



THE ANATOMY OF A WINNING COACH – PART I

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By Keith Madison
University of Kentucky Baseball

Since I have spent most of my adult life as a coach, I am from the school of thought that we should teach young players that winning is important. Yet, there are many different ways to win. Of course, we can win by scoring more runs than the other team. We all enjoy winning in this way! We can also win by teaching our players to work hard to reach realistic goals, exude class and sportsmanship and treat teammates, coaches and umpires with respect. We can teach them that winning on the playing field starts with having “winning” practices leading up to the game and giving your best in every situation.

You are a winner as a coach if you focus on seven specific areas of responsibilities. Below are the first three.

1. **Possess knowledge.** You don’t have to know everything about the game, but if you have chosen to coach a team, each player deserves to have a coach who tries to increase his knowledge of the game. A good place to begin is by reading books and watching DVDs on how to be an effective coach and using the free online Little League [Coach Resource Center](#). You should attend coaching clinics or watch a “professional” high school or college coach run a practice. You will earn respect from your players and the other volunteers helping you if you continue to increase your knowledge of the game. Knowledge is power.
2. **Care.** John Wooden, the legendary UCLA basketball coach, was the first person I ever heard say, “Players don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Pick different times to talk to each player individually. Make it a habit to ask different players to show up at practice 15 or 20 minutes early each practice for some “one-on-one” time fielding grounders, hitting, catching fly balls or working on a specific aspect of their game that may need some extra work. This time will let the player know that you care about him as both a player and as a person. Also, it will help the team. Some players respond better in an individual setting as opposed to a group setting. You will get to know each player in an entirely different way by spending just a little extra time with him or her. You could be a “difference maker” in the life of several young men or women on your team. Knowledge is extremely important, but caring is even more important.
3. **Lead.** Players look to the coach as the ultimate leader. If a leader emerges among the team, that is a bonus. But, never forget, coaches are the real leaders. The players’ attitude, language, body language, effort, execution and the way they carry themselves is a reflection of the leader/coach of the team. If you ever hear a negative statement from a coach such as, “I can’t believe how poorly these guys played today,” you can rest assured that the coach, in most cases, did not prepare his team during practice. Our teams and the players on our teams will never be perfect, but they can grow and develop both skill and character with positive leadership from the coach.

Keith Madison has more wins than any other Manager in the 106 years of the University of Kentucky baseball program. Since becoming the Wildcats' Manager in 1979, Mr. Madison has guided his team to 713 victories - the second-highest mark among active coaches in the Southeastern Conference. Four of his teams have broken the school record for wins in a

season; while 83 of his players have gone on to play professional baseball, with 14 having played in the major leagues.

Part Two of Coach Madison’s approach to becoming a “Winning Coach,” including the final four areas of responsibility, will be published in the October’s edition of the *Coach’s Box*.

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THE ANATOMY OF A WINNING COACH – PART II

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By Keith Madison
University of Kentucky Baseball

Part One of Coach Madison's "Anatomy of a Winning Coach," including the first three areas of responsibility, was published in the September edition of the Coach's Box.

We will most likely never win all of our games and we may never coach a future Major League Baseball player, but we can teach our players how to be winners and how to be "major league people" both on and off the field. Remember, you don't coach baseball or softball, you coach players. You have a position of influence ... take advantage of it to teach players not only how to better play the game, but to be better students, teammates and citizens.

You are a winner as a coach if you focus on seven specific responsibilities. Below are the remaining four we have yet to discuss.

4. Communicate. Never assume that a player understands baseball terminology. When my youngest son was about 5 years old, I was tossing the ball to him and trying to teach him how to hit. He was small and the bat was a little too heavy for him, so I asked him to "choke up." He looked at me with just a hint of confusion and continued to grip the bat at the end near the knob. So, once again I said "choke up." After the third time of telling him to choke up, he finally dropped the bat and placed both hands around his throat! I assumed that he knew what "choking up" meant. During preseason practice, start with the basic fundamentals and make sure that each player knows the baseball "lingo" that you will be using during the course of the season. Communicate clearly and positively during practice drills. Also, communicate precisely what you expect from the team in terms of effort, attitude, sportsmanship and respect for teammates, coaches, umpires, opponents and the game itself. Communicate with parents, as well, to let them know of league rules, team policies, expectations, practice times and game schedules.

5. Practice what you preach. Remember, you are the leader. If you want your players to show respect, then the coach should show respect. If you want your players to avoid negative body language; then you-as a coach-should exude positive body language. If you want your players to avoid profanity, then the coach should never use profanity. If you want each player to have a positive attitude, then the coach should have a positive attitude.

6. Teach and inspire. Several years ago, I was leading the baseball camp in North Carolina. There were middle school and high school athletes from all over the nation in attendance. I wanted to get better acquainted with some of the players. I started talking with two players from a nearby state. I asked them "Where do you attend high school?" and "How do you like your coach?" One of the players said, "I hate that guy!" I was shocked and was speechless for a moment. Finally, I ask him, "Why do you think you hate him?" He replied, "Every time I make a mistake or ask a question, he puts me down or makes fun of the question I asked. " Your teaching methods should encourage, teach and inspire ball players to learn more about and love the game of baseball. Leave a legacy of positive memories and a lasting love for the game of baseball with the players you coach.

7. Have passion. If you enjoy working with children and have a passion for the game, you are set up for success. Young people are smart. They know when you are going through the motions at practice, the same as you know when the players' hearts aren't in it. Take a few minutes to plan an effective, fast-paced practice. Recruit two or three assistant coaches to help with practice, so that you can have two or three drills going on at the same time during practice. Keep the drill stations short (15-20 minutes). We live in a "remote control" society. If the drills are too lengthy, players will mentally "switch channels." Be creative and keep each drill educational, competitive and fun. You will be able to express your passion for the game and make practice fun by planning ahead in order to keep your athletes focused on learning and improving. The only way that you can transfer your passion for the game to the players you coach is to make practice upbeat and fast-paced with very little standing around.

I cannot emphasize enough the lifelong positive influence you can have on your players. I remember everything about my Little League coach and the many things he taught me; I still have a relationship with him almost 50 years later. If you miss out on the relationship part of coaching, you have truly missed out. Coaches need to use our influence to help each individual on the team. Our communities will become better places to live. Now that is winning!

Note: Keith Madison is the winningest baseball coach in the 106 years of the University of Kentucky baseball. Since becoming the Wildcats' coach in 1979, Mr. Madison has guided his team to 713 victories - more than any other baseball coach in school history and the second-highest mark among active coaches in the Southeastern Conference. Four of his teams have broken the school record for wins in a season; while 83 of his players have gone on to play professional baseball, with 14 having played in the major leagues.

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