

JAY MARTIN

Foreword by Anson Dorrance

LESSONS
FROM
THE BEST
COACH

DEVELOP A
WINNING TEAM CULTURE
THAT LASTS

MEYER & MEYER SPORT

Lessons From the Best Coach

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FOREWORD

Yesterday, I read *Lessons From the Best Coach*. I did it in one sitting. I have never done that before with any book, but it was worth the investment of my time to read something with a roadmap so practical, so empowering, by a man with an extraordinary track record that *all of us* can learn from.

I love the debates we coaches have about player development, leadership, and culture. Years ago, I was invited to be a speaker for the organization, “What Drives Winning.” I remember one discussion about the evolution of elite coaching, and I was skeptical, especially when I was a young, ambitious coach, about the character development piece that was at its core. When I started coaching collegiately as a 24-year-old, it was only about the Xs and Os, running a good practice, and wanting to build my confidence as a coach. Of course, by the time they brought me in to speak, I was older, completely sold on character development, and the title of my talk for them was “Grading Character.” But I had not started there. I had evolved into that kind of coach. So where are you in your coaching evolution? Are you ready for the next step?

What I like about the overwhelming theme of Jay Martin’s book is not so much what you are teaching in the one-and-a-half to two hours you are training, but what happens in your soccer program for the other twenty-two hours. Because this is a *coaching* book, not a *soccer coaching* book. But how do you get to an environment that will be embraced by the team members? Trust me, if you want success, your environment must be embraced by everyone in your culture. And speaking of culture, how do you create it? I have never read anything with such a specific road map to construct culture as this book.

Jay Martin’s insights are taking us into another brave new world in which “coaches don’t develop players; only players make players better.” Our culture right now is “coach centric,” and we must change it to “player centric” to catch up to the social changes and the changes in the people

we are coaching. There is a sea of change in the modern coaching world from “telling players what to do” to “asking questions,” to see what they know to be able to instruct them better and help them improve faster. This route is harder because you must win the trust of your players. And to accelerate players’ growth, let them create the team’s “Core Values.” Jay Martin lets the players own and run as much as possible with his light hand on the tiller because unlike many sports, our sport requires athletes make decisions on the field without the coach, so athletes must organize outside the lines as leaders as well.

One of the biggest challenges in coaching today is getting an athlete’s personal narrative to the truth because that narrative is designed to protect the athlete from pain and accountability, but sometimes (the data tells us 85% of the time), it is a false narrative. The detail that this book provides to frame and inspire growth makes it clear why Jay Martin has had so much extraordinary and long-term success.

When I was young, I read two books that had a profound effect on my thinking and ambition. They were Jim Collins’ books, *Built to Last* and *Good to Great*. I wanted to be that “Level 5 Leader” that, according to Collins, has seemingly come from Mars and is self-effacing, quiet, reserved ... a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. I failed. Dr. Jay Martin did not. He is that leader from Mars. His hand on the tiller is light, but don’t be fooled, when the hurricane hits (and in *every* season a hurricane will hit), his grip will tighten and the hard decisions will be made, taking the team in the right direction. When you read this book, you will see why the amazing culture of Ohio Wesleyan is so successful, and like me, you will be stealing practical ideas and philosophies that will impact the human development of the people you lead. And honestly human development is the higher calling.

–Anson Dorrance

Head women’s soccer coach, University of North Carolina

PREFACE

On Friday December 2, 2011, the Ohio Wesleyan University soccer team was playing in the national Division III semi-final in San Antonio, Texas. The opponent was Montclair State University, New Jersey, who won the New Jersey Collegiate Association championship with a 19-2-0 record. In the stands, there were 78 former OWU players. They knew none of the members on the current team. They were there to support the program. A program they contributed to when they were students at OWU!

They came to San Antonio on their own. They paid their own way down to Texas and took valuable time away from their families during the holiday season.

The OWU team won the game 4-0. On Saturday December 3, 2011, an additional 48 former players flew into San Antonio. They were there to support the program. There were even parents of former players in San Antonio!

There were so many former OWU players that there was an impromptu alumni game at Trinity University hosted by the TU coach and good friend Paul McGinlay!

In the final game, OWU defeated a very good Calvin College team 2-1 to win their second national championship. The stands were across the field from the team benches. When the whistle blew, all the OWU players ran across the field and jumped into the stands to celebrate with the former players. See the photo. Let me repeat that none of the alumni knew any of the current players, but they knew the program.

As I watched the celebration, my wife, JoAnn, came up to me and said, "Jay, this is what you do and it has very little to do with soccer! You have connected with these players for the last 35 years. Different players, different generations, the same connection."

I knew that we had a good program. I can read. I knew we won a lot of games. But this was a realization. The program was more important than soccer for these players and former players.



I knew that the OWU men's soccer program meant more to the players than just playing a soccer game. It made a lasting impact. How can you create that with your team, whether in sports or business?

This is what this book is about. How can you, as a coach, a manager, or a leader, create an environment that empowers your players or workers or followers? In this book, coach and manager and leader are interchangeable. The coach is in a leadership position. Is he or she a leader? The manager is a coach and in a leadership position—or are they? The leader is the pinnacle.

Coaching or management and leadership is changing. The “*my-way-or-the-highway mentality*” is no longer appropriate. The players or employees today want more. Good coaches, managers, or leaders want to create an environment that empowers the players/employees/followers. They want to create an environment that is positive. They want to create an environment where there is a connection between the coach or manager and the players and followers. The best teams and organizations create an emotional attachment between the players or followers and the organization. I want my players to look at the soccer program as more important than a team.

To me, a soccer team is the 2 hours each day at practice; a soccer program is the other 22 hours. How many teams have you been on that were 2 hours each day without the other 22 hours? My guess is most of them!

Team dynamics suggest that a team goes through four stages. The first stage is the “forming” stage. The second phase is the “storming” stage. The third stage is the “norming” stage,” and finally, the “performing” stage. I contend that most teams never get past the storming stage. This book will lead you and your team or organization through the storming stage and into the performing stage.

This book will examine the ways a coach, manager, or leader can create an environment that will be embraced by the team members. It will present an environment that is conducive to intrinsic motivation. All good organizations thrive on intrinsic motivation!

This book explains how to create a culture. It is a coaching book. Not a soccer coaching book.

Enjoy!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have four mentors in my life: my father, Jack Martin; my high school basketball coach, John Barker; Dr Richard Gordin, the athletics director who hired me at Ohio Wesleyan University; and Dr. Harriet Stewart, the chair of the Physical Education Department at Ohio Wesleyan University. I am lucky. These four helped me set the values and philosophy that have carried me through 46 years of coaching and teaching at Ohio Wesleyan. While much of this came from my father, all of these people were mentors. I think of them every day. Not a day goes by that I don't use something learned from them.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank my wife JoAnn Martin for putting up with me for 46 years. I don't know how she did it.

INTRODUCTION

This is not a soccer coaching book. This is a coaching book. I have been fortunate to have had some success at OWU since 1977. For specific information, please see the “About the Author” page at the end of the book. I want to share this information with you because I know we do things differently at Ohio Wesleyan. We don’t talk about culture; we work culture. In many ways, culture is an overused term. Everyone talks about “culture.” Many do not know what that means. Even fewer know how to create a culture. They hope it happens.

Culture does not just happen. Culture takes time and effort. Culture is a choice. You can choose to make it happen. Or you can choose not to! Many of the topics in this book you have heard of before. But I know that this book will offer another way to look at these topics. All of which are needed to develop a very positive, long-lasting culture.

We will discuss:

- The importance of a philosophy and of not having a philosophy.
- Core values and how the team should set them.
- Individual and team goal-setting strategies.
- The importance of player empowerment and leadership.
- How humility is important for all the players and teams.
- No one talks about how to prepare for adversity. We will in this book.
- What is experience? Do your players have it?
- We will introduce another level of communication.
- Great teams do the “little things.”

LESSON I

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PHILOSOPHY

“Soccer players from the street are more important than ones trained by coaches.”

–Johan Cruyff

THE FOUNDATION

The foundation of my philosophy is very simple, but it makes colleagues and peers shake their heads in disbelief. **I do not believe that coaches develop players.** You simply cannot make someone else better. **Only players can make players better.** Most coaches want to believe they make players better. In fact, I know a coach that has on his business card, “. . . *the high school coach who developed (an MLS Player.)*” Sorry, coach, that is not true!

And it is the same in business; managers cannot make employees better—only employees can do that! Coaches and managers don’t have this magic wand that they wave over players and employees to make them better! It is not that simple.

Every player that comes to Ohio Wesleyan must change the way he plays to make the team. This is not a negative thing. Every time a player moves “up” to a higher level, he or she must change the way they play. If a player continues to play the way he did in high school or club, he will not play at OWU. And that is the case with most college teams, at least most good college teams.

An OWU player must increase his fitness, play the ball quicker, and increase his strength. That is just a start. That is to get one foot on the practice field. To play and be successful, players must continue to get

better. **But the coach cannot make the player better!** The player must do it!

Every year we have players who tell me they cannot get better. They say they are “set in their ways.” The truth is, they don’t want to get better because it is hard. And if they don’t get better, they don’t play!

The best and worst example is from the championship game in San Antonio in 2011. There were four seniors sitting on the bench next to me who did not play! Can you believe that? Senior year! National Championship game! But they did not play a minute. It was good that we won easily on Friday in the semi-final. That gave all these players a chance to see some action that weekend. But not in the final! They simply did not change the way they played from freshman to senior year.

Convincing players that the coach cannot make them better is difficult. It is hard for several reasons, but the biggest reason is our sporting culture in this country. Our system is “coach-centric.” It must change to be “player centric”.

American players are reactive not proactive. Players show up for practice and wait for the coach to tell them what to do. Players then react to what the coach says, and most often, players go through the motions. Players cannot get better doing this. But it is what happens in the United States. We must teach our players and employees the concept of **deliberate practice** or, as Daniel Coyle calls it in the “*Talent Code*,” **deep practice**.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE

“Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect.”

–Vince Lombardi

To learn any new skill or gain expertise in a skill you need to *practice, practice, and practice some more!* No one will debate that. In fact,