aggressiveness, inner-confidence, and strong thinking are important outgrowths of a positive coaching philosophy.