

Developing Leaders On and Off the Court:

A Year-long Plan for Coaches' Learning

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Introduction

Being the athletic director at a school for students with learning differences enables me to see the positive impact athletics has on them. I see the smile on their faces when they score their first basket, or the sense of belonging they feel being part of a team. So many of our athletes struggle in the classroom, but shine on the court and my goal is to bridge this gap. I want our athletes to be able to feel in the classroom, the same confidence they experience while playing and participating in sports, thus making them more confident learners. I believe that our athletics program should not only teach our athletes specific sport skills, but important life skills as well.

For the 2013-2014 school year I propose a Coaches' Learning Program that will educate our coaches on how to develop leadership skills in our athletes. By educating and transforming our coaches into better leaders, they will be able to share their knowledge with their athletes and instill those leadership qualities that will benefit students both in and out of the classroom. This program will entail reading an expert's advice on developing leadership skills in athletes, participating in group discussions, journal writing, and creating *Three Key Areas of Leadership* we want to develop in our athletes. I want to implement this program, first, with my basketball coaches and then the rest of my coaching staff. I am focusing closely on basketball because it is our most popular sport and it will impact the most athletes.

Background and Rationale

Educating our coaches about leadership is going to have a direct impact on our athletes with learning differences. Students with learning differences can have the

tendency to want to fade into the background so they go unnoticed. LD students are nervous to take risks, they have a hard time self-advocating, and they often feel left out of social situations (What is ADHD?, 2008). Many of these feelings come from experiencing failure in the classroom and many do not know how to cope. One way for teachers and coaches to help students overcome these feelings is by instilling leadership skills in our athletes with learning differences. Athletics is a great avenue to teach these skills because it is an area of strength for many of our students. By closely focusing on leadership skills, the hope is that the athletes will have increased self-esteem and, hopefully, transfer a higher level of confidence both in and out of the classroom.

I chose my focus sport as basketball because, according to the latest study by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, it is still the most popular team sport among children (Show, 2009). The report stated, with over 41,000 surveys taken in January 2009, states that 26.2 million children, ages 6 and older, played basketball in 2008 (Show, 2009). The popularity of the sport can also be seen at my school, where basketball is the most popular sport with around seventy participants and six teams. There is no other sport currently in our program that has such a high level of participants and, at our school, it has maintained its popularity over the years and should continue to grow based on our increasing enrollment numbers.

The Inspiration

In order for coaches to turn athletes with learning differences into leaders they need to learn from an expert on leadership, specifically John Wooden. Coach John Wooden, the legendary UCLA basketball coach who, for over 27 years, led his teams to ten NCAA championships, four perfect 30-0 seasons and was named ESPN's Greatest

Coach of the 21st Century, defined leadership as, “the ability to get individuals to work together for the common good and the best possible results while at the same time letting them know they did it themselves (Wooden & Jamison, 1997).” Wooden also stated that it is essential that a leader be an excellent listener, a fair person, and be able to earn the respect of others. These qualities of a leader will definitely benefit my athletes because they are the same qualities that cause them the most difficulty. My athletes struggle with being active listeners and participants and they often aren’t able to recognize or appreciate others’ perspectives. For this reason, the main educating piece for this proposal is Wooden’s book, *The Essential John Wooden*, written by himself and Steve Jamison. By learning from an expert in this field, my coaches will be able focus on those areas of difficulty, while teaching our athletes how to overcome them.

Proposal for Leading Coaches Learning

The proposal for leading coaches learning for the 2013-2014 is heavily focused on educating my basketball coaches about developing their leadership as well as the skills in our athletes.

Overall Goal:

- Using the experiences and stories from Coach John Wooden and his book, *The Essential Wooden*, my coaches will become more knowledgeable about leadership and developing it in our athletes. From the reading, we will create *Three Key Areas of Leadership* that will be demonstrated by my coaches and, eventually, our athletes.
 - These *Three Key Areas of Leadership* may include:
 - Being a good listener, being fair, and respecting one another.

Experience #1- Read the *Essential Wooden* by John Wooden and Steve Jamison.

- **Description:** The *Essential Wooden* is the ultimate collection of John Woodens' opinions and observations on achieving exceptional leadership in any organization. The information in this book is valuable because it reveals how he instilled productive attitudes and winning ways in his athletes. *The Essential Wooden* condenses a lifetime of learning into the leadership playbook for the twenty-first century (Wooden & Jamison, 1997).
- **Sub-goal:** After reading *The Essential Wooden*, my coaches will have the background knowledge to enable them to develop attributes of a true leader and can transfer that knowledge and ideas to our athletes.
- **How will this work? :** During the summer of 2013, the coaches will be expected to read the book to prepare for the next basketball season. To reinforce the importance of reading this book, the coaches will be required to fill out a journal, which is described more in experience #2.

Experience #2- Leadership Journal

- **Description:** While reading, *The Essential Wooden*, coaches will be expected to fill out a leadership journal. In this journal coaches will have to answer questions, provide examples, and write down any feelings about the book. The journal will provide my coaches an opportunity to process their ideas, analyze their own practices, and keep a record of their learning (Easton, 2008).
- **Sub-goal:** Through the content of their individual leadership journals, my coaches will be laying the groundwork for the *Three Key Areas of Leadership* we want to focus on and implement with our athletes.

- **How will this work? :** In order for this journal to be an effective professional learning tool for my coaches, I need to make sure that I establish guidelines for journal usage, create structures for entries, and determine how I will respond to the journal (Easton, 2008). For each chapter that is assigned to be read, there will be a corresponding journal entry that will be completed. The journal will be created beforehand and will be broken up by chapters. It will also include a response section for me to offer suggestions and provide insight into their writing. Upon returning to school in the fall of 2013, I will collect my coaches' journals and I will respond to each of them.

Experience #3- Implement the protocol, *Three Levels of Text Protocol* about the book, *The Essential Wooden*.

- **Description:** Using this protocol found in *Protocols for Professional Learning* (Easton, 2009), my coaches will reflect on the book, *The Essential Wooden* and begin our initial discussion of their findings over the summer.
- **Sub-goal:** The purpose of this protocol is to clarify, construct meaning collaboratively, and expand thinking about the text. This protocol is going to help to initiate our dialogue about leadership and how we want to instill it in our athletes (Easton, 2009).
- **How will this work? :** I will implement this protocol in August, upon returning from summer break. The initial meeting will focus closely on reactions from the book and the sentences, phrases, or words from the text that coaches felt were significant. From this discussion, my hope is to develop *Three Key Areas of Leadership* that we want to improve upon and, eventually, develop in our athletes.

This protocol will take around 45 minutes and will involve a brief introduction, discussion and debriefing (Easton, 2009).

Experience #4- Coaches Meetings

- **Description:** After the journal responses and the three levels of text protocol, the coaches' meetings will consist of ongoing discussions of leadership until the beginning of basketball season in November. In these coaches' meetings, we will start brainstorming and solidifying the *Three Key Areas of Leadership*.
- **Sub-goal:** By continuing our discussion from the three levels of text protocol, we will develop our own unique *Three Key Areas of Leadership* that we want to instill in our athletes with learning differences.
- **How will this work? :** These coaches' meetings will be held once a month, on a Friday, in September, October, and November, leading up to the start of basketball season. In these meetings we are going to set group norms, discuss our findings, and develop the *Three Key Areas of Leadership*. Also, during these meetings, I will set-up some planned and unplanned visits so I can observe our coaches implementing these leadership skills.

Timeline

The timeline for this proposed plan is described in the table below:

Date: (Estimated)	What is expected?	How will I keep track of progress?
6/24/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce and explain this year long learning to my basketball coaches. • Hand out <i>The Essential Wooden</i> to my basketball coaches, along with the Leadership Journal. • Explain expectations for journal writing and deadlines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throughout the summer, I will send quick emails reminding coaches about the expectations and overall goals of this learning process. • Provide deadlines of when to finish each chapter and journal entry.

8/22/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome back and turn in journals. • Provide reflection and insight to their journal writing and have one on one conferences with each coach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After reading their journals and reflecting on their writing, I will get a sense of where everyone is in this learning process. • I will be able to determine who fully completed this learning experience and who may need some additional help in understanding the importance of developing leadership in ourselves and our athletes.
8/26/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement <i>Three Levels of Text Protocol</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 45 minute session ○ Page 78 in <i>Protocols for Professional Learning</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we have finished this protocol I will be able to gauge my coaches thinking about leadership and start to infuse Woodens' teachings from the book.
9/20/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discuss our basketball program and how we are going to infuse Woodens' teachings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the coaches meeting, I will monitor who is contributing to our discussion and who is not. • For those coaches who are struggling to contribute, I will provide extra support and time to help clarify our goals and objectives as a group.
10/18/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brainstorm the <i>Three Key Areas of Leadership</i> we want to infuse in ourselves and our students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will create focus areas of leadership based upon Woodens' teachings for our athletes. • For next meeting, everyone will come with their top three choices to share.
11/8/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Solidify the <i>Three Key Areas of Leadership</i> and set-up Athletic Director drop-ins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss everyone's top three choices and solidify the three areas of leadership we want to focus on for our athletes. (May require more time.) • The athletic director drop-ins will be used to see if my coaches are able to put their learning from Wooden into practice.
December 2013-February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball Season <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coaches will practice and demonstrate the <i>Three Key Areas of Leadership</i> that were developed throughout the basketball season. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have scheduled and unscheduled visits of practices, where I leave notes of encouragement and feedback to my coaches on how they are implementing the leadership skills they learned.
March 2014-June 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on the Coaches Learning Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fill out survey ○ Changes for next year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By having the coaches fill out a survey and describing the programs' strengths and weaknesses, we can reflect on what did and did not work.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Question: Did we make the progress we wanted for this year?
<p>August 2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for Basketball Season <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summary of last year’s work ○ Do coaches need more practice or can we start implementing specific strategies to our athletes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send potential athlete leaders to captain clinics, institute our own leadership clinics, or find other activities for them.

Evidence of Accomplishment

To make sure my proposed Coaches Learning Program has accomplished what I intended it too, I must make sure the following evidences of accomplishment are being made throughout the year.

Evidence #1- Coaches demonstrate an increased knowledge and understanding of John Woodens’ principals of leadership.

- The coaches’ leadership journals are completed fully with proper answers and responses.
- Our coaches’ meetings and discussions are engaging and thought provoking.
- During my Athletic Director drop-ins, I witness my coaches demonstrating and reinforcing Coach Woodens’ principals of leadership.

Evidence #2- Creation of Three Key Areas of Leadership

- During coaches’ meetings, they are incorporating Coach Woodens’ ideas of leadership into the three key areas we want to develop for our athletes.
- During our brainstorming session, every coach is suggesting and offering ideas.
- Collectively we are able to solidify and agree on *Three Key Areas of Leadership* that are attainable and reachable for our students with learning differences.

Evidence #3- Signs of leadership development are being demonstrated and practiced by my coaches.

- Coach Woodens' ideas of leadership and the *Three Key Areas of Leadership* are being demonstrated at practices and games.
- Coaches feel an overall increase in ability to share their knowledge about leadership development in our athletic department and school. This could be shown through survey results or informal discussions and observations with my coaches.

Evidence #4- Signs of leadership development are being seen in our athletes.

- When provided quick surveys, our athletes' responses will match the *Three Key Areas of Leadership* we have been focusing on throughout the year.
- In the classroom, teachers have observed increases in leadership from my athletes.
 - This will be demonstrated by increases in self-esteem, the ability to listen to others, and the ability to accept others for their differences.
- More of our athletes are taking on leadership roles in and out of school.
 - This may include taking positions as team captains in our athletics program, being accepted to student government or the National Honor Society, or participating in volunteer work outside of school.

Anticipated Impact

The anticipated impact of this year long Coaches Learning Program is to develop and increase leadership skills within our coaches and eventually in our athletes with learning differences. Using the ideas of leadership provided by John Wooden, we will create *Three Key Areas of Leadership* that our program will revolve around and develop

in our athletes. Once the leadership skills are transferred to our athletes we will see increases in self-esteem and confidence that will be visible both on the court and in the classroom.

To reinforce these ideas and to continue developing leadership skills in our athletes, another program based upon athletes learning must be created. This Athletes Learning Program may include sending our athletes to conferences on leadership, providing our own workshops, or setting up mentoring programs, where older athletes mentor younger ones. By educating our coaches first about the subject and embedding it in our program, we will create an environment where leadership skills are fostered and nurtured in our athletes.

Summary

This year long plan for coaches learning will not only benefit our coaches and athletes, but our entire learning community, including our classroom teachers and parents. It will instill leadership skills within our athletes that will benefit them both in and out of the classroom for the rest of their lives. As Athletic Director it is my responsibility to not only teach my athletes about the game of basketball, but to also provide them with ways to develop life skills. This year long plan for coaches learning will provide that opportunity and hopefully transform our athletes into confident leaders.

Next Steps

Once this plan is implemented and well on its way, as Athletic Director and innovator, I need to be flexible and vigilant about its implementation. I need to set expectations with my coaches and I need to provide support, encouragement, guidance,

and feedback along the way. I need to refer back to my timeline and my overall goals for the program to make sure the plan is on track and focused.

I also need to briefly discuss and inform the entire staff about my proposed plan for the year. By informing them, it will give me additional opportunities to test the effectiveness of the program in the classroom and it will provide me with constructive feedback along the way. Having the entire staff informed about this program, may also spark some interest into learning more about our athletics program and what we do for our students with learning differences. If one of the overall goals of the program is for the athletes to demonstrate leadership skills in the classroom, I need help from the teachers and administrators to see if that is truly being accomplished. By having extra support and guidance from the entire staff, this Coaches Learning Program will not only benefit the athletics program, but it will also benefit our entire learning community.

References

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