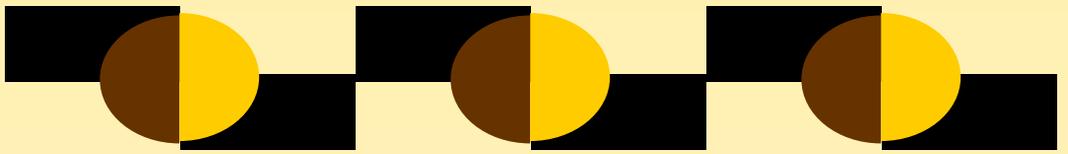


Making The Team



*Want to
make the
team? Here
are some
things you
need to
know.*



Making The Team

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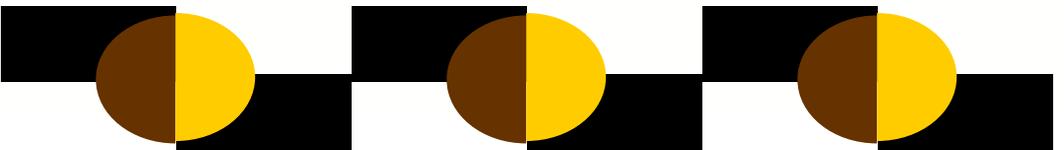
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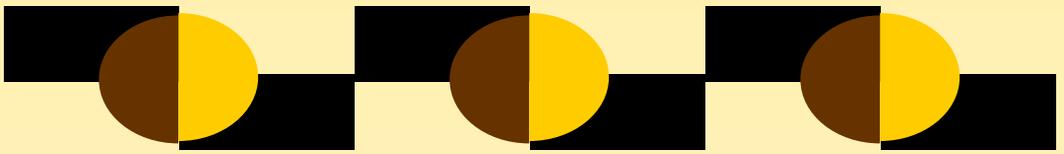
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BE YOUR OWN COACH

BE YOUR OWN JUDGE

- ✓ *Review your effort after each experience.*
- ✓ *Assess your own performance critically.*
- ✓ *Celebrate the really good things you do.*
- ✓ *Determine to fix those things that didn't go so well.*

“See yourself not as you are but as you hope to become.”

Jim Poteet (Krause, 2002)

1. Be Your Own Coach.

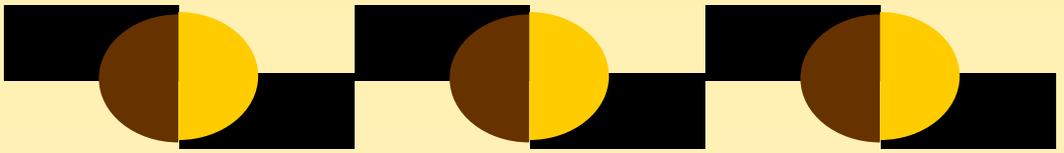
A lot of players who do not make the team, or do not get the time they want in the position they want, come to me and ask what they can do to improve. My first response is: “What do *you* think?” And, that is my first question to you.

When you are a player interested in making the team, you must learn how to assess your game in pre, post, and live situations. As a player, I analyze my game constantly. What did I do well? What did I do wrong? What do I think I should have done differently? Did I hit my goals? When you can answer these questions to yourself, you are ready to ask the coach for his/her opinion.

Why is it important to be your own coach and judge? Because it prepares you to determine what parts of your game need your most urgent attention. Serious players focus on the things that can really make a difference. Your coach can help—no doubt. But do some up-front work. You need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your game in order to improve yourself.

Believe it or not – you are the best coach you’ve ever had. You are the best coach you will ever have. If you will observe, practice, and implement the things you see and learn, you will be able to coach yourself in ways that nobody else can – because you can be brutally honest and incredibly complimentary.

Know yourself and seek self improvement —The only way to really improve is to accept your weaknesses and then make them strengths. You are the one that will know your weaknesses best, if you are reflective.



“A winner is someone who recognizes his God-given talents, works his tail off to develop them into skills, and uses these skills to accomplish his goals.”
Larry Bird

“If you start worrying about the people in the stands, before too long you’re up in the stands with them.”
Tommy Lasorda

Sometimes players forget to cheer for themselves.

Sometimes players forget to smile about their accomplishments.

Sometimes players forget to put pressure on themselves to be better.

Sometimes a good fan helps—you be that fan.

Why is this concept important? Simply – if you are not interested in you, then who else should be? Be interested in how well you are doing so you can figure out how to get better. Be realistic, but also be incredibly positive.

You have to be excited for yourself and about yourself.

2. Be Your Own Fan.

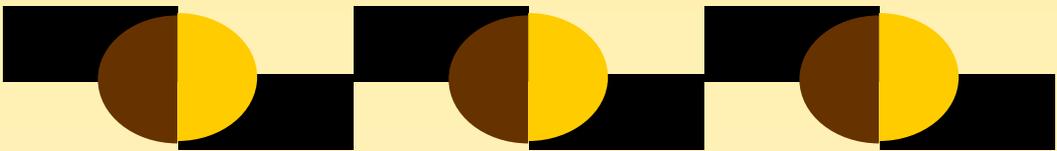
Read this next section with some caution. Do not hear what I am *not* saying. You should be your biggest fan. But, you should not be a braggart and become someone that nobody else on the team can stand because you talk about yourself too much.

Yet, you should be your own best fan. What does that mean, and why is it important?



Being your own fan simply means you follow your own game and career – you are interested in it, and have a passion. Consider being a fan of a great slugger like Alex Rodriguez. You might follow his hitting percentage, his slugging percentage, his stolen base average, his home run total, his golden glove status, etc. OK, now aren't you at least that important? Yes, you are – so follow your own results. Keep track of how you do and celebrate inside yourself the greatness of your talent. Evaluate the shortcomings, but be passionate about your game like a wild-crazy fan would be. Bring emotional energy as your own fan. This will heighten your awareness of your capabilities and make performing interesting and fun.

Insist on quality performance and celebrate the cool things you do.



Know your own strengths.
Know your own weaknesses.

Assess your competition for their
strengths and weaknesses.

Honestly assess where you are on the depth chart and why. Make a list of the things you need to do to move up the chart and into the game. By knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your competition, and by understanding your own strengths and weaknesses, you can create a plan of action to advance.



“Build up your weaknesses until they become your strong points.”

Knute Rockne

“Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”

John Wooden

3. Scaling the Competition.

Now it gets harder. Who is the competition? You have to ask the question. If you want to make the team, you have to know who you have to beat. Sometimes players who have been good when they were young find a rude awakening when they get into high school. Other kids have developed. To the player who is accustomed to being the best it comes as a cold shock that their playing time isn't what they expect. What has happened is the player has fallen into a comfort zone and forgotten to ask the basic question: "Who is better than me?" When a player comes to me, I'll ask him or her to answer that question. It is a tough thing to do, but until you understand where you really sit in the competitive landscape, how in the world can you even attempt to set targets for improvement?

I always look around and find players better than me, then I get motivated to be better, and figure out how I'm going to beat them out of their spot. That is the way to make the team. You have to beat someone out. It is like the old joke of you and your friend coming upon a bear. You don't have to outrun the bear; you only have to outrun your friend. Like it or not, it is like that in competitive athletics. If we are thinking about the basketball team, I've got to find a way to be one of the best 12. If I want to start, then it's got to be one of the best 5. But it is critical that you make the assessment right up front. You must be honest with yourself too. Sure there will be times when you honestly feel someone is not better than you. So, what then can you do? Well, you'll have to try to think like the coach and determine what it is that the other player does that you do not.

Force yourself to understand the competitive landscape. Then, work like crazy to get noticed.



*“No one has ever
drowned in sweat.”*

Lou Holtz

If you are not doing anything that
takes a personal level of commit-
ment—

If you are not practicing in order to
master basics—

If you are not setting aside the
time to make yourself better—

**How then will you make a
competitive varsity team?**

4. Individual Commitment.

So, what is your individual commitment? I was at a team basketball camp for high school girl's basketball at Gonzaga University. There was a question and answer period with some of the players. One question came up about how much they practice. One player said she practiced 3 hours a day in addition to the time allotted for team practice.

I have thought a lot about that answer. I think it is very reasonable. I remember practicing 2-3 hours each and every day just to make the starting point guard spot on my high school basketball team. I remember doing the same drills, day after day, night after night, and mastering the techniques. I did not do anything extraordinarily fancy, I simply practiced my basic skills for 2-3 hours each night.

Included in those sessions was at least an hour of competitive play time. Find someone to work out against, or to work with but put yourself in game conditions with game scenarios. It doesn't make a lot of sense just to shoot free throws. Tell yourself you are on the big stage, and shoot with a situation of being down by 1 with no time left and you have to make a 1-1 to win. How many times can you win the game?

This is the type of commitment I'm talking about. What do you do personally to really make the team.

"I don't know if I practiced more than anybody, but I sure practiced enough. I still wonder if somebody—somewhere—was practicing more than me."

Larry Bird

*“Just play. Have fun.
Enjoy the game.”*

Michael Jordan



Smile—it relaxes the
muscles and you will
perform better.



Enjoy what you are doing. Enjoy
the “Thrill of Victory.” Enjoy this
special time in your life that al-
lows you to play your sport.

5. It Ought To Be Fun!

What causes sports to become “no fun?” I believe, usually, it is a result of one of two factors. First, the athlete is not skilled enough in the sport, and second there are external pressures or situations that drain our mental desires.

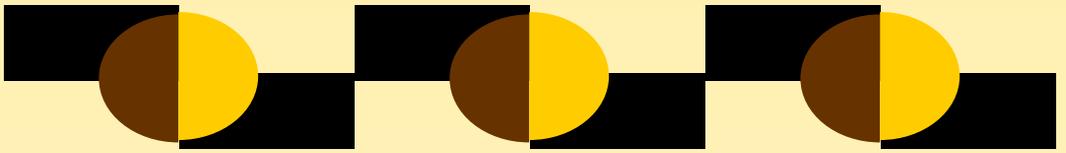
Both situations are really important to address. If the game isn’t fun because you aren’t good enough—that is very fixable. It takes some work, probably a lot of work, but in the end, we all enjoy things much more when we are skilled and when we have a chance for success. I don’t know any athlete that is able to win without applying hard work to develop their skills. Fun comes, in my experience, as a result of pursuing and achieving a goal. Fun is a mind-set. Perhaps a better word is fulfillment. We satisfy something deep inside when we are able to develop athletic skill.

The second situation is a bit more daunting. Outside influences are tougher to handle. Maybe you have peer pressure, maybe the crowds bother you, maybe the team dynamics are laced with conflict. There are a lot of external reasons that could be causing a bad experience. Here’s the bottom line on that—you play for you! You have the power to control how you feel about external pressures. You even have the power to change the external pressures through your reaction.

I remember playing basketball in junior high. I was so worried about what the people in the stands were thinking that I could never get into the flow of the game. It just wasn’t fun—I was a bundle of nerves. I have found that the best way to get into the flow is to smile and relish what you are doing like it is the best thing on earth at that moment. Smile, play games with your mind by telling yourself how “great this is.” Put yourself into a state of “fun.” When you smile, your competition will get nervous!

*“As a young athlete, it was first about having fun;
then it was about winning.”*

Dan O’Brien



Do not forget the value of clinics. There are a lot of really good ½ day seminars and specialty clinics that are focused specifically on your position. These are good options, particularly if the clinic host is an expert at that position.



Hint

- ✓ Make sure to **be in shape** before you go.
- ✓ Make sure to **practice** when you get back.

“The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital.”

Joe Paterno

6. Attend Camps and Clinics.

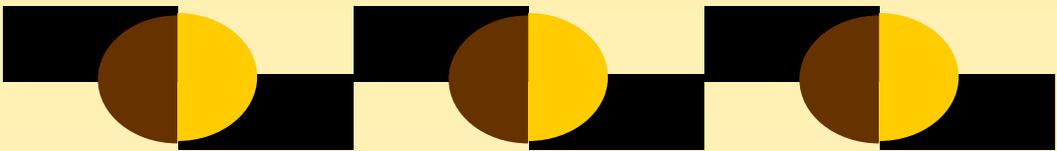
I believe it is important to attend camps and clinics. You have to stay current on what is being taught. You also have to get out and stretch yourself – work against others that are not from your school or league. See how other people do things, and make new friends. When you are at a clinic or camp, never partner up with someone from your own team or league – get out of your comfort zone and partner with someone you’ve never met before. This will help you get the most out of the drills because it will force you to be sharp and respond to a fresh set of competitive conditions.

There are two things you’ve got to understand about camps. First, if you do not prepare to attend camp you will not get the most out of it. Attending camps in the modern setting requires the athlete to be in shape beforehand. Most team camps, and individual camps that I see are intense. The athlete spends 10 – 14 hours a day working hard in drills and competitions. If you are not mentally and physically prepared for that schedule, you will not gain maximum benefit.

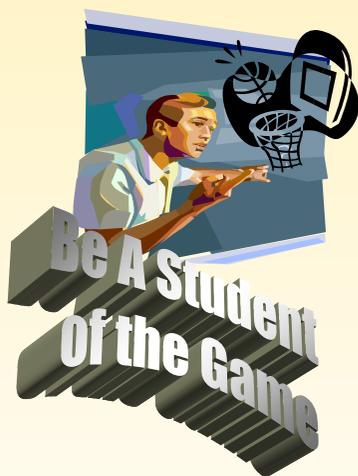
Second, you must practice immediately after you return from camp to drive home the things you’ve learned. Many players will go to camp and receive excellent instruction and then do absolutely nothing with it. Imagine what your piano teacher would say if you left this week’s lesson and did not practice only to come back next week no better than before? You would get in trouble for not having practiced.

“It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.”

John Wooden



If you want to be good—you've got to study by watching and then by implementing what you see.



Be a student of the game:

- ✓ Read from the experts.
- ✓ Watch and observe how good players do things.

“When you want to win a game, you have to teach. When you lose a game, you have to learn.”

Tom Landry

7. Be a Student of the Game.

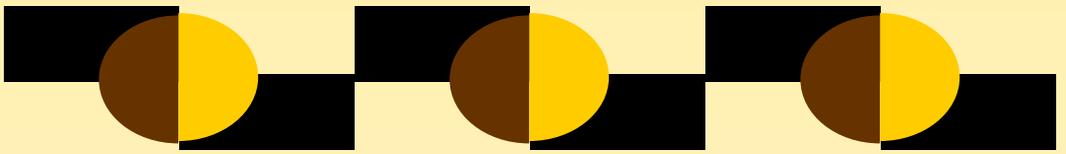
My 7th grade coach taught me a valuable lesson. He was Mr. Carlisle and was also our science teacher. He explained that in order for us to become good basketball players, we had to become students of the game. He went on to explain that we should watch basketball on T.V., attend high school games, and watch the game in other situations to learn from others.

He was absolutely right. I found that watching the game on T.V. was extremely important in my personal development. For one thing, the games televised have commentators that break down the game for you. It is like having a film session with the best coach in the world explaining what is happening. Most of the good plays will be replayed and the commentators will provide tips and explanations of what went well and what should have been done differently. Boy, you can really learn from that.

I learned how to shoot free throws in the clutch by watching college basketball. The announcer was a former coach of Marquette, Al McGuire. He believed that a shooter with a soft touch should aim for the front of the rim on a free throw resulting in a greater chance of making the shot. I used this technique and improved my shooting significantly. Every sport that is televised usually has a commentator qualified to be a great coach. If you will listen to what they say, and experiment with their comments, you will gain great advantage over your competition. They will not only talk about techniques (like passing, or shooting, or defense) but they will also cover philosophies – like when to save a ball from going out of bounds, when to use a timeout, when to foul down the stretch, how to manipulate the clock in the last two minutes of a football game, or what types of pitches to throw in a certain count of a baseball game.

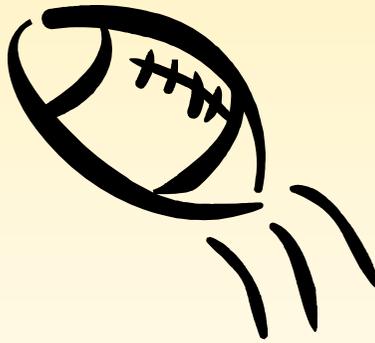
*“Football is a game played with arms, legs and shoulders
but mostly from the neck up.”*

Knute Rockne



“I kind of live with the mind-set that something good is just about to happen in everything we do.”

Pete Carroll, USC Head Football Coach (Shuit, 2005)



Believe you can win.

Believe you can achieve.

Believe you will succeed.

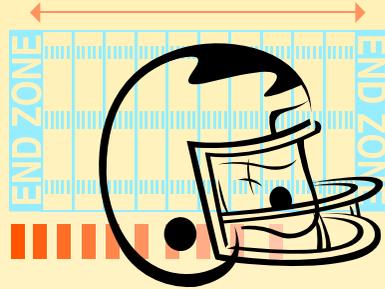
“A man can be as great as he wants to be. If you believe in yourself and have the courage, the determination, the dedication, the competitive drive and if you are willing to sacrifice the little things in life and pay the price for the things that are worthwhile, it can be done.”

Vince Lombardi

8. Believe.

I am not sure if there is anything more important than personal belief. Do you believe in yourself? If not, you are going to have an uphill battle. Belief in yourself comes first by

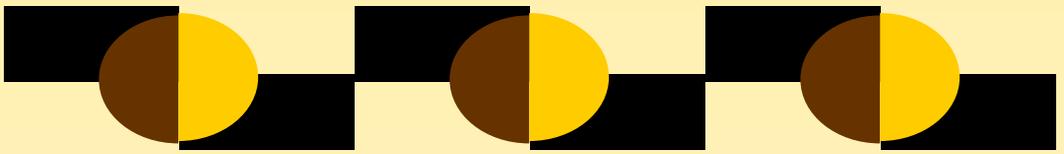
making sure you are prepared. We've talked about that – be physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared to compete.



Experts tell us we can achieve virtually anything we set our minds to achieve. I believe this is true. When I compete, I try not to underestimate my competition, and I always believe I can find a way to win. When I play golf, I believe every shot will be perfect. When I shoot a free throw, or any shot, I believe it will go in. When I play defense, I believe I can stop the offense. When I go out for a pass, I believe I will make the catch. You have to adopt the attitude of belief that you will achieve. There are so many negative forces operating in the world that if you do not consciously configure your thinking processes for positive outcome expectation you will subject yourself to more failure and less success.

“Believe deep down in your heart that you’re destined to do great things.”

Joe Paterno



9. What Does Coach Want?



Coachable What is being coachable? Coachable players listen, absorb constructive criticism without excuse, and they strive to implement the things coaches bring to their attention. If the coach suggests that you need to work on something, and you never work on it, how much more coaching do you think you'll get? Coachable players work hard on the things that coaches call to their attention. Then, they receive more coaching and more opportunities as a result.

Hard Working The most talent in the world is of little value unless the person is willing to work hard to shape that talent into something that is going to be useful and productive. Hard work is something a coach appreciates, perhaps above all other traits. I would rather have a team full of mediocre, but hardworking individuals, over a team of superior athletes who put out mediocre effort.

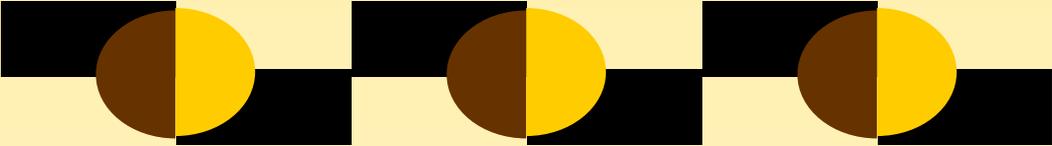
“A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.”

John Wooden

Athletic So, how do you become athletic? You train your body. Few are born with the natural capabilities of being athletic. Making your body move the way an athlete does is largely a result of training and persistence. Watch other athletes, successful athletes, to learn how they move and react. Then attempt to imitate this on the floor or field. Train your body to be athletic. Become athletic by being an athlete. This means play a lot.

Good Grades Good grades show dependability. Coaches do not like to see a player on the “F” list. In some schools, this disqualifies the athlete from competition. The coach wants players that are going to be ready and qualified to play. Poor grades are generally a reflection on your commitment to yourself – you must have the discipline to keep yourself ready .

Not a Partier Finally, stay away from the drugs and alcohol. Stay away from the party scene. It will drag you down and cheat you from experiencing a wonderful athletic career. If your school has drug or alcohol problems, you can be a difference maker. Be the one to make it cool not to drink or smoke. You will find many who will follow you if you take a stand. So be different—be an athlete!



10. An Experience to Share.

I came from a school with a proud tradition in basketball. Our head coach had taken the basketball team to state for more than two decades consecutively. Most of our games were to packed houses. Playing basketball was a dream of mine since I was a little kid watching one of our championship teams play.



In 1978 we had a coaching change. It was just before the season started my junior year. I had prepared myself all summer long. I had worked three hours a day perfecting every possible aspect of my game. The new coach came in and decided that he liked senior point guards. I was devastated – the senior over me, at least in my mind, was not nearly as good at running the team as I. One other thing occurred. The new coach’s philosophy was that his point guards played JV as a junior – he thought it provided the right experience and developmental environment to make a really good senior point guard. These two things crushed me. While I suited up Varsity, I played all four quarters each and every JV game, which left me little eligibility for Varsity experience.

Fortunately, I had a great JV coach who understood the complex emotions this caused in me. We had a great season and lost only one game.

However, I came back my senior year a little discouraged and somewhat skeptical. I had always viewed myself as a two year varsity starter. It was a blow to my ego to only have the job for one year. As it turned out, I continued to work very hard and to persist. The opportunities unfolded and I had a terrific senior year. The JV experience had indeed helped me. Would I have been better if I had played my junior year on Varsity? I think so, but it wasn’t in the mind of the coach and therefore, it didn’t happen for me.

Life is like that – we will rarely see things roll out the way we want, or even the way we plan. Yet, if we persist, if we work hard, if we use the obstacles that are set against us as a source of motivation and energy, the outcome can be one of tremendous joy. I still have a piece of the net that we cut down my senior year when we won the League title. And, I’ll never forget the experience of leading my team in being a part of a long string of unbroken state tournament appearances.

11. The Essence of It All.

In this little booklet I have tried to convey the vital information needed for a player to make the team. I hope you noticed that most of the tips are about **attitude**. You see, making the team isn't really the goal. If we make the team, that's great. If we become stars on the team, that's great too. But do you know what is really important? It is **attitude**. Developing the right mental approach to competing, to winning, to teamwork is really the foundation of what sports should be teaching.

Players often ask me: "Coach, what do I need to work on?" or "Coach, what do I need to be doing?" I'm pretty happy to tell them, as are most coaches. But, here's a suggestion—instead of just asking the question, explain what you have been doing to get better and ask for suggestions as to additional things to do. One more thing—if coach gives you some things to do, make sure you do them. It is part of being coachable, and your coach will take notice because this little technique will differentiate you from others who do not take this little step.

Here's the thing you have to know – there is simply no substitute for work. What separates the really great athletes from the pack? Judging from the examples of Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, and others, they work to constantly get better—they are simply never good enough.

Making the team requires you to **believe in yourself**, to have the **winning attitude**, to **be hungry**, to have a **strong will**, to **practice hard**, practice hard at the **right things**, to be a **student of the game**, and to have a **strategic approach** to what you are trying to accomplish. Most of all—don't give up, **be persistent** and ready to take advantage of opportunities when they come.



About the Author: Coach

Gordon Whitehead has been working with young athletes since 1979 as a senior in high school. He currently is the Head Varsity Girl's Basketball Coach at Dayton

High School in Dayton, Oregon. He is also an assistant football coach, and works for the winningest football coach in Oregon history—Dewey Sullivan. Coincidentally, Whitehead was a player for Sullivan in the late 70's. Coach Whitehead spent 13 years in the Marines—starting as a Private in 1982 and leaving as a Captain in 1995 to start a career in private industry. He has a Bachelor of Arts from Oregon



State University, an MBA from University of Phoenix, and is currently a Doctoral student at George Fox University studying leadership and management. Coach is married to Diane Ramos Whitehead of Dayton, and together they have eight children.



*Coach Whitehead would enjoy hearing from you.
Please forward your thoughts or questions to:
gwhitehead_542@yahoo.com.*

Other booklets available:

- ✓ Drills for Quarterbacks
- ✓ Conditioning Techniques
- ✓ Drills for Point Guards
- ✓ Youth-Driven Leadership—A Guide for Team Captains.
- ✓ Managing Conflict—A Guide for Coaches

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Other quotes taken from *brainyquote.com*