

Teaching athletes to find their A-games
requires more than sports expertise.

Leadership Lessons from Coaches

By Craig Harrison, DTM

The modern-day sports coach must be a skilled leader and communicator. During any given season, a coach is expected to recruit, inspire, motivate, instruct, discipline and counsel players of different ages, skill levels and backgrounds.

The successful coach also melds individuals into a competitive team and models proper behavior to help athletes come of age as players and young adults. It takes listening as well as speaking skills, strategy and a dash of salesmanship, as well as an appreciation of both psychology and kinesiology.

Sean Tarrant, DTM, is the head football coach of the Westside Christian Academy Warriors in Detroit, Michigan. The communication and leadership skills he honed in Toastmasters have served him very well as a football coach: During the 2009 season, Tarrant's team was ranked number four in the United States in Division 2 private high schools.



When Tarrant speaks to his players, he does more than diagram Xs and Os on a whiteboard (defensive and offensive

players in a diagram). "I'm teaching my players to make better decisions, on and off the field," he says. Known as "Coach T," Tarrant also models good behavior and thinking skills to his athletes. "There is a correct way to think," he notes. "There are choices in how you speak and how you act. I help young people improve both."

A Coach with Credibility

Tarrant, 44, joined Talu Toastmasters in Moberly, Missouri, many years ago



Tom Richardson, Toastmasters Past International President (1988-89), is a football coach at Zionsville High School in Zionsville, Indiana. He works with the varsity defensive linemen, including (from left to right) seniors Andrew Wilson, Adam Wertz and Logan Aven.



while serving time in the Moberly Correctional Center. He has credibility with the current generation of student-athletes: He's made mistakes and accounted for them, overcome personal hardships and now models success for others. Besides serving as Westside Christian's football coach, Tarrant is also the school's dean of students and its athletic director.

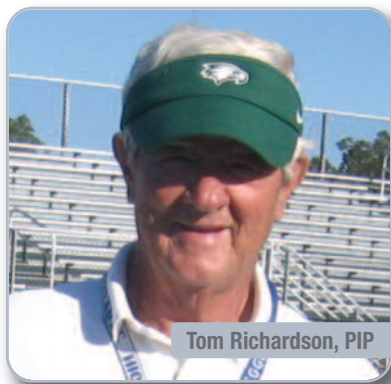
Most recently, Tarrant was a member of the Oak Park Toastmasters in Oak Park, Michigan. The coach draws on his life experience and newfound confidence from Toastmasters to help others with public speaking. By his own count he has given thousands of speeches. He frequents rehabilitation centers and homeless shelters, has

toured with rapper T.I. and also speaks directly to youth through a mentoring program.

"I see all mistakes made in one's life as learning experiences," says the father of six.

Toastmasters PIP Guides Young Men on Gridiron

Tom Richardson, who was Toastmasters International President in 1988-89, has coached sports for more than 25 years. After playing football at the University of Tennessee, he coached football, basketball and track at high schools in Tennessee and Florida. He then worked as an insurance executive for a number of years – and, having retired, is again coaching high school football.



Richardson, a DTM, says his Toastmasters training formed the foundation for his coaching, noting that he uses his communication and leadership

skills every day in working with football players. As the defensive line coach, he guides 10 young men who play a specific position on the field, and he must communicate clearly and effectively, whether teaching them proper techniques or motivating them to perform to their maximum ability.

"You look at nonjudgmental ways to discuss with the players what they're doing, but you also want to get the message across when change needs to be made," says the longtime Toastmaster, who is in his 13th year of coaching football at Zionsville High School in Zionsville, Indiana. He does the job on a volunteer basis.

Just as in Toastmasters, "When we see players doing things right, we tell them so," adds Richardson, who runs a company that coaches executives in speaking and communication. "That builds their confidence. And if they're not doing things right, we give them constructive feedback. We ask, 'How can you make that better?'"

A member of the 2000 Toastmasters club in Indianapolis, Indiana, Richardson also trains the entire varsity team mentally – in sports-psychology. This includes

athletes interact with player-agents, general managers and owners. Each form of communication requires different skills, tone, language and credibility.

"When you're coaching it's impossible *not* to communicate," says Bill Cole, a peak performance and sport psychology consultant in San Jose, California. "You're communicating whether you know it or not." He gives this example: "When a coach has his or her arms folded while observing players practicing, it's sending a message of disapproval or skepticism, whether intended or not." He explains that congruency between words and tone, verbal language and body language, is imperative.

Cole has worked with athletes, parents and coaches in more than 55 sports. Whether working with the top water skier in Mexico, the Israeli Davis Cup tennis team or the coach of the Irish National Cricket team, Cole blends sports psychology with the language of success to coach clients to greatness.

Shifting into Neutral

Coaches aren't the only ones who set the tone for games and matches. Treve Taylor, a 32-year Toastmaster in South Africa, has been an official for the sport of swimming for many years. He also trains other officials. When officiating, he remains neutral and exudes impartiality, referring to swimmers only by their lane numbers. Yet when training other officials, he takes dry material

and "applies the skills of vocal variety, body language and eye contact to enhance the presentation."

As president of the Durban Club in Durban Natal, South Africa, Taylor developed these talents in Toastmasters. "Due to my Toastmasters experience, I was installed as a trainer for new

officials over people with more [officiating] experience than I had, but weaker communication skills," he notes.

The Man In Charge

Jim Tunney's communication and leadership skills were pivotal to his career as a National Football League (NFL) referee. "You have to demonstrate through your posture, through your voice, through your actions and what you do on and off the field, that you are somebody who is in charge," says Tunney, who refereed in the NFL for 31 years and has been nominated for the league's Hall of Fame.

How good were Tunney's communication skills? After retiring from the NFL in 1991, he went on to serve as president of the National Speakers Association.

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- RETIRED NFL REFEREE JIM TUNNEY

such methods as visualization and self-talk, to increase confidence and positive attitude. He says he first drew on these strategies in Toastmasters, when he was competing in the World Championship of Public Speaking in 1974. (He was a finalist that year.)

Richardson still draws on these motivational methods in his own athletic pursuits: He holds the Indiana state record in his age bracket for competitive power lifting (a type of weightlifting) and is working toward earning his purple belt in Kempo karate.

Using Different Skill Sets

Coaches of student-athletes communicate with players, parents, referees and trainers; coaches of professional



The Quintessential Coach

When John Wooden died this past June, the world lost one of its greatest coaches – and a man celebrated just as widely for his principles and teachings. His insights on leadership, motivation, communication and ethics influenced countless people through the years. In an interview for the October 2008 issue of the *Toastmaster* magazine, Wooden was asked how Toastmasters leaders should best motivate their teams. He said that making people feel appreciated is always important. “One of the greatest motivating tools we have is a pat on the back,” he said. “It doesn’t have to be a physical pat – it could be a smile, a nod. Everyone likes to be complimented in one way or another.” “Another technique is listening,” he added. “A leader must listen to those under their supervision.... We don’t know a thing that we haven’t learned from somebody else in one way or another.”

Coach Wooden was a captivating speaker – and many of his greatest speeches were delivered to his basketball teams. The Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, in New Castle, Indiana, features a video presentation showing a speech Wooden gave to one of his teams at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he won an unprecedented 10 U.S. college basketball championships. The following excerpt illustrates what made him such a wise and inspiring coach:

“Please let me have your attention, young men. I would like to say a few words about this coming season. We all want it to be very successful, but for our success to become a reality you must accept my concept of what success truly is.

True success in basketball shouldn’t be based on individual statistics or the percentage of victories, any more than success in life should be based on material possessions or the position of power and prestige.... You cannot be truly successful without peace of mind, that only comes from knowing you made the effort to become the best that you are capable of becoming. You and only you will know whether you have done that. You can fool others. But you cannot fool yourself.

We must not become too concerned about the things over which we have no control, but we must make every effort to utilize to the best of our ability the things over which we have control.

Everyone is different. There will always be others who are bigger or stronger, or quicker, or better jumpers, or better in some other areas, but there are other qualities in which you can be second to none.

Among these are: your dedication to the development of your own potential.”


The resident of Pebble Beach, California, says an official must maintain a calm demeanor in the face of hostility from players or coaches. “How you handle confrontation with a player on the field or with a coach is very important,” says Tunney. “If you allow that to shake what you believe in, it shows up in your body language. People say, ‘This guy is not sure of himself. He doesn’t know what he’s doing!’”

The Work Before The Work

Fans often marvel at how calm, cool and collected coaches can appear on the sidelines, during the heat of battle. Just as in Toastmasters, preparation is key. Coaches have done their work already, preparing their teams for the competition and for performing at their optimal level. The legendary college basketball coach John Wooden, who died earlier this year at the age of 99, put it well: “Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.” He believed preparation

was so fundamental to success that the very first lessons he taught his players were how to carefully lace up their sneakers and properly put on socks to avoid blisters.

Game On!

As communicators and leaders, coaches play a unique role in forming character in their players. By patiently teaching and nurturing their athletes, and communicating clearly with them, they can create Hall of Fame players and world-class citizens. As Toastmasters, you can use your skills to impact others, as well. The ball is in your court! 

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