

# WHY WE PLAY

## Expanding Our View, Twisting Our Lens, Redefining Our Purpose

### Important Questions to Consider



By **Jody Redman**, Associate Director, MSHSL

With the start of another school year, we are provided with a fresh start and an opportunity to provide great experiences for the students we coach. As we begin this new year and reflect on this opportunity please take a moment and ask yourself the following simple question — “Why Do I Coach?”

#### Why Do I Coach?

To positively impact the students who participate on our teams, we must start with and identify our coaching purpose. In doing so, we purposefully identify the road we want to take, to get to the place we want to be, instead of ending up down an unintentional path, wondering how we got there.

We spend a considerable amount of time on the technical and tactical aspects of the sports we coach, but there is so much more to consider. Joe Ehrmann, author of *InSideOut Coaching*, states, “Coaching shouldn’t start with the X’s and O’s but with the Y’s. This WHY should be a clear and concise statement defining the impact we are trying to make in our players’ lives. WHY directs the expenditures of our time, energy, and effort and provides a final destination. Answering the question ‘Why do I coach?’ can help a coach identify selfish agendas and develop a purpose that transcends personal, vocational, financial, or ego-driven needs. WHY prompts us to answer the questions of when and how to use the power of coaching to affect players for their lifetime.”

A clear coaching purpose will assist us in focusing on the students we are entrusted with rather than on the X’s and O’s and winning and losing and will make us aware of the true value that comes from coaching opportunities. We have to get intentional, twist the lens and focus on the WHYs of what we do.

#### Why Do I Coach the Way I Do?

Coaches have an incredible opportunity to dramatically influence their students’ lives. Take a moment and think back: How did your high school coaches impact you? We can all name the coaches that we couldn’t wait to spend time with and those whose practices dragged on, those who were heroes in our lives and those we despised. Why do you coach the way you do? How have the coaches in your past impacted the way that you coach today? Look in the mirror. Good or bad, how much of how you coach is based on what you learned from them?

Ehrmann defines the coach who strips away fun as a Transactional Coach, one who uses questionable tactics, manipulation and threats to achieve their goals. “When players perform well, they are rewarded. When they don’t perform well, some kind of punishment is inflicted, be it

yelling or the withholding of praise, playing time, or participation.”

The coaches we aspire to be are Transformational Coaches. Ehrmann defines these coaches as those who inspire, motivate, and produce positive change in their student-athletes. They understand the needs of young people and “offer individual support and encouragement for each player and have a clear vision for the desired impact on their players’ lives. And not surprisingly, a Transformational Coach, even in organized athletics, allows and encourages young people to simply play.”

Spend a few moments and think about the coaches you played for and identify the experience. Was it a Transactional one in which you only got something when you proved your value and worth, or was it Transformational, an experience from which you consistently grew? Now that you are the coach, what type of experience are you providing the students who play for you?

#### What Does It Feel Like to be Coached by You?

Identifying whether we are Transactional or Transformational will determine how it feels to be coached by us. Students who have played on a team will remember the time spent with their coach and have stories and memories of their experiences. Through every experience and interaction, we are creating pathways in our students for future responses, solutions, and attitudes. Positively or negatively, we will forever be a part of each person’s life that we have had the privilege of coaching. We are modeling how to interact, how to treat others, how to deal with conflict, how to help others succeed, how to show appreciation, how to do our best, how to do things we don’t want to do, and how to work with other people. We are leaving our imprint on the students we interact with for a lifetime.

What will our coaching legacy be with the students who played for us? Will it be a legacy of Transaction or Transformation? Will it be defined only by the outcome on the scoreboard or more intentionally by the process and the path that we experienced together? Much of this is determined by defining success.

#### How Do You Define Success?

Success can be determined in many ways. Unfortunately in our culture, it is most often defined by the outcome on the scoreboard. Our job as educators is to make students aware of additional possibilities. Ehrmann urges us to “define success before we measure it. If we measure ourselves against ourselves, we can determine if we are truly successful. This is especially important in our ‘win at

*Continued on Page 27*

Continued from Page 26

all cost' sports culture where success is defined only by winning and in the vast majority of situations, we are left to feel that we didn't measure up." Focus your definition of success on the aspects of coaching we can control: improvement in performance rather than our record, providing a fun environment for participation, and making our students better people, not just better athletes.

### **Twisting the Lens on the Question 'How'd Ya Do?'**

Teaching students to answer the question 'How'd Ya Do?' with more than "we won" or "we lost" is the first step to creating awareness in them on how to define success. By focusing on the following WHY values as the outcome and a new way to answer the 'How'd Ya Do,' question, we teach them the true purpose of participation:

1. To have fun
2. To learn
3. To help others succeed
4. To improve
5. To conduct yourself well
6. To appreciate the opponent
7. To do your best
8. To learn life skills (Star Qualities)
9. To learn from both winning and losing

### **Redefining Our Focus**

As coaches, we know there are important lessons to be learned through participation in high school athletics programs. By expanding our view, twisting our lens and

redefining our purpose, we can provide a positive learning experience that will influence the students on our teams for a lifetime. Face it — with less than three percent of our students going on to play college or professional sports, we are not providing these opportunities to help them get scholarships or professional careers. A greater and more important purpose of our programs is to provide opportunities to make ethical, caring, empathetic people. It is an incredible opportunity and responsibility, one that we as coaches need to approach with conscious intent. We have the power over young people to either do a tremendous amount of good or a tremendous amount of harm.

- If students who played for us can define winning and losing as an outcome of the WHY and not the *purpose* of the WHY, then we as coaches have been successful.
- The key is being intentional, utilizing teachable moments, and holding ourselves as coaches accountable to the WHYS.

Choose intentionally, define your purpose, reflect on how it feels to be coached by you, and why you coach the way you do. Commit to making success about the WHY values and not the final score. Give students the positive experience we as coaches longed for as young people involved in high school athletics.

***This article is the first of a four-part series. The second will take an in-depth look at the WHY values of "How'd Ya Do?"***

*The Resources in this article are from InSideOut Coaching, by Joe Ehrmann and How'd Ya Do, a Top 20 Training Concept.*