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## LEADERSHIP IN COACHING EDUCATION

### **Every Moment Matters: A Book Review and Personal Reflection**

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I (Deb) have asked myself the question and have been asked the question, why do I coach? I have been coaching for over 20 years, both at a junior high level and a varsity level, and the message O’Sullivan (2019) conveyed in *Every Moment Matters* about coaching the individual, not the sport, really resonated with me. I have always felt this to be true. When coaches show their athletes that they genuinely care about them individually, they will earn the trust and respect they so desire. In addition, the athletes will know that their coach has their best interests at heart. A coach should be a positive role model in a player’s life. A good coach should also build character through positive coaching and realize the influence they have to make a lasting impact on their athletes. I still have athletes contact me years after I have coached them and thank me for the life lessons they learned from me. There is no better reward as a coach than to know that one has positively impacted the life of a child, student, or athlete and those individuals still remember something you taught them that still resonates with them later in life.

I really believe more coaches should learn about coaching in an athlete-centered environment. An athlete-centered environment may involve the coach restructuring some of the ways they do things. The athlete-centered style of coaching is reiterated throughout the book as a style that has seen remarkable success, especially in youth programs. Building your program to become more athlete-centered is setting a statement to your athletes that they will only be as good as they want to be. I like the idea of coaches asking questions of their players instead of constantly giving them direction. The book displayed several questions that would be good ones to utilize: What did you see in that situation? Did you notice any other options available to you? These questions allow athletes to be more creative and have a part in the decision-making process.

The author references many schools, colleges, and clubs that offer sporting activities and shares the experiences that have worked best in these programs. The Belgium FA transformation is one of those he describes. The Belgian FA (soccer program) knew that coaches who used a more authoritarian style of coaching resulted in a decrease in players from year to year. The transformation took place when the leaders within the Belgian FA knew that if coaches could change their mindset to more of an athlete-centered environment, kids would get back to enjoying the game they once loved. During the transformation, coaches saw the excitement athletes exhibited, all while learning the game and developing their soccer skills. The coaches focused on making practices more game-based and catered to the unique needs of the kids.

Many coaches place too much emphasis on winning. The author suggests that even though the goal is to win, the real purpose of coaching and participating in sports is much deeper. How many times does one hear someone say after a contest or game, “How was the game...Did you win?” The book talks of Coach Cromack, coach of a nine-year-old soccer team, who was determined to convince the team and parents they needed to play for a higher purpose than winning. He challenged the team that if they could play one hundred passes, a certain amount of money would be raised for a charity. This gave the kids a reason to play for a purpose higher than winning. The outcome was exactly what he was expecting.

In Part II of the book, the author asks the reader to ask themselves the question, “How Do I Coach?” I pondered this and wrote down my answers to this question. Even though I tend to have a more athlete-centered coaching style, I realized I could change the ways I conducted my practices to make the athletes more engaged. I found I get repetitive with my practice plan and even though I try to follow an athlete-centered style of coaching, I had not been

allowing my players enough decision making. I also realized I tend to talk more than needed when trying to get my point across. I will do better at creating an environment that combines learning with fun! These are things I will be working on doing better from this season forward!

In O’Sullivan’s book, he talked about having a growth mindset vs. a fixed mindset. I liked how he cited examples of athletes who are well known to get the reader to relate better to the book. He tells of golfer, Greg Norman, playing in the Masters Tournament. Heading into the final round, Norman had a six-stroke lead over his closest challenger. Norman started doubting himself and continued to think negative thoughts. His inner game (the mental aspect of his game) was controlling his mind which resulted in him losing to his challenger. Athletes often perform how they think they will. One saying I always remind my players of is, “Whether you think you can or can’t, you’re right.” Coaching the inner game takes time and a coach needs to be patient with the mental development of their players. In a growth mindset environment, the athletes take the lessons they learned and implement them towards their skill development, understanding the coach is trying to help them improve in all areas, including their mental growth.

Midway through the book, the author writes about the involvement of parents and how to effectively engage them in your program. I took away something he shared that I plan to implement into my pre-season meeting with players and parents. He suggested to give parents an exercise to write down answers to questions that provided feedback to the coaches as to what goals they had for the team, what they expected their child’s experience to be like, and what they would like their experience to be like as a parent. The parents felt the coach’s inclusion of them showed they cared about both the athletes and their parents.

In the last part of the book, the author asks, “What Does It Feel Like to be Coached by Me?” This is also something I plan to have my player’s answer. As a coach, we evaluate players all the time, but we do not always give them the opportunity to “evaluate” us.

Creating a purpose statement and a team slogan and making them visible to players provides a constant reminder of what the team is striving for. This part of the book is where I plan to implement many of the examples given. I love the idea of handing out more of a non-traditional award, along with your MVP, Hardest Worker, Best Defender etc. The book lists five awards that may go to anyone on the team, regardless of play time or athletic ability. They are:

- Playing with Passion Award

- Best Impact Award (for a non-starter)
- Rise to the Occasion Award
- The Grit and Persistence Award
- The Attitude of Gratitude Award

When I coached junior high girls basketball years ago, I handed out a Spark Plug award at the end of each game. It was a spark plug mounted on a piece of wood. There were often times this award would go to a player on the bench who, regardless of playing time, brought the most energy and positivity to the team and provided the spark we needed!

Another great take-away from this chapter was the team values sheet a coach from “Unleash the Athlete” shared. Coach Leath gathered his players during the first practice of the season and had the athletes shout out adjectives that describe a great teammate. He had compiled an impressive list of adjectives, and had the players sign at the bottom after the sentence that read: I commit to being the type of teammate described above.

I think value of oneself is so important, and as a coach, I do a similar exercise the first week of practice. I put the name of an individual player on the top of a blank paper, and once I have a paper for each athlete, I scatter them around the gym floor. With pens in hand, I have each athlete go to each player’s paper and write a word or two that depicts that person. The player then gets to take their sheet with them. I have had many athletes and parents contact me and tell me that reading those words from their peers was so impactful. I have had players contact me years later telling me they still have that paper framed and look at it periodically!

This book challenged me to look at myself as a coach and areas I could improve upon. Many of the author’s insights will be used in my approach to coaching. I plan to incorporate my own philosophies with the new and valuable information I absorbed from reading this book. Remember every athlete matters, every opportunity matters and EVERY MOMENT MATTERS!

### References

O’Sullivan, J. (2019). *Every moment matters: How the world’s best coaches inspire their athletes and build championship teams*. Changing the Game Project.