
BASKETBALL COACHES

What is your philosophy to coaching?
(Translation – what do you *REALLY* believe in?)

A Personal View

JOE FORBER

INTRODUCTION

This short booklet is not designed, in any way, to tell you how to coach. I would not be so presumptuous and also it would be counter-productive. It is simply asking you to **THINK** about what you are doing, how you might improve and asking whether you really have thought through the deeper aspects of your coaching. A summary might be ‘what do I really believe in?’ I really wish someone had asked me many years ago what my philosophy was. I’m sure that, had it happened, it would have made me think and made me a better coach. I’m also sure that my answer at the time would have been ‘what on earth are you talking about?’

Some reflections in the booklet are my own but also I have included some comments by other coaches, players, athletes and other successful people which are relevant to my own beliefs. I don’t expect anyone to agree with all the points I make. In fact, it would be a bad sign if this were the case. It is important that coaches have an open mind, listen to other opinions and then either accept or reject other views.

ON WINNING AND LOSING

After some years of coaching, I began to feel that an over-concentration on winning was not helpful to my coaching. This led me to a personal re-think when my focus moved away from a concentration on winning which I came to believe was a flawed philosophy.

If we could win a National Championship or a National Cup, that would be good and most enjoyable, but what if the team I had was simply not good enough to do this?

My aim every season then became whether I could get the best out of the team I was coaching and let the Win/Loss column take care of itself. This would now be a measure of my success as a coach. It meant no cutting corners or taking short cuts in order to try to win more games, just an absolute concentration on making the players better so that they can use their skills to help their **TEAM**.

AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL COACHES IN ALL SPORTS

This piece was written by the father of a USA High School Basketball player to his son's coach:

'Dear Coach

We are giving you our most prized possession. Throughout the next 4 years, our son will make you one of our prime household conversations. He will tell us about your emotional half-time talk when you came from behind and won the Championship. When we are listening to all this talk, our son's eyes will shine. You see, coach, he will idolise you. So, YOU are our son's hero.

We are relying on you. His muscles are nearly developed but his mind is still fragile, and so impressionable. Your responsibilities are great. Accept them with our trust and faith in you. The world is full of gangs, drugs and violence because a kid picked the wrong hero. But you can change that, by becoming the right hero – for our son.'

COMMENT FROM JOE:

Wow, what an enormous responsibility a coach has. It is easy to forget, or take for granted, but is so important to your coaching.

How many times have I heard of an ex-player seeing his coach after a number of years and saying 'Coach, I didn't fully understand all you were getting at when I played for you, but now that I am older, have a family, have more responsibility in my job – now, I understand!'

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

On Doing Your Best

'A coach can only do his best, nothing more, but he does owe that, not only to himself, but to his players. If you truly do your best, and only you will really know, then you are successful and the actual score is immaterial whether it was favourable or unfavourable. However, when you fail to do your best, you have failed, even though the score may have been to your liking.'

On Success

'I want to pass on my love of running to younger athletes. I would like them to understand earlier than I did that winning a gold medal is not the difference between success and failure. If you do anything in life to the utmost of your ability, you are always a winner whether you come first or not. It is the key which has unlocked my life and I would like it to do the same for others.'

WILSON KIPKETER, FORMER 800M WORLD RECORD HOLDER

Another View on the Concept of Success

'If you are interested in success, it's easy to set standards in terms of other people's accomplishments and then let other people measure you by these standards. But the standards you set for yourself are always more important. They should be higher than the standards anyone else would set for you because, in the end, you have to live with yourself, and judge yourself, and feel good about yourself. The best way to do that is to live up to your highest potential. So, set your standards high and keep them high, even if you think no one else is looking. Somebody out there will always notice, even it's just you.'

COMMENT FROM JOE:

Much food for thought here.

How do you define what success is to YOU?

ON X'S AND O'S

'But Joe, are there any X's and O's in this booklet? Isn't this what coaching is really about?'

Yes, they absolutely need to be part of your philosophy but...

SOME THOUGHTS:

1. Lots of coaches in our Club know more about X's and O's than I do. Why not ask them.
2. I once worked with a teacher in our Chemistry department who had a PhD in Chemistry. If any member of our department had a problem with a topic, they went to the 'Prof' for advice. Due to his outstanding technical knowledge, he sorted out the problem for the teacher who then felt totally confident in teaching the class this topic. **However, the 'Prof' was a really poor teacher. What does this tell you?** (SEE NEXT PAGE.)



Andrew Lang

Andy is a wonderful example of what it means to be a team player. After a stellar Junior career, he went on to play 7 seasons at the highest level of English basketball for Manchester United, Manchester Eagles, Manchester Giants and latterly Cheshire Jets. The league was then called the Budweiser League which became the current BBL. Andy also represented GB at the World Student games in 1989 and 1991. As a point guard, his game was always based upon what he could do to help his team without any consideration of himself as an individual. His personal points tally was never a factor in his thinking. Andy is currently a valued member of our Magic Age Group coaching staff.

MOTIVATION: SEEING BEYOND THE X'S AND O'S

Wise words from a top American Basketball Coach:

'If I had to pinpoint one particular element of my own coaching method which helped me to succeed, it would be motivation. I don't claim to be any special basketball genius. I don't know everything there is to know about the game. I am certain there are lots of coaches in the game who know more. I believe there is a lot more to coaching and winning than mere technical knowledge. There is so much more to basketball or any other sport than just drawing lines on a blackboard, or reading somebody's diagrams or theories about the game.

The game is still played by human beings. You can be the most brilliant technician in history and your players the best-schooled ever in the technical points of the game, but your team isn't going to be a consistent winner if your players don't feel inspired to excel out of pride for both their team and themselves.

A teacher in the classroom may have all the knowledge in the world about his subject but still may be a poor teacher. **As a coach, ask yourself 'Am I able to get my team to play and practise with their hearts every time they enter the floor?'**

COMMENT FROM JOE:

I really like the piece above. It does mirror closely my own beliefs. Technical basketball knowledge alone is simply not enough. A quality coach needs other skills to succeed.



Jack Minister

Jack started as a very young boy at the Magic and went on to the USA on a 4-year scholarship.

He played for many years for our highly successful Magic Div 1 team. Jack was one of the smartest players and best passers of the ball to ever represent our Club, always putting the team first. Underrated by some, but always top quality for me.

WISE WORDS ABOUT COACHING PRINCIPLES

- The coach's qualities as a person are paramount in the coaching process – his/her values, ethics, standards. If the coach's moral code shines through, the youngsters will follow.
- Coach by example. Do your players respect what you are and what you stand for?
- Always care for your players. If you care for them, they will respect you. You won't always treat them the same but should always treat each one fairly.
- Accept your responsibility as a role model and act accordingly.
- Coaches should always serve the best interest of their players and not the coach's self-interest.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO COACHING?

'A coach should approach his work like a craftsman, not like a shop steward. That is where the real joy is. We are the craftsmen of the training and formation of sports people and should be more concerned with the progress they make rather than the results they achieve. It is the process that matters, not the victories. That is where the joy and satisfaction comes from. Our first priority is to ensure that our players develop and, after that, we think about how to win.'

JULIO VELASCO - RENOWNED ARGENTINIAN VOLLEYBALL COACH

WHAT NOT TO SAY?

(NOTE THAT THERE IS NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THE COMMENTS BELOW AND OUR CURRENT MAGIC AND MYSTICS COACHING STAFF.)

Coach A

'Big game this son, just give ME 15 rebounds and we'll win it.'

Really? Win it – are you sure?

Who are you playing the game for – the coach or your TEAM?

Coach B

'MY team are having a great season – I never expected to be 8 – 0 at this stage.'

Remind me again, who are you playing the game for – the coach or your TEAM? Whose TEAM is it?

Coach C

'Great job boys. Even though we lost, you gave ME 110% so I am really pleased with you.'

Really? Gave who 110% - the coach or your TEAM?

110% - really? Where has the 110% come from?

Coach D

'Johnny, I am not accepting this at my practice. The whole team – get on the line.'

Is this really the best way to motivate your team?

Is coaching by punishment likely to bring you success?

Coach E

'We would have won the game if we had our full team available.'

Should you be making excuses or should you not be asking 'have I got the best out of the available players?'

Coach F

'The refs were awful and cost us the game.'

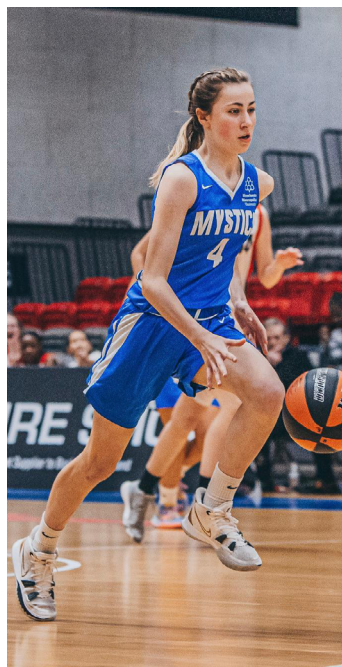
This is mental weakness. Should you not be saying 'We must win the game by a margin which will take the issue of poor/biased refs out of the equation.' I always said to a team going to a tough away game 'The refs are going to be biased, the table officials may miss some of our baskets, the floor will be slippery, and the

changing room will be filthy. We need to be 20 points better than this team so it will not matter about the so-called disadvantages.'

Coach G

'We were poor today. We were feeling the effects of yesterday's game.'

More excuses. Are you really saying your team is not fit enough to play 2 games in 2 days?



Maisie Keyes/Irene Oboavwodu

Early success when young can sometimes hinder progress. In the case of these 2 young Mystics players, I can only see it being beneficial due to their determination, ambition and ability. It will be an interesting few years following their progress. Watch this space!

Both girls were major factors in the GB U16 2022 Europeans and both were young in this age group - Irene has 2 more years and Maisie one more year in the U16 age group.

PHIL SCOLARI'S PHILOSOPHY

As we are in the middle of Manchester, with City and United, we have to have something with a football background.

Scolari coached the Brazilian team which won the World Cup in 2002. They beat England in the Quarter Final:

Half time - England 1 Brazil 1

Full time - England 1 Brazil 2

He also coached Chelsea in the 2008-09 season.

FROM PHIL:

'First of all, I value loyalty. I am very loyal to whoever works with me and whoever is on my side. I put my whole heart into a squad. I need to feel great affection for my players as well as trust. Some coaches do not attach much importance to this factor but this is the way I view football. I believe this attitude is very important when we have to overcome difficulties.

Just remember what happened in the Brazil versus England Quarter Final game in the 2002 World Cup. By looking each one of my players in the eye during half time and talking to them, we managed to gather the strength which led us to victory. Of course I work on tactics but the secret of our success lay in the feeling of unity, total trust and the sense of calm this engendered in the hearts and heads of the players.

My aim was to create a club atmosphere and the feeling of belonging, trust and friendship that lasts throughout a season. I make sure that there are no cliques to split the squad. It is important to place the big stars on an equal footing with the less well known. With Brazil, this meant treating a Ronaldo (Nazario, not Christiano) the same as a Kleberson.'

COMMENT FROM JOE:

Two words stand out here – loyalty and trust – must come from both players and coach to be meaningful. It is a 2-way street.

EARLY SUCCESS IS NOT ALWAYS GOOD

Joe Cole, prior to playing in the 2007 Cup Final (in which Chelsea were the winners 1 - 0, with an extra time goal) said:

‘I played at Wembley for England U15 when we beat West Germany. The only players who came through from that team to play senior football were Stevie Warnock, Leon Osman, Chris McCready and myself.’

COMMENT FROM JOE:

This is not unusual in most sports, certainly in soccer, rugby and basketball. The paragraph below is a suggestion for young players but good for a coach to appreciate this in dealing with this issue within his/her team.

If you are rejected for England, GB at a young age, it will naturally be a big disappointment but should not be unduly worrying. It should make you more determined to prove the selectors wrong. Physical development will always be a factor here. Boys/Girls will always develop physically (and mentally) at different times, so success for some will always come late. **Just don't give up!**



Graham Williams

Graham was an outstanding coach at the Magic for 20 years. Most of his coaching was done at U18 Boys level where he was immensely successful. The banners at the Centre will testify to his magnificent coaching.

He always got the best out of his players with a positive, encouraging approach. He rarely had to raise his voice as he had the total respect of his players.

Now in his 70s, we still miss his coaching!

VICTORY AND DEFEAT

‘I would rather experience the ecstasy of victory and the pain of defeat than spend any time in the grey twilight of life. It is not the critic who counts, not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled or how the doer of deeds might have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred with sweat and dust and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause and who, at best, knows the triumph of high achievement and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.’

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT, WHO WAS A POLITICIAN AND NOT A BASKETBALL PLAYER/COACH!
32ND USA PRESIDENT, 1933–1945.

COMMENT FROM JOE:

You will always get criticism and negativity from the outside, sometimes based upon envy. It is good in life just to go for it and disregard external criticism. You will make lots of mistakes and just need to learn from them. Who was it that said ‘when they go low, we go high’? In other words, don't let people drag you down to their poor standards, but rise above them.



Callum Jones

Mr Consistent. Callum, alongside his brother James and sister Georgia, was at the forefront of our early development as a Club in the late 90's and early 2000's. He was an outstanding Junior with us who went to Prep School in the USA before accepting a 4-year Scholarship over there. On his return, most of his Senior career has been with the Giants in the BBL, for many years coached by his dad, Jeff.

He represented England in the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast in Australia in 2018.

Will Callum finish his career by coming back to the Magic?!

SO YOU WANT TO BE A COACH?

1. Be totally honest at all times.
2. Stress loyalty – it works both ways.
3. Do the right thing regardless of the consequences.
4. Lead by example.
5. Never stop learning and changing.
6. Earn the trust of those being led.
7. Show who you are, what you stand for, your values and principles.
8. Remember your attitude becomes the attitude of the team.
9. Good values attract good people.
10. Find the best way, not your way.
11. Lead with the heart, as well as the head.
12. Never disrespect time.
13. Be totally enthusiastic and communicate this to the team.
14. Believe in people, trust them, and give them responsibility.
15. Create a belief in where you are going and how you are going to get there.
16. Make every member of the team feel valued.
17. Have respect for and give credit to other people.
18. Get everyone on the same page. Do not allow personal or hidden agendas.

COMMENT FROM JOE:

This kind of list could go on for ever. You may like to think about making your own list. I can say that all of the points in my list have been relevant at some stage in my coaching philosophy.

SOME THINGS I LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

A coach can only develop players by giving them the green light to play. This is obviously impossible for the coach who wishes to control everything that a player and team does on the floor. With freedom to play, players will find their own game – what they are good at and how to develop their skills. This approach demands considerable patience from the coach.

As an ex-teacher, I quickly learned that what I was SAYING to pupils was less important than what they were HEARING – 2 different things. So, the English teacher has a lesson with Set 1, followed by a lesson with Set 6. Is he/she going to communicate with them in the same way? Ask yourself, in talking to a team or individual, what are they HEARING?

If you practise with intensity and passion, you won't need to run your team up and down the floor to get them fit. Your drills will get them fit. What is the sense in practising anyway without a ball? (At least offensively.)

Keep it simple. Fundamental skills are the foundation of producing quality players. All the rules in basketball are written in favour of the offensive player – that is why the scores are so high.

Why complicate it?

Don't underestimate the value of praise. Try to be slow to criticise and quick to praise (not always easy).

Over coaching is very common whereby coaches are showing their players how much knowledge they have instead of asking themselves 'what do my players NEED TO KNOW at this stage of their development?'

The best pre-game talks tend to be the shortest. Don't bore them with 'we gotta play D, don't forget the fast break, rebounding will be a big key, patience in offence, take good shots, etc. etc.' A good coach will have prepared all this on the practice floor. Why repeat it all? Make only a few points in your pre-game, sometimes specific to the team you are playing, sometimes not.

Who was it that said ‘a picture paints a thousand words’? A good demonstration may be better than a great description. Don’t TELL them, SHOW them.

And finally, and most importantly, we hear all the platitudes about TEAM, as in ‘there’s no I in TEAM’, ‘Get rid of the ME and replace it with the WE’, ‘The strength of the wolf is the pack’, etc. etc. It took me a long, long time to truly understand this concept - getting all the players to fully realise and accept that EVERYTHING they do is for the TEAM and not for THEMSELVES. I found it to be a really difficult principle to get across to players, for them to take it on board and then to put it into practice, but this principle goes to the core of all I believe in as a coach.



Andrew Lovedale

Andrew came over from Nigeria in 2003 as a 17 year old, with nothing except a burning ambition.

After playing for the Magic for 2 years, he went to Davidson College in North Carolina on a 4-year scholarship and played in the same teams as Steph Curry.

After playing pro-ball in France, he set up his Foundation in Nigeria which combines academic achievement with basketball, based upon what he learned at our Club.

Andrew is the ultimate example of DETERMINATION to achieve his goals in life.

FOUNDATION WEBSITE:

www.a2sfoundation.org

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you are thinking deeply about your philosophy, it will change as you gain more experience. If it doesn’t change, then you are not thinking deeply enough.

A player should always give total effort and concentration from the first second of practice to the last second. If the coach is successful here, motivating the team to give their all in games will automatically follow from their approach on the practice floor. Why would a team give all they’ve got during the week and then not do so when it comes to weekend in competing against other teams?

Real coaches should always get better year on year. The improvement will come with bigger jumps early in your career, but even a 70 year old, with 50 years’ experience, should be improving, if only 1%.

I used to write something on the whiteboard before most practice sessions – making a point which I wanted to stress to the team. If, during the session, something occurred relative to the point I had written, we all took a trip (very short) to the board to emphasise the point I was trying to make.

My most common written piece pre-practice was: **‘Quality practice is everything.’**

My second most common written piece was: **‘Always remember the 2 Q’s – Quality and Quickness.’**

‘A man there was and they called him mad, the more he gave, the more he had.’ Joe, what on earth has this to do with basketball coaching?

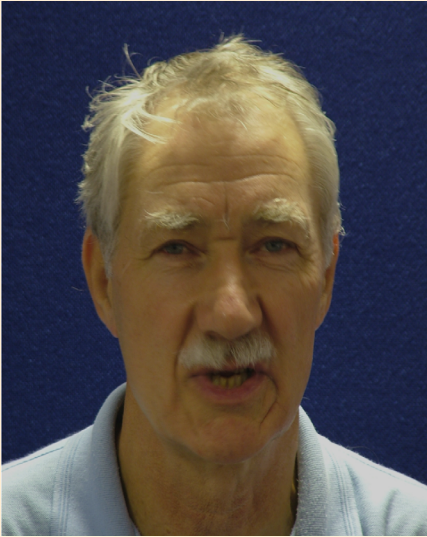
So, coach, what do YOU really believe in? It should not be what I believe in or what anyone else believes in. The philosophy is YOURS. I do wish that someone had asked me earlier in my coaching career to explain my philosophy. Now that would have made me THINK.

ALL THE BEST

I hope this booklet will be helpful to someone along the way. Even if it only helps one coach, it will have been worthwhile.

All the best for your future coaching career. Be really grateful that you have the opportunity to develop youngsters on and off the floor.

Oh, and ENJOY!



JOE FORBER