

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A GOOD COACH

By Coach Gordie Gillespie
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This list of tips on coaching is by one of college baseball's legendary coaches. Coach Gordie Gillespie. The advice applies to all coaches, from summer travel teams to high school and on to college. Common sense approach to dealing with your players, staff and faculty

During his multi-faceted career, Gordie Gillespie has coached not only baseball, but also football, and men's and women's basketball.

His Lewis College baseball team had back-to-back-to-back NAIA World Series titles from 1974-76 among eight total tournament appearances and a 634-241 record in 24 campaigns.

Coach Gillespie had eight additional World Series appearances with the College of St. Francis. He became college baseball's all-time winningest coach in 1993, and the season ended with his club earning the school's only national sports title.

Gillespie semi- retired in 1995 with an 804-488 record and currently serves as head baseball coach at Ripon College.

One of the most renowned and well-respected coaches of all-time, he has received numerous honors during his coaching career-including being named to thirteen different Halls-of-Fame.

WHAT IT TAKES . . .

You Have To Like Young People

This has to be number one: you have to like being with kids. Your primary reason for coaching should be to watch young people grow, mature and develop. Sure, everybody likes to win, but if winning is the only thing that counts, you'll never get that deep feeling of pride and satisfaction that comes from watching your kids succeed at life.

And it doesn't matter what age or gender you're talking about. "Kids" range from the "Pee-Wee" stage of five years old until they graduate from college. College coaches even refer to their players as "my kids."

You have to be in coaching for the right reasons. You must like youngsters and want to teach them proper values. These values include discipline, work ethic, conquering fear and tension, pride in their team and teammates, establishing reachable goals, and most importantly, the burning desire to accomplish those goals.

Organization

A favorite expression of many people in all walks of life is: "I have got to get organized."

Jerry Kindall, the great baseball coach at the University of Arizona, took a poll of his baseball players and asked his team what they wanted most from Jerry and his staff. Much to his surprise the players responded "organization."

I know of no one more organized than Jerry. He has won NCAA baseball championships as well as being selected NCAA Baseball Coach Of The Year on several occasions and organization is one of his greatest strengths. You won't accomplish half of what you set out to do without a concrete, workable plan.

Enthusiasm

If we could bottle enthusiasm and sell it, we would be the richest people in the world.

Enthusiasm is a must in coaching baseball. It is such a fantastic game to each and every one of us. The thought of working with "your kids" should truly motivate you and get you excited about what they are doing. Going back to the first premise of being a good coach, caring and liking kids, it would be a complete contradiction if you were not enthusiastic about teaching them the game.

Patience

The gift of patience - what a virtue! The ability to go over things time and time again, never losing your enthusiasm is an absolute for a great coach.

Every great athlete had a mentor, a friend who had the patience to teach him the fundamentals of the game. Ted Williams, Roger Hornsby, Babe Ruth, all had someone who took the time to teach them to hit. Vince Lombardi, one of the great football coaches of all time, had this vital quality. The Green Bay Packers would run the Green Bay sweep fifty times at every practice and Vince would be teaching the "little things" that made it work each time they ran it. That is why they were champions year after year. Vince was a patient man.

One of the greatest joys of coaching is to see the least talented suddenly blossom, and all because you never gave up on him or her.

Persistence

Patience and persistence are certainly a marriage. It is difficult to differentiate between these two virtues, and they truly go hand in hand in the coaching profession.

You must persist, and you must teach your kids to persist. Yogi Berra's quote, "It's never over until it's over," is an excellent definition of persistence. Chris Evert, the great lady of tennis, was taught at age four by her dad that every volley was match point. Persistence, in simple words, is "never give up." Each of us fail. It is what we do after we fail that is important. I believe Abe Lincoln was defeated 17 consecutive times while seeking public office.

The beautiful aspect about defeat is that it is a powerful learning experience.

Sincerity And Concern

We get back to a coach's most important virtue - caring.

You must be sincerely concerned about your athletes first as human beings and secondly about their physical abilities. If it's vice-versa, it won't work and resentment will be the end product of your relationship. Being truly concerned, to listen as well as teach, is not an easy virtue to acquire.

Being Fair

Being fair goes along with sincerity and concern.

Everyone wants a fair chance to show what he or she can do. They want the opportunity! Each day the coach has to evaluate his personnel. Each team member must be reviewed and analyzed. Great coaches have the gift of being able to evaluate personnel quickly and get them into the proper position and in the proper pecking order.

But even great coaches get fooled when a player comes out of nowhere to make a great contribution to the team. An excellent attribute of many coaches is that they will spend as much time as possible with the "second stringers" and make them feel their worth to the team.

Championships are won in many situations because the second team constantly pushed the first team to greater heights.

Integrity And Your Relationship With Your Coaching Peers

Never compromise on rules. Rules are exactly that - rules! They are not suggestions. Society today treats the Ten Commandments as if they were the ten suggestions.

Never compromise on right or wrong. It is a black and white situation, not a gray area.

In dealing with umpires, referees and those that govern the game, we want the play called right at least 90% of the time. Instant replay has proven time and time again that we can't expect more than that. Officials are human and they will make mistakes. The important idea here is that you must support your officials rather than tearing them down or ridiculing them.

Coaches Are Human Beings - Don't Be Afraid To Show It

You are going to get angry and perhaps show it. You might get so emotional that you cry. I'll bet John Wayne even cried. If you care, you are going to cry. It is perfectly O.K. to show people that you love them. Don't just say it, show it.

Especially with your wife and family. They are proud of you but they also miss a lot of family time because of your long coaching hours. So you must show them you love them at every opportunity.

You are going to fail and make mistakes. If you offend someone, apologize as soon as possible, especially when you offend one of your players. They are like family.

Be At Your Best In Dealing With The Press And Other Media

The media has a job to do, just like you. Try to make their job easier by your cooperation.

Dealing With School Administration And Faculty

If You Are Coaching In A School Situation -- I have never met an outstanding coach who was not an outstanding classroom teacher. The great Knute Rockne of Notre Dame was an outstanding chemistry professor. Vince Lombardi taught physics and math at St. Cecelia High School. The great ones take special pride in their classroom work and with especially working well with non-athletes.

Your Best Friends In Coaching - Your Support Personnel

Recognize the importance of your support personnel at every opportunity. They are the ones who care the most. Praise them all, including the grounds keepers, the custodian, the student managers. The grounds keeper is the difference in whether you play or sit on rainy days. He takes pride in the field and makes it a showcase. It is your Field of Dreams and he makes it tick.