

The Love Win

Ready:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”—1 Corinthians 13:4 (NIV)

Set

“Coaching is a profession of love. You can't coach people unless you love them.” - Eddie Robinson

On June 26, 2010, thousands gathered at a memorial service to honor the life of legendary coach John Wooden who passed from this life to the next. 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.”

Sporting News Magazine made a list of the 50 greatest coaches of all time. It must have been an incredible challenge to narrow it down to 50 and nearly impossible to select the #1 coach. 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. Ultimately, we believe it was the heart of the man.

Wooden's purpose in coaching was not only to make better players, but better people. He was committed to teaching, inspiring and motivating people, and empowering his players to be the best men they could be. Wooden believed coaching should have a lasting impact that develops and instills habits and practices for life. For him, greatness was found in loving his players. His coaching was marked with love, and it is best reflected when he said:

- A bell isn't a bell until you ring it.
- A song isn't a song until you sing it.
- And the love that's within us wasn't put there to stay.
- Love isn't love until you give it away.

Coach Wooden's players felt the investment he made in them, because he loved his players deeply. He knew that his #1 job was to love them unconditionally. Love is usually not found in most coaching job descriptions. But Bobby Dodd, former football coach at Georgia Tech, once said, “Either love your players or get out of coaching.” When Joe Ehrmann, former NFL player for the Baltimore Colts, was coaching the Gilman High School football team, he would tell the players: “Our job as coaches is to love you. Your job as players is to love each other.”

That is The Love Win – coaches love players and players love each other. It's a powerful

principle that can transform a team and possibly transform all of sports. Love is the missing ingredient in the world of sports. And I am not talking about the love of sports.

When a coach loves their players, they demonstrate it in the way they teach, the way they correct, the way they push. Coaches who love their players don't shame them in front of their teammates; they don't condemn publicly and tear down, they confront privately and build up. They care about what's going on in the classroom and at home. They work to understand the pressures their players are feeling off the field as well. They serve their players and step in to help in whatever way they can, because they are tuned into the needs and hurts of their players. They're intentional about modeling and building specific character qualities into the hearts of their players – integrity, perseverance, consistency, teamwork, overcoming adversity and forgiveness.

If coaches would coach their players like Jesus loved His disciples, sports would be transformed instantly! Imagine if every coach followed The Love Win and could say – “My goal is to love my players!” Jesus makes it clear how a coach should love his or her players:

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you...this is my command: Love each other.”

– John 15:15-17 (abridged, NIV)

Once coaches set the standard by loving their players, it's the players' turn to love each other. As the coaches love on the players, the players #1 job is not to love their coach back, but instead love their teammates. When you create a culture of love, it replaces distrust, bitterness, envy, anger and jealousy. Paul defines The Love Win for players:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

– 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

Players love each other by speaking words of encouragement. They believe the best in each other. They get excited when their teammates succeed and celebrate with them. They pick each other up when they are down and don't blame each other for mistakes. Instead of complaining about a lack of playing time, they continue to work hard and everyone takes responsibility for their own effort. Instead of taking all the glory for a great play, they thank God and their teammates who made it possible. All negative talk and behind-the-scenes “locker room” talk that divides and discourages is shut down

Love is the one thing that gets people's attention – especially when it's displayed in the arena of competition. It is a glimpse of the Kingdom here on earth. Putting love in action is a picture of Jesus. When coaches love their players and players love each other, they are becoming more like Jesus. All relationships on a team must be rooted in love. Let's make The Love Win our goal to show the world that sports can be different. Let the competition begin and let's live The Love Win!

Go

1. How can a coach love his or her players? How can athletes love their teammates? List out three specific examples for each.
2. Read Romans 12:9-21. Paul explains how to love. Why is it hard to rejoice with others when they are rejoicing? Why is it hard weep with those who are weeping?
3. How can you make your goal The Love Win? Pray and ask the Lord to show you how love can transform the world of sports. Let Him show you specific ways.

Workout

- 1 Corinthians 8:1
- 1 John 2:10
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12
- Philippians 1:9-11

Overtime

“Lord God in Heaven, I love You and that is much easier than loving people. It is difficult to love because players and coaches let us down and disappoint us. Lord, I am asking for a heart of love so that I can love unconditionally. The Love Win is what I desire to do. Help me to love other competitors at full strength. May Your love compel me. Teach me how to love others. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.”



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