
SUCCESS IS IN THE DETAILS

and Other Life Lessons from
COACH WOODEN'S PLAYBOOK

PAT WILLIAMS
with Jim Denney



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Foreword

To the world, he was Coach John Wooden, the greatest coach of all time. To me, he was—and always will be—Daddy. And the same qualities that made him such a wonderful father also made him a great teacher and coach.

When Daddy was coaching at UCLA, my brother, Jim, and I loved going to the games. We'd sit in the stands with our mother, and before each game, Daddy and Mom would always perform a little ritual. He'd pull up his socks, then he'd reach over and tap his assistant coach on the knee. Finally, he'd turn and look at Mom up in the stands and make an okay sign with his thumb and forefinger—and the basketball game could begin.

That okay sign that passed between them was a tradition going back to their high school days, when Johnny Wooden was a star basketball player at Martinsville High in Indiana. Mom was the only girlfriend he ever had, the only girl he ever loved. They had met at a town carnival, but Daddy, being very shy, didn't know how to ask her out on a date. So at a Martinsville game, just before tip-off, he looked up into the stands and caught her eye. She was in the band, playing cornet, and when she saw him looking at her,

she flashed him the okay sign, meaning, “Good luck!” And he gave the sign back to her, meaning, “Thanks!”

That was their secret code from then on. A game couldn’t begin until their eyes met and he gave her the okay sign.

If only every child in the world could have parents like mine. When I was a child, I didn’t realize what a rare privilege it was to be raised by parents of such loving, godly character. I had nothing to compare them to. I not only grew up hearing all the wise, inspirational sayings you’ve read in Daddy’s books (now known as “Woodenisms”) but also had the privilege of watching him up close and knowing that he practiced every word he preached.

Daddy lived to serve people and to make others feel special. That’s why he was never too busy for anyone. Whenever you spoke to him, he gave you his full attention. He listened. He was genuinely interested in you and everything you had to say. And when he spoke, whatever he told you was solid-gold wisdom you could apply to your life.

He had a deep love for my mother bordering on reverence. He thought she did everything perfectly, especially the way she took care of her home and her family. On one occasion, I found him on his knees in the kitchen with a towel. He was mopping up some spilled homemade orangeade from the floor—*then squeezing it back into the pitcher.*

Horried, I asked him what he was doing.

He winked at me and said, “Don’t worry, Nan—your mother’s floor is so clean you can eat off it.”

That was my Daddy, the wonderful, fascinating, one-in-a-million man you’re about to discover (or rediscover) in these pages.

This is the fourth book Pat Williams has written about my father, John Wooden. With each new book, Pat seems to uncover some new facet of his character, some deeper understanding of what it was that made him so special.

Here Pat explores a time in my father’s life that has long been neglected—Daddy’s “second career” as a coach at summer youth

basketball camps. Pat uncovers new insights into my father’s life—his values, his faith, his intensely competitive spirit, and his serving heart. You’ll encounter insights, stories, and words Daddy spoke that have never before been published.

Pat also captures the essence of Dad’s Pyramid of Success. The world is familiar with the Pyramid and the good character qualities it promotes. But I’m not sure everyone understands the *real* power of the Pyramid of Success.

Many people seem to think that the Pyramid was something my father taught his players *in addition* to teaching them the game of basketball. That’s a misunderstanding. The Pyramid of Success was the foundation of everything he taught about basketball. It was the foundation of everything he taught about life. It was the foundation of the way he lived his life. It was the foundation of who he was as a husband, father, teacher, and man of God.

You can’t understand his greatness as a coach until you understand his Pyramid. He formulated the Pyramid over a period of years—not so much as a set of lessons to teach but as a set of unbending principles he chose to live by throughout his life.

This is a book to be treasured, studied, and lived in. Whether you are a coach, an athlete, a sports fan, a business leader, a teacher—or you simply want to be a wiser, more influential human being—this book will deepen your understanding of the ideals and precepts that made Coach John Wooden the wonderful man he was.

So read on. Discover how my father impacted the lives of hundreds and hundreds of young people on those “forgotten teams” at his summer youth camps. Listen to his words. Rediscover his Pyramid. Imagine yourself as a boy or girl on a basketball court in the middle of summer, being taught by the greatest coach of all time.

Then see how these stories and lessons change *your* life.

Nan Wooden
Los Angeles, California
January 15, 2017

Introduction

A Coach for All Seasons

Make greatness attainable by all.
Coach John Wooden

You and I could argue all day about who's the *second* greatest coach in the world. Phil Jackson? Don Shula? Mike Krzyzewski? Bear Bryant? Vince Lombardi? A good case could be made for any one of these great coaches.

But the greatest coach of *all* time in *any* sport? That's beyond dispute. Coach John Wooden has that position all sewn up. In July 2009, the *Sporting News* made it official by publishing a ranking of the fifty greatest coaches of all time, in every sport, both collegiate and professional. A blue-ribbon panel of sportswriters, coaches, and top athletes placed Wooden at the top. Over a twelve-year period, Coach Wooden's UCLA Bruins won an unparalleled ten NCAA national championships, including seven in a row. During that era, the Bruins won a record eighty-eight games in a row, not

to mention two other winning streaks of forty-seven and forty-one games.

Before Coach Wooden arrived at UCLA, the school had never won a national championship and had won only two conference championships in the previous eighteen years. Coach Wooden achieved a dramatic turnaround in his first UCLA season, turning a 12-13 losing team into a 22-7 Pacific Coast Conference Southern Division champion. Coach Wooden's Bruins clinched the division title again the following year, this time with a 24-7 record. He established a tradition of sustained success throughout his tenure at UCLA.

Now, I've heard a few sports know-it-alls claim that Coach Wooden could never achieve such a feat in today's basketball environment. They spout such uninformed opinions as, "Anybody could win back-to-back championships with stars like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Bill Walton." Or, "There are more teams in the NCAA now—the competition would be much tougher." Or, "Coach Wooden taught an old-school approach that would never work today."

Well, that's a load of horsefeathers!

Greg Hayes has coached basketball at UCLA and the Master's College and is a color commentator for FOX Sports West. He's heard many of those same ignorant opinions, and he told me a story that broke my heart.

"A few years ago," Hayes said, "I was at UCLA to coach at a high school basketball camp that Jim Harrick ran. Jim had invited Coach to speak to the coaches at the camp. I was there with the other coaches, and I could hear some whispering and laughing. They were young, and they just didn't get who Coach was and what he'd accomplished. They just thought he was an old guy from back in the day and there was nothing they could learn from him.

"One guy was really disrespectful. I heard him say about Coach, 'He doesn't know anything anymore, so why are we here?' He

must have thought Coach couldn't hear him, but I saw the look on Coach's face. He could feel the disrespect in the room. He was hurt. I saw it in his eyes. He was thinking, *Maybe I'm not relevant anymore. Maybe my time has passed.* Yet Coach was so humble and never complained when people criticized him.

"My heart went out to him. After his talk, the other coaches filed out, and I sat next to him. It was one of those moments when he was just so human. He was hurting, but he didn't say a word about it. We just talked. I wanted to let him know how much he meant to me. Just being there, sharing that moment, made me love him all the more.

"It also made me more determined than ever to let the world know that Coach is as relevant today as he ever was. I want people to know who Coach was and that his lessons are timeless. I want people to know that Coach Wooden was the greatest coach of all time and that if he was coaching today, he'd still be dominating everybody."

As I listened to Greg Hayes, I became angry thinking about those gym rats who thought they knew more about basketball than a man who was both a Hall of Fame player and a Hall of Fame coach (yes, John Wooden was inducted into the Hall of Fame *twice*). Hayes was right. John Wooden would still be winning championships if he was coaching today.

Coach Wooden won championships *with* superstar players and *without* superstar players. He won before Kareem and Bill Walton arrived, and he won after they left. He started building a winning tradition at UCLA when the basketball program was still housed in a decrepit, foul-smelling, Depression-era gymnasium known as the "B.O. Gym." UCLA's facilities were so embarrassingly bad that home games had to be played off campus at local high school gyms or at the Los Angeles Sports Arena.

During one basketball camp, Coach reminisced about his early days at UCLA, saying, "Under the conditions in which we worked,

we had no home court, we practiced in a gym that only had two baskets, and the gymnastics team and the wrestling team were practicing right next to the basketball court. The gymnastics team had a lot of pretty coeds in leotards hopping up and down on trampolines, and I found it difficult to hold the attention of my players. I learned to accept those difficulties over which I had no control and to focus on the things I could control. We finally won our first championship, and we won under those exact conditions.”

Is the competition tougher today than it was in Coach Wooden’s day? Coach Ray Lokar, a leader in the Positive Coaching Alliance, spent a number of years coaching at Coach Wooden’s camps. He explains why the competition was actually tougher during the Wooden era: “Back then you only got in the NCAA tournaments if you won your conference title. You had to be good for months to win the title back then. Now you can play poorly and struggle but get hot for a few weeks and win the title. . . . Do you know that Coach’s ten NCAA title teams lost a total of ten games? And

*“It’s what you learn
after you know it
all that counts.”*

back then everyone was focused on beating UCLA, yet they still couldn’t.”¹

Fact is, Coach was endlessly adaptable. When the game changed, he changed with it. Every year he focused on some aspect of the game and studied it intensely, often

by interviewing other coaches. One of Coach’s famous maxims was “It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.” And he didn’t just preach it—he lived it.

For example, in 1964, before UCLA had won its first national tournament, Coach Wooden was pondering how to play his under-sized Bruins against significantly taller opponents. His assistant, Jerry Norman, suggested that UCLA’s well-conditioned players and fast-paced offense would be more effective when paired with a zone press defense, designed to force opponents to make turnovers. Coach Wooden adopted Norman’s suggestion—and UCLA’s

scoring surged. Instantly, the Bruins became a near-unstoppable force, with an undefeated record of 30-0, capping their season with a 98-83 victory over the taller-yet-slower Duke Blue Devils in the NCAA championship game. The UCLA zone press defense forced twenty-nine turnovers in that game and completely erased Duke's five-inch height advantage. That was the first of Coach Wooden's ten national championships.

No matter how the game has changed from Coach Wooden's time until today, or how much it might change in the future, Coach Wooden would have adapted. A commitment to continuous improvement was key to his character. Wooden was so much more than a product of his time. He was a coach for *all* times, a coach for *all* seasons.

I'm constantly amazed that I had the great privilege of knowing him and learning from him. Though I had followed Coach Wooden's career since his heyday at UCLA, my first personal encounter with him came in July 2000 when I checked my voice mail and heard him say, "Mr. Williams, this is John Wooden, the former basketball coach at UCLA." As if he needed any introduction.

He had called to offer his personal recommendation for a UCLA trainer who had recently applied to work for the Orlando Magic. He concluded, "Mr. Williams, I enjoy reading your books very much."

I had to sit back and absorb the fact that the legendary Coach John Wooden had called and wanted to talk to *me*. Then I returned the call, and we had a wonderful chat. He spoke as if we were old friends. That was the first of many encounters I would have with Coach Wooden over the next decade, until he passed away in June 2010. During the final decade of his life, he invited me into his life in an amazing way.

Whenever I was on the West Coast, I would make a pilgrimage to Coach Wooden's modest, middle-class condo in Encino, California. At five o'clock sharp, we'd get in my rental car and head

to Sherman Oaks for dinner at the Valley Inn, Coach Wooden's favorite dining spot. We'd arrive in time for the early bird special and the Valley Inn's famous clam chowder. We'd talk about our shared love of basketball, our shared faith, and our shared fascination with history.

The more I learned from him, the more I wanted to write about this great man and all the things he taught me. So I approached Coach Wooden for permission to write a book about his life and success principles. He gave me his humble permission: "Though I'm not worthy of a project like this, if you would like to write this book, you go right ahead." So in 2006, my first book about Coach was published: *How to Be Like Coach Wooden*.

I thought that book said all there was to say about Coach, but as I continued talking to him and the people who knew him, I discovered I had barely scratched the surface of this man's wisdom and greatness. I learned that his life had been shaped by a simple seven-point philosophy that his father had taught him, so I journeyed to Indiana, to the town where John Wooden grew up and the farm where he was born. Then I wrote *Coach Wooden: The 7 Principles that Shaped His Life and Will Change Yours*.

In 2014, I wrote a book about an insight Coach Wooden had shared with me over dinner at the Valley Inn—*Coach Wooden's Greatest Secret: The Power of a Lot of Little Things Done Well*. Once again, I thought I had plumbed the depths of this man's deep wisdom. And once again, I was wrong.

Soon after that book was published, I heard about the John Wooden Basketball Fundamentals Camp, which he conducted from 1971 (while he was still coaching at UCLA) to the mid-1980s. Most people thought that after Coach had retired from college basketball coaching in 1975, he had faded into obscurity. But Coach had not gone fishing. He had moved on to a new phase of his career as a teacher, mentor, and coach. Every summer he led three weeklong basketball camps, each camp accommodating approximately three

hundred campers. Instead of being Coach to a dozen college basketball players each year, he was Coach to nine hundred basketball campers ranging from elementary-school age to high-school age. Many of his camps included both boys and girls. Coach was living out his own maxim “Make greatness attainable by all.”

*“Make greatness
attainable by all.”*

You can’t go to a John Wooden Basketball Fundamentals Camp. But through these pages, I’m going to take you back in time. I’m going to help you experience what it was like to be coached by the greatest coach of all time.

So put on your gym socks and lace up your shoes. Grab a basketball and meet me in the gym. Let me introduce you to my friend, my mentor, my coach—John Wooden.

Pat Williams
Orlando, Florida

1

More than a Basketball Camp

Seek opportunities to show you care. The smallest gestures often make the biggest difference.

Coach John Wooden

Craig Impelman was an assistant men's basketball coach at UCLA in the post-Wooden era, 1976 to 1984. In 1984, he married Coach Wooden's granddaughter Christy and became part of the family. Impelman conducted his own basketball camps, and Coach Wooden spoke at those camps for a number of years.

Impelman would sometimes introduce Coach Wooden to his campers with this story: "I was a fan of John Wooden for years. I was an assistant coach at UCLA, and I wanted to become as much like Coach Wooden as I could. While at UCLA, I often visited Coach Wooden at his home and talked basketball. He was the greatest basketball coach around, and I thought I knew him pretty well.

“One year I attended a basketball camp in Santa Barbara where Coach Wooden was speaking. While I was sitting in the bleachers, waiting for him to speak, I said to a coach sitting next to me, ‘You know, the greatest thing about Coach Wooden is that he’s an even better person than he is a basketball coach.’

“Sitting in front of me was a man named Max Shapiro, who had run Coach Wooden’s basketball camps for years. Max overheard me, and he turned and said, ‘Craig, you’re missing the whole point about Coach Wooden. The reason he’s such a great basketball coach is *because* he’s such a great person.’

“Max opened my eyes. I finally understood what I should have known all along: being a good person is essential to being successful in life. You’ve got to be a good person *first* before you can even think about being a great coach or a great basketball player. Coach Wooden won ten national championships during his last twelve years coaching at UCLA. The most national championships any other school has won? Three.

“But here’s the amazing thing: that’s the accomplishment Coach Wooden is the *least* proud of! He’ll tell you he’s more proud of the fact that his players all graduated and went on to become doctors, lawyers, and ministers. He’s more proud that the people he taught went on to become good people who did good things in life. So if you get anything out of this week at camp, I hope you learn how to be a good person like Coach Wooden.”

Impelman’s introduction helped set the tone for the entire week at camp. The most important goal of Coach Wooden’s basketball camps was building character.

Max Shapiro—the man who ran Coach Wooden’s camps—is a longtime friend of mine. While researching this book, I called him and asked him how the John Wooden Basketball Fundamentals Camp began.

“In 1970,” Shapiro said, “I was living in San Diego. I drove up to UCLA to meet with Coach Wooden. At that point, he was

making \$25,000 a year coaching the Bruins. I said, ‘Coach, I’d love to do summer camps with you. We could do them at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks. We could hold three week-long camps for three hundred kids per week. That would be nine hundred campers each summer. I would pay you forty dollars per camper for a total of \$36,000 for the summer. What do you think?’

“Coach replied, ‘Max, I appreciate your interest, but I must decline. I have to be at school, and it’s an hour’s drive from the campus to Thousand Oaks, and I don’t like to drive.’

“I said, ‘Coach, we can solve that. I’ll have a driver for you every day, and we’ll work the schedule out so you can be back at school by three in the afternoon.’

“Coach said, ‘Okay, let’s try it.’

“So we held our first camp at Cal Lutheran in the summer of 1971. Eventually, those summer camps put all of his grandkids through college.”

The Living Legacy of the Camps

Actor Jim Caviezel played the demanding title role in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* and starred in the CBS crime drama *Person of Interest* for five seasons. Caviezel’s father, James Sr., played freshman basketball at UCLA under Coach Wooden and assistant Jerry Norman in 1959–60. The senior Caviezel likely would have played on Coach Wooden’s first championship team if a knee injury hadn’t cut short his playing career.

Despite that injury, Jim Caviezel’s father maintained a lifelong friendship with Coach Wooden and made sure that his son attended Coach Wooden’s summer basketball camps. “I knew Coach Wooden until he died,” the younger Caviezel recalled. “He’d come over, and he was like my grandfather. . . . I watched him and was connected to him through my entire life.”

Jim remembered his father giving him a choice: either go to Coach Wooden's basketball camp or work on a farm baling hay. It was a no-brainer—Caviezel went to camp. There he learned the fundamentals of the game—and the fundamentals of life, as taught through the Pyramid of Success.

Caviezel observed that Bruins fans “won't be surprised to know the first thing Dad ever taught me was to put my socks and shoes on properly. Coach Wooden told his players that wrinkles cause blisters and blisters steal time. He said getting socks and shoes right was the start of everything they'd need to know for the rest of their lives. . . . Attending Coach Wooden's summer basketball camps, I learned to stay in my game, focus on execution, and ignore the scoreboard.”

Through the Pyramid of Success, Coach Wooden taught young Jim Caviezel the importance of maintaining one's character and values. A devout Catholic, Caviezel rejects any screen roles that would violate his faith. Though Caviezel works in an industry dominated by narcissistic egos, he is known for his humility and strong moral principles. He is a walking testament to the positive influence of Coach John Wooden.¹

Greg Hayes attended his first John Wooden basketball camp immediately after his graduation from UCLA in 1977. That first year he served as a camp counselor. He returned every summer for the next twelve years as a coach. Hayes told me, “Coach Wooden influenced hundreds of players during his twenty-seven years of coaching, but in the summer basketball camps, he influenced well over ten thousand campers and probably more than a thousand coaches, including me.

“His camp coaches went on to great things because of what they learned directly from Coach. And there were many indirect benefits of coaching at his camps as well. Just being associated with Coach Wooden opened many career doors for us. The coaches learned from each other, and many of the older coaches mentored

the younger ones. Coach Wooden made sure that only the most highly motivated coaches worked at his camps.

“We made friends and contacts that were helpful in our careers. And Coach himself was always willing to make phone calls and write letters to help us find jobs. Many camp coaches were high school, community college, and college coaches. We all became better classroom teachers as well as better coaches because of Coach Wooden’s influence.

“The camps were run efficiently and professionally. But the important thing was that so many lives were touched. We were like family. We cared for each other. There was very little turnover from year to year. Most of the staff returned every summer.

“One way the influence of Coach Wooden’s camps has continued is through the coaches who have gone on to run their own camps. They use their basketball camps the same way Coach Wooden used his—to teach character and life skills. Coach set an example that people want to follow. His influence goes on and on. That’s the legacy of his camps.”

Day One: Sunday

The camps opened early Sunday afternoon. Most years Coach Wooden and his wife, Nell, came straight from church, and she assisted with the check-in and registration of the campers. Coach and Nell often brought their granddaughters to help, and Greg Hayes recalled, “All the counselors and young coaches were in love with their granddaughters.”

Campers and staff were abuzz with excitement on opening day. Some were about to experience their first Coach Wooden camp. Others were returning for the second or third time. All were excited about being in the presence of the greatest coach of all time.

Some coaches came from across the country, but most were top coaches from local high schools, colleges, and community colleges. They didn't come only to teach. They came to *learn*. The coaches saw the camps as a chance to recharge their own batteries while improving their coaching and teaching skills.

Coaches arrived by 1:00 p.m. and gathered for their first meeting with Coach Wooden at 2:30—a coaches' clinic that set the tone for the week. The coaches' handbook summed up Coach Wooden's expectations for his staff: "A great deal of the camp's success will be due to the enthusiasm, willingness, and cooperation of you, the *coach*. It is imperative that you are at your best at all times during the week."

Next, Coach Wooden spoke at a meeting of parents and campers to set forth goals and expectations. Then Coach led the campers in an exercise that went back to his earliest days as a college coach: showing his players how to put on their socks and shoes. At first glance, this might seem like an extreme case of majoring in the minors. These kids had come to learn the UCLA high post offense and the zone press defense. Why was Coach teaching them how to put on their socks and shoes?

Knowing how to properly care for one's feet was foundational to everything Coach Wooden wanted to teach his campers—and not merely because he was concerned about blisters. I think Coach was teaching his players a lesson in character and humility.

It's a humbling thing to be told how to put on your socks and how to tie your shoes. These are skills we all learn before entering kindergarten. If his lesson was simply about blisters, Coach could have addressed it in a printed handout. But I think Coach was teaching much more than proper foot care. He was teaching his players the importance of small details in every aspect of the game, in every aspect of life. He was teaching the character trait of humility. He was teaching the importance of following instructions.

I recently talked to Steve Kerr, who played for the Bulls, Spurs, and Trail Blazers in the NBA and now coaches the Golden State Warriors. I asked him about the John Wooden basketball camps, and his eyes lit up. “Oh yeah, absolutely,” Kerr said with a grin. “I went to Coach Wooden’s summer camp for two years. I remember the first thing Coach Wooden taught us was how to put on our socks and shoes and to make sure our room keys were attached to our sneaker laces and tied tight so we wouldn’t lose our room keys. He taught us all the UCLA basketball drills, but the socks, shoes, and room keys were the first order of business. Boy, those were fun days.”

Entrepreneur Dick Kazan recalled taking his twelve-year-old son, Kyle, to a John Wooden camp in 1979. “I recall a hot summer day and a packed gym,” he said. “The kids were laughing and shouting out to one another as basketballs bounced on hardwood flooring, the noise echoing to the rafters. . . . Then everything fell silent as the word spread, *Coach Wooden is coming*. And with no fanfare, this man of such quiet but powerful presence walked into the room.”²

Sunday was also the day the three hundred campers were divided into thirty-two teams, and the teams were divided into associations or conferences. The teams were formed largely on the basis of a random drawing but with some redistribution of players if it seemed that some teams had too much or too little talent.

After dinner, campers enjoyed free time until 8:15 p.m., when they reported to the gym for roll call. In the gym, the campers watched UCLA championship game films. Then at 9:30, the campers all headed to their dorm rooms. They were allowed a phone call home, a shower, and time to unpack before lights out at 10:00 p.m.

Dormitory roommates were usually assigned by random drawing. One lesson campers were expected to learn was how to make new friends and get along with others.

Day Two: Monday

Monday was the first full day of the camp. A driver (usually a counselor) brought Coach to the camp. He generally arrived at 6:30 or so in the morning to have breakfast in the cafeteria with the campers and coaches at 7:00. At 8:00, everyone—campers, counselors, coaches, support staff, and Coach Wooden himself—gathered for a group camp photo. The coaches reminded the campers that all shirts had to be tucked in.

After the photo session came the basketball drills. Coach taught the first half hour of drills himself. The camp had his name on it, and he made it special. He was fully involved in each camp, and that's why his campers and coaches kept coming back summer after summer.

The first half hour was intensive. Coach put his campers through the same drills he used to teach his championship teams at UCLA. Coach wanted to create the same culture in his camps that he had produced in his UCLA teams—a culture of mutual respect and consideration, of discipline and hard work combined with enthusiasm, a culture that focused on executing the fundamentals.

I recently had lunch with Basketball Hall of Famer Jamaal “Silk” Wilkes, who was a key player with Coach Wooden's Bruins before going on to a stellar NBA career with the Golden State Warriors and the Los Angeles Lakers. Wilkes was a frequent guest speaker at Wooden's basketball camps, and he told me he was impressed with the way Coach ran the camps. “Coach was very engaged with the campers,” Wilkes said, “very hands-on. He took great pride in the caliber of instruction offered at the camps. It was UCLA-level instruction. Coach always saw himself as a teacher and was never concerned about self-promotion or acting like a big shot. He always represented UCLA and his own code of ethics the best he could in everything he did. And that included the summer basketball camps.”

During the morning drills, Coach Wooden paced the stage and used a microphone to call out encouragement, instructions, and his signature maxims: “Flexibility is the key to stability” and “Be quick but don’t hurry.” He observed each player and sometimes directed one of his coaches to work with a player on technique. Campers were often surprised that this soft-spoken, grandfatherly man could be as authoritative as a Marine Corps drill sergeant. Coach was positive and encouraging, but when he blew his whistle, campers instantly gave him their attention. Coach was one of those rare individuals who commanded with authority but without fear.

*“Flexibility is the
key to stability.”*

Coach ended every workout just as he ended his UCLA practices. He always concluded with a word of approval or a joke. His habit of ending workouts on a positive note reflected his belief that teachers should always encourage and affirm—that’s the best way to get a lesson across to students.

Next, campers rotated through eight skill stations, each station focused on a specific skill: dribbling, passing, shooting, lay-ups, pick-and-rolls, stops and pivots, rebounding and defense, and the elements of the UCLA high post offense. These were the same drills Coach Wooden used with his UCLA players during the championship seasons.

While his coaches conducted the eight-station drills, Coach Wooden took a five- or six-mile walk around the campus accompanied by a camp director or counselor. Greg Hayes and Max Shapiro both mentioned a habit Coach displayed on those walks: if there was any litter along the way, even a gum wrapper, he’d go out of his way to pick it up and dispose of it. Shapiro recalled, “We’d be walking along the grounds at Cal Lutheran, and if Coach saw a piece of paper twenty feet away, he’d go over and pick it up.” When Coach Wooden stooped to pick up trash, he made an impression

on coaches, counselors, and campers. He showed by example the kind of person he wanted them all to be.

Coach returned from his walk before lunchtime. And lunchtime was work time for Coach. He sat at a table surrounded by coaches, and they asked him questions and sought his advice. This was an informal coaches' clinic over cafeteria food. Many coaches reported that those meals with Coach Wooden were some of the most instructive and memorable times of their camp experience.

Though some of Coach Wooden's camps were held at places like Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego or Pepperdine University in Malibu, most of the Wooden camps were held at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, Coach Wooden's camps shared the Cal Lutheran campus with the Dallas Cowboys, who used the university's football facilities for their training camps. As a result, two coaching legends often had lunch in the same dining hall at the same time: John Wooden and Tom Landry.

During lunchtimes with Coach, Greg Hayes listened to conversations Coach Wooden had with his basketball camp coaches—and he took careful notes. In those notes, he preserved reams of

“All of us are underachievers,” Coach Wooden replied. “There is no such thing as an overachiever.”

coaching wisdom so that it could be shared with the world. For example, during one of those lunches, a coach asked how to coach an underachiever.

“All of us are underachievers,” Coach Wooden replied. “There is no such thing as an overachiever.”³ Coach went on to explain that we all have the capacity to achieve great things. If we are making the

effort to do the best of which we are capable, we will achieve 100 percent of our capacity, and we can be at peace with ourselves. We sometimes hear about coaches who demand “110 percent” from their players, but there's no such thing. As leaders and coaches, we

should not expect more of our people than 100 percent—but we should always ask them to give the best of which they are capable.

At 1:00 p.m., right after lunch, campers assembled in the gym for a half-hour workout with Coach, followed by a ninety-minute workout with their own coaches. Campers quickly learned they should eat a light lunch—or pay the price of overindulgence during the fast-paced afternoon practice.

The afternoon practice focused on the fundamentals of the UCLA high post offense—the offensive strategy that Coach Wooden implemented with unprecedented success at UCLA. It was a flexible man-to-man offense that involved the abilities of all five players on the floor, emphasizing unselfishness, passing, and teamwork. Elements of the high post offense are now in use throughout college and professional basketball, yet the fundamentals of the strategy were simple enough that Coach could teach them to his youngest campers. Players needed to learn the offense before the start of official games on Wednesday.

Day Three: Tuesday

On Tuesday, Coach Wooden gave his Pyramid of Success talk to the campers (in chapter 4, we'll see how Coach made this life-changing message come alive for these young people). Coach also brought in guest speakers, including some of his past players, to teach the campers about basketball and life.

During the morning and afternoon drills (and later in the week, during the games), Coach walked around, both inside and outside the gym, making suggestions to coaches, giving pointers to individual players, and calling out encouragement.

Each day in the midafternoon, a camp staff member (usually a counselor) drove Coach home to his condo in time for dinner. The assignment of driving Coach to and from the camp became a sought-after privilege. It was a distinct honor to serve as Coach's

driver for the day. While driving Coach, a driver got to spend one-on-one time with Coach—asking questions, listening to stories, and soaking up wisdom from a coaching legend. Some of Coach Wooden’s drivers asked permission to run a tape recorder during the drive, and Coach was always happy to oblige.

Imagine being able to have wide-ranging conversations with Coach about anything from basketball strategy to living by faith. Some of Coach’s drivers were almost paralyzed with nervousness at the thought of having this living legend in their car. One driver recalled driving fifty-five miles an hour in the slow lane, keeping his hands at the ten and two o’clock positions on the steering wheel. But no matter how awed or nervous a driver might be, Coach sat back, relaxed, conversed, and never said a critical word about his chauffeur’s driving—and Coach managed to put most of them at ease. He never seemed to mind that many of his young chauffeurs transported him along the crowded freeway in aging clunkers, often with poor brakes and no air-conditioning in the summer heat.

Meanwhile, back at the camp, the coaches put their campers through afternoon practice sessions. Then, after the last practice, campers had free time until dinner at 4:30. During free time, some campers chose to go swimming. Others, feeling exhausted, dragged themselves back to the dorms for a nap. Many campers took part in optional afternoon skill clinics the coaches ran from 3:10 to 4:10 on Monday and Tuesday. Others played pickup games in the gym or worked on their shooting on the outdoor courts. Most of the campers were there to play basketball, and that’s what they did—every chance they got.

Days Four and Five: Wednesday and Thursday

On Wednesday, the games began. On that day, the camp experience took on a whole new dimension. Enough practice, enough drills.

It was finally time to compete! Though drilling and teaching were Coach Wooden's favorite parts of the camps, for the campers, it was all about the competition.

The games were refereed by the counselors, and each game was forty minutes long, consisting of two twenty-minute halves. Each team was required to run the UCLA high post offense they had practiced on Monday and Tuesday. Coach Wooden expected the games to be instructive as well as fun. He also expected players to demonstrate good sportsmanship in the UCLA tradition.

Coach Wooden wanted his campers to learn authentic organized team basketball. The handbook for coaches demanded that coaches set an example for their players: "The purpose of the competition is to allow campers an opportunity to put into practice what they are learning throughout the day and to learn to play together on a team. Winning at the cost of swearing, losing your temper, or otherwise setting a poor example for your players will not be tolerated!"⁴

The John Wooden Basketball Fundamentals Camp employed an ingenious system of substitutions to ensure that all campers enjoyed equal playing time, while making sure the teams were highly competitive. Each player was assigned a number, and a team's two best players were given special numbers in the system to ensure that at least one of them was on the floor at all times. Making sure that every player got equal playing time helped equalize differences in talent between teams so that there were fewer lopsided matchups. It also ensured fair treatment for all campers, from the most to the least talented.

Greg Hayes said there's a legend that the substitution system was developed as a counterweight to an intense competition between two camp coaches. In the early days of the camps, two coaches were so focused on beating each other that they overplayed their best players, while the less-gifted players warmed the bench. A displeased Coach Wooden pointed out that his camps were about

teaching, not winning. All campers deserved equal playing time. So the coaches developed the substitution system to correct the imbalance.

The Wooden camps exposed young players to a spectrum of coaching styles and personalities, under the auspices of Coach himself. Some of the camp coaches were loud, passionate, and emotional. Others were quiet, analytical, and reserved. Not only was the mix of personalities and coaching styles valuable for the campers, but the coaches also benefited from watching one another, talking to one another, and learning from one another.

Games were played all day Wednesday and all day Thursday on the indoor court in the gym and on the outdoor courts. The games culminated in a championship game on Thursday afternoon. Thirty-two teams competed, but only one could win the ultimate prize—the camp championship trophy.

Day Six: Friday, the Final Day

Friday began with a hearty breakfast. Over scrambled eggs and sausages, campers talked excitedly about the emotional high of the previous day's championship game. Some campers were somber, knowing that this glorious week of instruction, inspiration, and competition was coming to an end. After breakfast, the coaches took the players through one last set of drills. Then the campers assembled for an awards ceremony.

Todd Wasserman, who now works in the motion picture industry, attended Wooden's camps at Cal Lutheran. "In the summer of 1984," he told me, "I was nine years old. I went with a friend to the Wooden camp. The first few days I was miserable and homesick. The players were divided into teams, and I started the week as the most timid and fearful player on my team, but the coaches were great. They really encouraged me during the week.

“On Friday, they presented an award to one kid on each team. The coaches and counselors selected one camper to receive the camper of the week award. The winner got the Coach Wooden Pyramid of Success mounted on a plaque. And guess what? I got the camper of the week award on my team. It’s an award for the camper who demonstrates a coachable attitude, strong work ethic, cooperation, team spirit, good listening, and so forth. I think the coaches felt I had grown the most during the week. I still have that plaque, and to this day, I look at it for inspiration.

“When I see that award, I think, *Here I am in my mid-forties, and if those coaches saw these attributes in me when I was nine, I must still have these attributes today.* And that thought keeps me motivated. I keep believing that I have the attributes Coach Wooden taught in the Pyramid, and I’m committed to going deeper and deeper into those attributes every day.

“In the movie industry, it’s easy to get discouraged. I write a script, knowing that it may never get accepted, may never see the light of day. But I keep Coach Wooden’s definition of success before me, and I have peace of mind in knowing I made the effort to do the best of which I’m capable. If I’ve truly done my best, I’m a success. Coach Wooden’s philosophy of success has had a lasting effect on me, and I’ll never forget that awards ceremony at the end of the week.”

Coach Wooden closed the awards ceremony with a talk and a poem. Here’s an example of one of Coach Wooden’s closing talks, transcribed from a videotape Craig Impelman shared with me.

“When I graduated from the eighth grade,” Coach said, “my father gave me two things: a two-dollar bill and a piece of paper on which he had written a seven-point creed—seven pieces of advice. He said, ‘As long as you keep this two-dollar bill, you’ll never be broke. I still have that two-dollar bill to this day. And he said, ‘Try to live up to this seven-point creed, son, and you’ll never go

wrong.’ I kept that creed in my wallet until the paper became almost unreadable.

“The first point of that creed is ‘Be true to yourself.’ If you are true to your principles, if you choose to do the right thing at all times, then you’ll be true to everyone else.

“The second point is ‘Help others.’ Show love for your fellow man. When you help others, you help yourself even more.

“The third point is ‘Make each day your masterpiece.’ Do the best you can every day. You can never make up for a wasted day.

“The fourth point is ‘Make friendship a fine art.’ Don’t forget the friends you’ve made this week at camp. Goodness gracious, no. Keep in contact with them after this week is over.

“The fifth point is ‘Drink deeply from good books.’ Not just trash or popular novels, but good books. And it’s wise to turn to the Greatest Book every day.

“The sixth point is ‘Build a shelter against a rainy day.’ Think about the future, not just today. Save your money. Help others and let them help you. Keep learning new things every day. Then when a rainy day comes, you’ll have saved up some money, some friendships, and some wisdom to see you through. Someone wisely said, ‘Live as if you’re going to die tomorrow, and learn as if you’re going to live forever.’

“The seventh point is ‘Give thanks for your blessings.’ Be thankful to the Lord for the good things you have, and ask him for help and guidance.

“My father gave me that seven-point creed when I was thirteen, and I have tried to live by it. I wish I could say I lived it perfectly. I can’t, but I do try. That’s the important part.

“Now, coaches and counselors and older campers, I hope you’ll always set a good example for the young people. Our young people need role models. They need to follow good role models. They need role models more than they need critics. They need to learn not only the right way to play basketball but the right way to live

their lives. Some of the people playing professional basketball today, they're not good role models at all. So it's up to you older ones to set a good example for the younger ones to follow.

“And young people, be careful and selective about the people you choose as your heroes. Make sure that the people you follow, the people you listen to, are wise people who set a good example. Make sure they are truly heroes, and they have earned the right to be role models.

“When my son was born, I was doing some work for a book publishing company.

I taught English in high school for many years and did a lot of editing work in addition to my teaching job. It helped to pay the bills. And this publishing company not only sent me a check for my work but also sent me a set of encyclopedias called *The Book of Knowledge*. And included with the encyclopedias was a poster that showed a man walking along the seashore with his son right behind him. The boy was following his father's footsteps in the sand and trying to walk exactly where his father walked.

“This picture is about the example we all set for others. As parents, teachers, coaches, and basketball players, we set an example. People are following us and watching our example, whether we realize it or not. That's the message of this poster. There was a poem printed next to the picture of the father and his son, and I memorized that poem. It read:

A careful man I must always be;
A little fellow follows me.
I know I dare not go astray,
For fear he'll go the self-same way.

I cannot once escape his eyes;
Whate'er he sees me do, he tries.

*“Our young people . . .
need role models more
than they need critics.”*

Like me, he says, he's going to be,
This little chap who follows me.

He thinks that I am good and fine,
Believes in every word of mine.
The base in me he must not see,
This little chap who follows me.

I must be careful as I go,
Through summer sun and winter snow,
Because I am building, for the years to be,
This little chap who follows me.”

Coach Wooden recited that poem by an anonymous author at the end of every camp just before noontime. That poem signaled the end of Coach Wooden's last talk of the week—and the end of the camp.

Max Shapiro told me he loved the moment when Coach Wooden finished reciting that poem and said farewell to the campers. “That was the highlight of the Wooden camps for me,” he said. “The basketball drills were over. All the awards had been presented. All the talks had been given. All the photos had been taken. This whole exciting experience had come to an end. At that moment, without any prodding, all these young campers would rise up as one and give Coach a spontaneous standing ovation. You can't fool kids. Their loving response to Coach came from the heart. During the week, they had come to know him and love him. They had gotten to know who he was and what he had just added to their lives. They couldn't thank him enough.”

The sports world remembers Coach John Wooden for the legendary string of championships his teams won in the final dozen years of his coaching career. He created a college basketball dynasty that will probably never be equaled. Yet Coach himself shrugged off his legendary accomplishments as if they didn't matter. All that mattered to him was that he had been a faithful teacher who had

impacted young lives. And by that standard, he was even more successful in his retirement than he had been while coaching at UCLA.

The thousands of campers who passed through the John Wooden Basketball Fundamentals Camp from 1971 to the mid-1980s all knew that they were in the presence of greatness—not greatness as measured by sportswriters and sports fans but greatness as measured by John Wooden’s depth of character and breadth of love.

As a coach, as a leader, as a teacher, as a mentor, and as a man of faith, Coach John Wooden was not merely a rarity. He was absolutely unique, incomparable, one of a kind. That’s why, year after year, camp after camp, the young people he influenced rose up as one and gave him a standing ovation. No ovation was ever more fitting or more honestly earned.

Coach Wooden influenced generations with authentic love. And that’s why he received so much love in return.