

Notes on Team Travel

Let's think for a moment about the various ways we have traveled to and from competitions across our lives in sport. Low rent or first class, those who play their hearts out find joy in the journey.

I remember traveling to high school wrestling meets in school buses. I remember teammates spitting in paper cups to lose the last fractions of a pound to make weight. I remember the smell of oranges being peeled and snacks from mothers being shared among teammates. I remember the raucous rides home after victories and the deathly quiet following painful losses.

I remember riding 12 hours with three charter buses from Carbondale, Ill., to Cedar Falls, Iowa, for a football game at the University of Northern Iowa. One bus broke down before we even got out of town. Thankfully, the athletic director was in the seat in front of mine, and we've flown there ever since.

I remember a road trip to Northern Iowa and Peoria, Ill., with a women's basketball team. It was so cold the VCR froze up and we couldn't watch movies. What a boring drive! Worse yet, we lost both games.

I remember a bus ride with that same women's basketball team between Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha, Neb. The head coach and I both knew she would likely be fired upon our return home. We had a very good heart-to-heart talk on the quiet bus in the late evening. We anticipated accurately, and I was very glad to have had that talk with the coach.

I remember boarding the chartered plane after our football team had just lost its first game of the season. We had entered the game 10-0 and had a lead in the fourth quarter, but came up short. I sat down and the head coach asked me if I was OK. I said, "Coach, I forgot what it felt like to lose." It was a bitter flight home.

I remember a whole college football team traveling to Tampa, Fla., on commercial flights. This was before 9/11 and security was a little easier. Still, trying to get a traveling party of 85 through two international airports was a logistical nightmare for our office manager.

I remember a friend who played college football for our team and went on to play in the Arena 2 League for four years. His team had a sweet, tricked out bus in which to travel. It included beds, big screen televisions, video games and more. I asked him once about what he would miss about football. "Road trips," was his answer. He loved everything about being with his teammates -- the bus, the hotels, the meals and all the camaraderie that we who play our hearts out enjoy in sport.

Whether you ride in a rattling yellow school bus, a shiny motor coach, a Boeing 737 or even a private jet, find the joy of travel with your team in the rich relationships to be cultivated in every mile of the journey.



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