

THE MEANING OF WINNING

BY

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A player's potential to perform better is never greater than the quality of the coach.

Sports coaches and enthusiasts like the best results first - so that is a good place to start to grab attention. For those, however, who believe that discovering human excellence is far above detailed statistics, motivational speeches and heavy psychology, you are encouraged read past the next paragraph.

It makes no difference if you do not understand the mechanics of American gridiron football, the scoring system, time keeping or players' positions. In this specific case it is irrelevant information as you can appreciate the scope of accomplishment. You get the picture quite quickly. For over thirty seasons, Coach Roger Barta has won 273 games, lost 58 and guided his team, The Smith Center Redman (High School) of Smith Center, Kansas, to six state championship titles. They are currently on a four-year winning streak. This season (2007/2008) they have won 54 games in a row and outscored opponents 844-20. They broke the national record set in 1925 by scoring 72 points in the first quarter of a game and, despite replacing the entire senior team before halftime with first year freshmen, they went on to win the contest 83-0.

A closer look at the team's dynamic reveals a stark contrast to the nearly perfect results when you consider the demanding nature of the way in which coaches push their players in competitive sports. For this team, playing football is next to the last thing on their mind. In fact they are not really bothered at all about winning games. The 'how', 'who', 'what' and 'why' they are able to do is not of primary importance - what they do actually goes far beyond the pitch, giving an entirely different meaning to the word 'winning'.

Coach Bata possesses years of technical, tactical and strategic expertise - just like every other coach. He still enjoys writing his scouting reports and running the same offensive and defensive formations season after season. Yet there is something very different about how each individual, as a member of the team, approaches every practice, game and championship title.

What begins to emerge from the coach's side is how he uses his *qualities* as a coach, both as a leader and a human being, combined with his football expertise, to make a tremendous impact on an entire community. That impact starts in the first year a player steps on the field for the first time, right through to their senior year's final step off the playing area - and continues throughout their lives.

Ask any of the players what makes him perform so well and it is probable that he will not mention football, but rather the highest qualities a coach exemplifies:

- **Purpose** - "He puts special things into winning. Small things like silence on the bus and holding hands before taking the field."
- **Challenge and enjoyment in the process** - "We like to set different goals every game, like only allowing ourselves a certain number of yards each time we have the ball."
- **Leadership** - "As good a coach he is, he's a better guy. He treats everybody like gold."
- **Mentoring and being** - "He speaks with us about how to be men, things like respect - then shows us."
- **Responsibility and awareness** - "Each player signs a contract to be drug-, alcohol- and tobacco-free, both for ourselves and the team."

The qualities he demonstrates are especially powerful in the critical years when young talent needs to be nurtured in order to flourish. The result is a transformational experience for each player that creates a value that ripples across the state and nation. When players graduate and go on the university, a few use their skills to play professional football or even become coaches themselves (an average no higher or lower than any other high school in the nation). Others finish the university and use their skills in the professional arena or perhaps in serving the community. Regardless of their future life path, the coach's outcome is that all go on to have a successful life - whatever that may mean for each individual.

A commercial view on this model shows at the very least, in terms of ROI (Return On Investment), the enormous potential for a professional development club or youth academy to adopt. If you can develop coaches who have a personal signature powerful enough to inspire people and an entire system, it usually delivers huge returns back to the club, to the coaches and, most important of all, to the player.

Now, let's get winning.