

The Sport of Association Management—Which Game Are You Playing?

A typical day for an association executive...It's 4th and 10 with seconds left on the clock, a field goal could win the game but the line judge said your tennis ball faulted out as your perfect putt veered just past the cup and you missed getting that last rebound for the winning basket. With no more time outs, your team lost the game!

Ever wonder which game you, your staff and board are playing? Whether everyone is embracing the same game book (strategic plan), rulebook (policies and procedures), and team responsibility (job description)?

What If:

- Using sports analogies, showcasing the best and the worst of group and individual dynamics, can advance how association's express leadership, management and communication.
- Volunteer and staff leaders, by using sports techniques, training practices, and coaching model can move their organizational efforts and value forward?
- Individual and team missteps, their failures and lessons learned, are perfect opportunities and training ground for tomorrow's leaders.
- The willingness to model leadership and management distinctions inherent in sports is easily translatable into volunteer and staff realities that deliver increased productivity and value.

Which Sport Does Your Association Model

The comparisons are many between associations and sports are many if we allow that metaphor to flow. Lessons from their playbook offer us opportunities for becoming world-class champions. We like they:

- Have certainty on what the goals are and how their achievement will be recognized;
- Make use of multiple skills and abilities within a specific timeframe;
- Define clearly the fields of play and responsibility perimeters for each player;
- Use the equipment masterfully for excellent rather than mediocre performance;
- Stellar performances by individuals and departmental teams are needed for real success;
- Have winning strategies formulated by “coaches” and executed by practiced players;
- Follow flexible implementation of the game plan with tactical modifications as needed; and
- Appreciate public demonstrations of confidence by raving fans and dislike objections from critics.
- Have universal appeal as they are everywhere, all the time, available when you want them
- Are interesting and inviting as there is an offering for every interest and ability;
- Offer performance upgrades whether a master or novice, advancement is always possible; and
- Want Engagement by stakeholders —both active involvement and passive observance are valuable.

Every sport and each game played has unique circumstances. Each has a start, actions taken over time and an ending when the game is over. The level of play is clear to the sport's aficionados. Interactions, even seemingly trivial ones, are clearly noted for their impact on the game's outcome. But in life or in your association, it may not be as clear. Why? Perhaps it's the lack of collaboration between staff and Board, missed signals on desired actions to be taken or even separate scoreboards recording achievement. Then again, maybe it's the discipline of practicing together as a team that missing. The team objective—having the mission and vision of the organization *practiced* in every communication, event, and program by every member, volunteer leader and staff.

Sports Lessons to Learn

- Leadership and management lessons could be translated from everyday sports stories.
- Strategic planning and their mid-course adaptations are as normal as a coach sending in a new play.
- Team and individual sports cultures are considered resources for problem solving and competency building.
- Practice is fundamental in sports, yet the fundamentals of organizational achievement are often neglected and rarely practiced.
- The importance of personal responsibility plus a partnership approach to accountability
- Keep doing what works and eliminate what does not—with urgency and rigor



Consider...

If members are in the stands, volunteer leaders on the field of play and staff are their coaches, then how are members (spectators) able to show their appreciation and encourage their *team* or ever be coaches? What equipment, practice and special training are available for your team (individually and together) so they all know the play expected or action to take? Both active and passive engagement should be valued.

Whether you are a local, state, national or international *team*, intentionally executing actions to win rather than losing the game by default matters. Every volunteer leader and professional staffer playing the game and every member watching from the stands wants to be a part of a world-class championship team. What constitutes *that* may be the biggest unanswered question. Keep in mind—*Who* is actually on the *field of play* at any given time or *in the stands* does alter the how the game is viewed, played, and appreciated. What needs to be fine-tuned at your next team practice?



New Language for Volunteer Leaders and Staff Teams

<i>In the Zone</i>	Being <i>one</i> with what's happening, an experience of oneness and a 360° awareness
<i>On the Bench</i>	Available to produce immediate results and add to the efforts of those already on playing
<i>Scoreboard</i>	Counts and measures efforts, actions and result, individual and team
<i>Rule Book</i>	Agreements for resource use, communication, roles, and protocols
<i>Double Pump</i>	Repetition of actions to enhance play execution
<i>Practice</i>	Gives a choice to enhance performance and results, a discipline
<i>B Game</i>	Playing less than you're A-game and still carrying the day
<i>Home Field</i>	Actions taken in very familiar settings to best leverage resources and opportunities
<i>Minor League</i>	Opportunity for training and development, fine tuning
<i>Batting Average</i>	Statistical record of hits at bat, measures productivity and success
<i>Nothing but Net</i>	Appearance of effortless delivery, consistently possible with practice
<i>In the Paint</i>	Urgent demand for immediate results
<i>Play Calling</i>	Someone not responsible for executing the play is calling the play
<i>Pinch Hitter</i>	Going into a game in progress, ready to deliver an immediate spike in action
<i>Offense & Defense</i>	Being aware of the project's status and able to advance its progress regardless of role
<i>Water Hazard</i>	If go here, project becomes irretrievable resulting in negative results
<i>Fairway</i>	A direct path to the goal but be careful – likely water or sand traps on either side of it
<i>Baseline</i>	Marks a critical boundary showing what's "in play" and what's not
<i>Forehand</i>	Popular action used by both novice and expert to control activity
<i>Pit Crew</i>	Collaborative activity where person's expertise counts
<i>Fans</i>	Cheering for the team's success from the sidelines not on the court
<i>Goalie</i>	Last line of defense, someone you count on to guard the team's success
<i>Play Book</i>	The strategic plan everyone is following, performance and value improves by its use
<i>Huddle</i>	Gathering together to review latest effort, analyze options and choose next actions
<i>Sacrifice Bunt</i>	Used to advance those players already on the field of play
<i>Assist</i>	Passing the opportunity for team's success to another player in a better position to score
<i>Rebound</i>	A player controls possession of a missed opportunity-whether offensive or defensive
<i>Team Penalty</i>	Fouls committed by an individual become a hardship situation to either team
<i>Suspended Game</i>	Deliberately halted, to be completed later. Resumes at exact time halted w/same players
<i>Off Sides</i>	A player has entered the neutral zone or made contact with other team before play started
<i>Ejected</i>	Player removed from field of play for unsportsmanlike action
<i>Fouled Out</i>	Individual player must leave game and team no longer has advantage of her expertise
<i>Caddie</i>	A support role, responsible for having equipment available plus advice on how to play

The key to consistency of performance is concentration. Each game, at the beginning of each play, I thought of it as the most important play of the year. I went into every play as if the game depended in it.

Merlin Olsen, NFL Hall of Fame



Books

- Coach to Coach-Business Lessons from the Locker Room, John Robinson
- How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work, Robert Kogan & Lisa Laskowlakey
- The Winner Within, A Life Plan for Team Players, Pat Riley
- They Call Me Coach, John Wooden with Jack Tobin
- Quiet Strength: The Principles, Practices and priorities of a Winning Life, Tony Dungy
- The Meaning of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football and Basketball and What They See When they Do, Michael Mandelbaum
- The Joy of Sports, End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit, Michael Novak
- The Last Word on Power, Executive Re-Invention for Leaders Who Must Make The Impossible Happen, Tracy Goss
- The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, A Leadership Fable, Patrick Lencioni

Movies

- Basketball— Hoosiers, Hoop Dreams, A League of Their Own
- Baseball— Bull Durham, The Natural, The Pride of the Yankees, A League of Their Own, Ken Burns-Baseball
- Boxing— Raging Bull, The Great White Hope, Ali, The Cinderella Man, The Hurricane, Rocky
- Football —Friday Night Lights, Any Given Sunday, The Replacements, Rudy, Remember the Titans, Invincible
- Golf—Tin Cup, The Legend of Bagger Vance, The Man with the Perfect Swing
- Hockey— Miracle, Slap Shot, The Mighty Ducks, The Deadliest Season
- Tennis—Wimbledon, The Prince of Tennis
- Track & Field—Chariots of Fire, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, The Runner

Quotes

Achievement is difficult. It requires enormous effort. Those who can work through the struggle are the ones who are going to be successful. Jackie Joyner-Kersey

A bad attitude is worse than a bad swing. Payne Stewart

Confidence comes from being prepared. John Wooden

Sometimes it just takes patience one play at a time, moving towards the goal. Janet Guthrie

Anytime you want to, you can go out and pad your numbers, but to win, you have to have everybody around you playing great. Bill Walton

If you want to improve incrementally, be competitive. If you want to improve exponentially, be cooperative Anonymous

It isn't hard to be good from time to time in sports. What's tough is being good everyday. Willie Mays

The secret of winning football games is working as a team, less as individuals. I play not my eleven best, but my best eleven. Knute Rockne

Most people think I'm practicing before I play, but I'm not. I'm just warming up. I practice after the round. The first thing I practice is every shot that I hit poorly that day. I practice all the shots I didn't have to hit that day...if you've practice everyday, you're confident of hitting well. Jack Nicklaus





Leadership Lessons Learned—Coach Tony Dungy...Modeling a Legacy of Leadership by Rhea Blanken, Results Technology

Tony Dungy is one of the most respected and popular NFL coaches in the National Football League. His influence to the game of football resonated all the way to the 2009 Super Bowl win by the Pittsburgh Steelers. For association boards and staffs often overtaken by today's circumstances, following Coach Dungy's philosophies are certain to boost your efforts.

Legacy of Leadership

Dungy's career includes several notable firsts. He is the first NFL head coach to defeat all 32 NFL teams. At age 25, he was the youngest assistant coach and at age 28, the youngest coordinator in NFL history. In 2007, Dungy became the first African American to coach a winning Super Bowl (XLI) team. By the time he retired in Jan. 2009, he had two Super Bowl victories (XIII, XLI); two AFC Championships victories (1978, 2006); achieved a regular season record 139-69-0; a playoff record of 9-10; and an overall record of 148-79-0.

Dungy played quarterback for University of Minnesota, safety for the Pittsburgh Steelers from 1977-78 and the San Francisco 49ers in 1979, was head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 1996-2001, and head coach of the Indianapolis Colts 2002-2008.

On December 18, 2008 after securing his tenth straight playoff appearance with a win against the Jacksonville Jaguars, Dungy set a new NFL record for consecutive playoff appearances by a head coach. Dungy knows how to win. He has coached many through defeat and on to victory. He knows how to teach leaders to lead. Coach Dungy believed his primary job, as a coach, was to build men worthy of being role models to a nation of boys who look up to them.

Coaching Leaders to Lead

Leaders mentor others into leaders—that is part of a leader's responsibility. Coach Dungy has given more than lip service to this philosophy—he has lived it. Influenced by the coaching philosophies and defensive system of Chuck Noll, Dungy's coaching legacy out of the Pittsburgh Steelers' dynasty of the 1970s and has spread its influence wide and deep. As of January 29, 2009, three from Dungy's coaching staff are head coaches of NFL teams: Jim Caldwell, Indianapolis Colts coach, was Assistant head coach Indianapolis; Lovie Smith, Chicago Bears coach, was Linebackers coach at Tampa Bay; and Mike Tomlin, Pittsburgh Steelers coach, was Defensive backs coach at Tampa Bay!

Coaching philosophy

Dungy's philosophy was formed by taking something from every coach he came in contact with — Noll in Pittsburgh, Walsh in San Francisco, Schottenheimer in Kansas City, and Green in Minnesota. He took his own beliefs and values and blended it with their teaching. Mentored by many, he has maintained that tradition.

No Excuses-No Explanations

In his memoir, *Quiet Strength: The Principles, Practices, and Priorities of a Winning Life*, Coach Dungy speaks of living a life and playing the game of football from the prospective of responsibility and accountability. Dungy, his coaches and team were clear what their goal was—to win the game. He knew having individual talent stood accountability for delivering results was primary and that the lack of team unity would contribute to a losing environment.

Dungy believed having everyone pulling together at the same time for the same result was essential. But just as important, he knew people used circumstances as excuses or explanations for not playing their best. This was unacceptable to him. His expectations were unmistakable: "be a pro; act like a champion; respond to adversity, don't react to it; be on time—being late means it's not important to you or you can't be relied upon; execute—do what you are supposed to do, when you are supposed to do it, not almost - all the way, not most of the time - all the time; and take ownership, whatever it takes."



Next Man Up

He knew it took all 53 players on his team to win so he trained even the 53rd player on his roster as if he would be the 3rd player. This was Dungy's coaching philosophy. He insisted his team have a thought process, a philosophy of action and the commitment to stick with it, even if personnel changes occurred during a game. He knew injuries can happen at anytime and the game must continue. His coaches and team trained and practiced: everyone had a job to do; every job impacts the team's results; and anyone may be called upon at anytime to do more if the situation demanded. Are you staff and volunteers living up to this standard? Are you?

Warrick Dunn, Tampa Bay Buccaneers running back confirmed Dungy's leadership legacy when he said, *The good news is that Coach Dungy... is moving his extraordinary influence to other places. Just like he did for me and for countless other players, he will always be able to help teach young men how to be grown and able men. And we need this, not just in football, but in the bigger game of life.*

Consider

- What does your organization's leadership tree look like?
- How does your organization nurture Board, volunteer and staff leaders?
- How are accomplishments from your best and brightest tracked and honored?
- How are mentors selected, developed and cultivated?
- How does accountability and unity manifest in your organization?
- What testimonials would your staff give confirming your leadership legacy?

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