

Greatest Coach Ever

Ready:

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”

– Proverbs 22:1

Set

In 2010, thousands gathered at a memorial service to honor the life of legendary coach John Wooden. Coach Wooden lived 99 full years. He lived well, died well and understood his eternal fate. He once said, “There is only one kind of life that truly wins, and that is the one that places faith in the hands of the Savior.”

In 2009, *Sporting News Magazine* did the unthinkable. They made a list of the 50 greatest coaches of all time. That’s right—of all time! What an incredible challenge to narrow down the list to just 50! I bet the biggest challenge was selecting who received the No. 1 spot. If it had been you, who would you have selected as the greatest coach ever? According to *Sporting News Magazine*, John Wooden deserved that honor.

Why Coach Wooden? Maybe it was because he’d won 10 NCAA National Championships at UCLA. Maybe it was because he was the coach that all the other coaches looked to as the benchmark of success. Either way, Wooden was officially crowned the ultimate coach—a title that players, friends, fans and other coaches had already given him for many years.

Actually, Coach Wooden never wanted this award. He felt uncomfortable with the title and preferred that someone else be recognized. But his reaction to it may provide some insight as to why he is the greatest. Wooden coached with humility and confidence. He learned the art of mixing these two seemingly opposite traits—a feat that many others have failed to accomplish.

Wooden’s purpose in coaching was to instill greatness in others. He was committed to teaching, inspiring and motivating people, and he empowered his players to do great things. For Coach, greatness had nothing to do with himself. He never looked in the mirror when it came to success or accomplishments. For him, greatness was found in focusing on others. He lived out the principle that the fruit of a leader grows on other people’s trees. He was consumed with the simple principle he called “competitive greatness,” which included “not being the best, but being the best that you can be.” Through that message, Coach Wooden touched thousands of lives in a very profound way.

Coach Wooden’s impact has been felt in every sport in every way possible. Name a topic, and I would bet that Coach has covered it in his teaching. Philosophy of coaching, definition of winning, parenting, persevering through difficult situations, integrity, definition of success,

teamwork, reaching noble goals, true friendship, life mission statements...Those are just a few.

On the last night of many FCA summer camps, there is a traditional open mic session in which athletes come forward and share how the camp has impacted their lives. It is always the highlight of the week. When I read that John Wooden had received the title “Greatest Coach Ever,” I pictured what an open mic session for him might be like. I imagined an endless line of players and coaches who had been directly and indirectly influenced by him stepping up to share countless stories of personal impact. What an incredible night of celebration that would have been! I’m sure that Coach would have been surprised and blessed to hear the life-changing difference he’d made throughout the years, and I think we all would have been motivated to leave such a legacy ourselves. We are thankful that Coach Wooden never stopped coaching. Even after he officially retired, he lived out the adage, “once a coach, always a coach.” He blessed us beyond measure because he used the game of basketball to coach people about life.

Just two weeks before he passed away, we were reading Coach Wooden the manuscript of the FCA book on him called *Greatest Coach Ever*, and Coach said, “I am happy being remembered as a man of integrity. I like that.” Yes, he will definitely be remembered as a man of integrity and much more. Coach realizes that a good name is better than national championships, undefeated seasons, and Hall of Fame honors. To be called a man of integrity is better to Wooden than being the greatest coach ever.

What a gut-check for all of us! I was so convicted by his reaction, and I know I will continue to be challenged by the simplicity and clarity of Coach’s life. He inspires me to be the best I can be, to invest in others, to give my life away.

Coach Wooden was pleased with a legacy of faith and integrity. If it were me, what would I want others to remember me by? Coach’s life forces me to come to grips with that very question. Oh, how I long for people to remember me for my heart and not my accomplishments. What about you? How would you finish the sentence, “I am happy being remembered as a ...” May your answer, like Wooden’s, shape your future and your legacy in a way that honors the Lord.

Go

1. How would you respond if you were given the title “Greatest Coach Ever”? Be honest.
2. If you could be the greatest ever at something, what would it be? Why?
3. When you reflect on Coach Wooden’s life, what stands out to you? How do these qualities compare with qualities of most coaches today?
4. Why do you think Wooden was awarded the title of “Greatest Coach Ever”?
5. Complete the sentence: “I am happy being remembered as a ...”
6. If you died today, how would people describe your legacy?

Workout

Ecclesiastes 7:1
Proverbs 3:4

Overtime

“Lord God in Heaven, I thank You for the life of Coach Wooden. His life touched so many in

so many different ways. I ask that You continue to use his life to impact generations to come. Thank You for using his life to bring clarity to my own. I desire to have a good name more than any titles or accomplishments. I want to be remembered as a man after Your heart, Lord, and to have a heart that burns for You. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.”

Bible Reference:

Ecclesiastes 7



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