

Thoughts On Winning

In 1962 I made a statement as a young prospective coach to the effect, "If I could get my football players to bench press 200 pounds I know we could win." As soon as I said it, I knew this simplistic statement was wrong. I know now winning for a coach is a very complex phenomenon requiring great attention to every detail. Weight training is just one of those details, an important detail to be sure, but still only one of the many details required in the quest of winning.

Two years ago I watched the Division I-AA Collegiate National Football Championship. It was a wild scoring game. Team A was behind 39-34 but driving down the field late in the game. They scored a TD with 50 seconds left. Now what do you do? A decision should have been anticipated; it wasn't. With a lead of 40-39, Team A kicked the extra point for a two point lead which didn't improve them at all. They obviously should have tried for two. Team B could have easily gained enough in 50 seconds to kick a field goal and win. An assistant coach could have easily been assigned to advise on extra point decision to overcome the emotions of a dramatic touchdown. Attention to detail wins games!

I watched three football games involving top 20 teams on September 25th of this year. Penn State ranked #8 was playing Nebraska ranked #2 (also thought by many to be the strongest team in the nation). Penn State Coach Joe Paterno on Friday claimed Nebraska was the best team ever. Nebraska scored late in the game to take a slim lead. With a little over a minute to play, Penn State was 80 yards away from victory. I said, "O.K., Paterno, how can your team score under those conditions against the best team ever?" Well, they did! Now Penn State must be the best

team ever, right? Well, Coach Bear Bryant figured it that way. Two weeks later Penn State was ranked #2 and Alabama #3 and the two teams were meeting at the Crimson Tide's home field. Friday, Coach Bryant declared on national TV that Paterno's team was the best team ever. The result: a record home crowd and the 42-21 score was the 320th career victory for the Bear. Psychology is a powerful detail used by the masters of winning.

Another game involved Stanford against a Big 10 team. Stanford was behind by four points late in the game. The Big 10 team had the ball with 2:30 left. I said, "Watch the clock, take your time, be conservative." Stanford intercepted on second down. Elway, the great QB for Stanford, immediately gave it back as he was intercepted. A great run back placed the ball on Stanford's 20 with 1:30 left. I said, "Coach, you were lucky. Now just run out the clock. Remember what just happened. Stanford only has one time out left. You can't give a fabulous QB like Elway a chance." Incredibly, they passed again on second down and were again intercepted. Elway promptly marched 80 yards in 60 seconds and won the game. The Big 10 team was ranked in the Top 20, their team was bigger and stronger; but not coached well enough that day to win.

The third game I saw involved another top 20 team in another barnburner. This time the underdog team marched 99 yards in the last 60 seconds and scored a two point conversion to win 39-38. The underdog team's wishbone QB said they practiced that very situation all week. The losing top 20 team was confused after the TD. The coaches were trying to call a time-out. Their defense didn't see them and a poor defensive formation was called. As a result, the two-point play was a 'piece of cake!' The weaker and smaller team had won. A simple detail of communicating a time-out contributed heavily to defeat.

Coaches, I challenge you to improve your ability for detail towards the end of games by watching bowl and Thanksgiving games. Take pen and paper. Don't be a Monday morning QB. Write down coaching decisions before plays are run. How would you try for extra points? How would you use and call time-outs? Anticipate and learn and win by attention to detail!

What Age Do You Start?

This is a question I'm asked quite frequently. It is impossible to come up with an exact age to start power weight training. If I were to say age 15, many kids would be ready but some would not. I therefore have come up with a performance level rather than an age level.

When an athlete begins the ninth grade, he may be tested on the squat. If he can do 5 reps with 145 pounds with good form, he is ready to begin a serious power weight training program. He is ready to take off and make great strides towards his potential.

It has been my experience that about 50% of beginning ninth graders can squat with 145 pounds 5 times correctly, while ten percent of sophomore athletes may have difficulty with this performance level. Those athletes that are not ready may work on a Universal Gym, dips, rope climb or body building lifts which work on high reps with lighter weight.

An athlete who has not yet reached puberty, weighing 115 pounds and is overwhelmed by 145 pounds on the squat is very very unlikely to gain much benefit from a power weight training program. He would also be more likely to be injured. Conversely, the athlete who shaves, weighs 150 pounds and can handle beginning poundages with good form should not be held back because of age. Also, by having to earn the right to lift with the big boys, it makes the power program even more special for everyone.