The Gift of Gratitude in Sport

As we approach Thanksgiving Day, it seems a fitting time to reflect on the concept of gratitude for our sport teams and communities. How can gratitude impact our coaching and the experience of our athletes and teams? Let's explore through a short example and research that can inform our approach.

Most of us have experienced loss that goes beyond the field or court. In the aftermath of her husband's death, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg thought she would never again experience joy. The mother, professor, best-selling author and successful businesswoman simply couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel. For anyone who has experienced this type of trauma or adversity, the feeling can be debilitating. In search of help, Sandberg called friend and psychology professor Adam Grant. The two eventually collaborated on the book *Option B*, a 2017 best-seller that uses Sandberg's journey to uncover truths about adversity, resilience and gratitude. Early in that book Sandberg cites research that has important implications for all of us. She writes,

*Psychologists asked a group of people to make a weekly list of five things for which they were grateful. Another group wrote about hassles and a third listed ordinary events. Nine weeks later, the gratitude group felt significantly happier and reported fewer health problems"*(Sandberg and Grant, 2017, Page 26).

Sandberg goes on to talk about the importance of "counting her blessings" in overcoming her own adversity. While she notes that her grief didn't just disappear, she found her ability to handle the difficulties of each day improved as she focused on what she was grateful for. She used gratitude to once again find joy. The research in this area affirms her experience.

I would suggest that the results of this simple study hold importance for coaches and athletes as well. As coaches, our goal is to maximize the potential of each of our athletes and team. While this certainly involves challenging skill work, repeated correction of mistakes and having important conversations about issues that arise, maximizing performance also requires positive mental preparation. That's where gratitude comes in. Just as attitude and health improve with exercises of gratitude, so too can your athletic performance.

Consider the following:

* Individuals perform their best when they are enjoying an activity. When athletes enjoy what they are doing, they practice harder, focus more acutely and give 100% in competition. Taking time to think about why they enjoy their team or sport is important to cultivating this enjoyment.
The Weekly Game Plan

Take a moment to write down 5 things you love about coaching your team. Keep this list somewhere you will see it as a reminder to make gratitude a part of your team culture. If you’re in-season, go a step further and take a moment to tell your team why you’re grateful for the opportunity to be their coach. This little exercise will go a long way!

Play Like a Champion is thankful for...

This Thanksgiving, we’re grateful for each of you! Our amazing partners are the core of this organization, from coaches and administrators to athletes and their families. We’re thankful that you have allowed us into your community and shared with us your tremendous gifts. Thank you for spreading the Play Like a Champion message over the past year; together we are changing the culture of youth sports across North America!
Giving Tuesday is November 28th!

For the past 5 years on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving, non-profits across America have banded together for what has become known as #GivingTuesday. On November 28th this year, please consider a small gift to Play Like a Champion as a way to provide opportunities for kids and coaches in underserved communities. Look for an email next week that provides more information and ways to give!

#WeChampionFemaleCoaches is #Winning

Congratulations to Trisha Corbi of Maryland for winning our #WeChampionFemaleCoaches contest! With nearly 200 entries over the past month, all of you are helping to spread the word and encourage more female coaches to get in the game. The work doesn’t end here, so keep up the good work and share your stories using the hashtag on social media. Thanks to everyone who participated!

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God, of Whose mercies there is no number, and of Whose goodness the treasure is infinite; we give You thanks for the gifts You have bestowed upon us. Grant that our petitions may be heard and that You might bestow on us the graces we need as we seek Your holy will. May we always seek to use the gifts You provide to glorify You, through Christ our Lord.

Amen.