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# ***The Coaching Toolbox***

***Winning Way Series***

***130 Great Ideas to Make Your  
Basketball Team More Mentally Tough***

**Our best ideas to improve teams immediately**

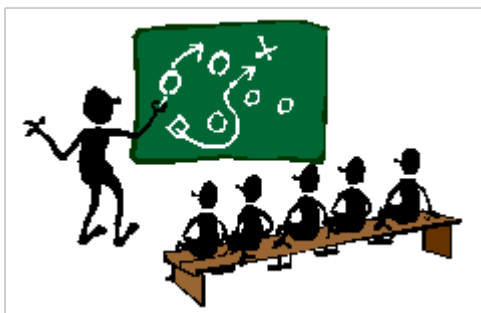


**Brian Williams**

# 130 Great Ideas to Make Your Basketball Team More Mentally Tough

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**Other Books in the Series**

130 Great Ideas to Get a Lot More Accomplished in Practice.

## Introduction

In my twenty years of coaching basketball, I have always strived to emphasize and improve the mental toughness of each individual player in our program. I have been a student of mental toughness and have attempted to apply the things I have learned to my coaching career and to all aspects of my life. I have made mental toughness the main building block of our basketball program. We refer to the building blocks of our program in this manner:

**“To play the inner game is not really a matter of choice--it is always going on and it is played in various outer games. The only two questions are whether we are playing it consciously and whether we are winning or losing.”**

**--W. Timothy Gallwey  
*The Inner Game of Golf***

- 1) Toughness
- 2) Individual Skills and Simple Schemes
- 3) The Winamac Way (the intangibles that want our program to stand for)

Due to the limited time that you have with your players, you must choose the few areas that you are going to emphasize as your building blocks and work very hard to become really good at those things. This e-book will focus on my beliefs and efforts to improve my mental toughness as well as that of our players. I list “Toughness” as number one among our building blocks because I feel that in the long run, you win with players and coaches who:

- 1) Are willing to step out of their comfort zones to do what is necessary to improve themselves for the good of the team.
- 2) Have enough self-discipline to consistently give great efforts day in and day out, no matter how things are going.
- 3) Are stable enough to fight through the inevitable adversity that comes during each game and during the course of the long basketball season.
- 4) Understand that the difference between successful and unsuccessful individuals is often just the focus to do the little things that unsuccessful people are not willing to do.
- 5) Can deliver when the competitive pressure of a game is at its hottest.

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It is my opinion that those characteristics are not present in individuals who do not possess a high degree of mental toughness.

To me, mental toughness is a fairly simple concept to express: Keep the mind focused on thoughts and emotions that improve performance, and away from thoughts and emotions that hinder performance. But, mental toughness is very difficult to master, apply, and maintain. There are two distinct times when mental toughness comes into play in building a basketball program. One is in training and preparing (can be individual skill workouts, out of season conditioning workouts, or team practices) and the other is in the competition of a game. It is my belief that being mentally tough in one of those areas does not necessarily guarantee mental toughness in the other, so we have to develop both.

I have coached mentally tough players whose families had a lot of money. I have coached mentally tough players whose families had nothing. I have coached mentally tough players who were good students and those who were average students. Talented players and “role” players. All Conference players and guys who played two or three minutes a game. It doesn’t have to do with age. I have coached mentally tough freshmen on the varsity. None of that matters. What does matter is the mindset of the individual and his or her ability to maintain that mindset in the face of adversity.

**“Mental Toughness (for basketball) is the ability to control thoughts and actions and maintain a focus on what is important in a calm and poised way.**

**Mental Toughness is a key to improvement in both individual skills and five player schemes, and allows players to be able to execute them during the pressure of competition.”**

**--Brian Williams**

To develop my own philosophy of and methodology to teach mental toughness, I have pulled ideas from various sources that I have studied and from my personal experience in working with basketball players and teams. I have compiled what I have learned throughout my years of studying mental toughness into this e-book in hopes that it will give basketball coaches a tool that is specific to our game as you work to develop, nurture, and bring out the mental toughness that is in your players.

I have used my definition of mental toughness to organize the concepts in this e-book:

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The first two sections of the book are:

- 1) What I believe and have learned about mental toughness as it applies to basketball.
- 2) What I believe the benefits of mental toughness are and why mental toughness is one of the most important aspects of a successful program.

Sections three, four, and five are applications of mental toughness and come from breaking down my definition of mental toughness.

- 3) Controlling thoughts and actions.
- 4) Maintaining a focus on what is important.
- 5) Execution under pressure: Concentration, Confidence, Overcoming Mental Obstacles.

The final sections:

- 6) Mental toughness looks like...
- 7) Mental toughness for basketball coaches.

**“The mental is to the physical as  
four is to one.”**

**--Bob Knight**

In my way of thinking, any and all thoughts and emotions that players and coaches have that can be harnessed, re-directed and improved to allow the individuals to contribute more to the success of the team fall under the scope of mental toughness.

My hope is that you will encounter many useful ideas and resources that will find their way into your program and into the lives of the young people that you touch. As your players become tougher and experience success, that success will lead to increased toughness and you will experience a very positive cycle of success feeding toughness and toughness feeding success.

**One editing note:** In order to make the book flow more smoothly, I have attempted to alternate between the male and female genders. I am not implying that an individual point is gender specific by only referring to males or females. I believe that all of these points apply to boys and girls, men and women.

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## Section #1 Beliefs about Mental Toughness

Your beliefs about Mental Toughness will influence your team's level of Mental Toughness

I am of the opinion that our beliefs lead to our thoughts, our thoughts lead to our habits and actions, and that our habits and actions lead to our results. I put my beliefs on paper to be able to better examine what I do and to evaluate myself to see if my actions are congruent with my beliefs. Following are my core beliefs about mental toughness. They are the basis for the remainder of this book. I encourage you to make your own list as a starting point to improving the mental toughness of your individuals and your team as a whole.

1. **Mental Toughness is essential to a player fulfilling her potential.** There are four aspects to anything that we do, including playing basketball: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. In this case, I am not referring to the spiritual in the sense of religious spirituality. My reference is to the sense of being aligned with something greater than ourselves and the synergy that allows a group of individuals to become a team that has a value that is greater than the sum of the individuals. The four are dependent and interrelated and in order for a player to achieve her full potential, each area must be developed fully and in harmony with the other three. The mental has a major impact on the other three areas because the thoughts that we think and allow to enter into our mind influence our physical energy, our emotional equilibrium, and our willingness to surrender ourselves to and become a part of the group. Much of the key to players increasing control of their bodies lies in their ability to control their minds. Mental toughness allows us to keep our thoughts focused on working towards achieving our potential in the other three areas.
2. **The level of Mental Toughness that is needed for it to make a difference in competitive basketball does not develop naturally in the majority of players.**

**“Mental toughness is not letting anyone break you.”**

**--Tom Izzo**

Coaches must emphasize, teach, and nurture it for players to make improvements in the area of mental toughness. Like any other skill we teach, the more we think through and plan specific strategies to teach mental toughness, the more successful we will be. The more you emphasize it, praise it, correct it when it doesn't meet your expectations, and demand it (without being demeaning) the more mental toughness you will see your players demonstrate. As coaches, we don't go into a season without a plan to teach shooting, dribbling, defense, etc... We should also have a written plan for teaching mental toughness and be conscious

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of that plan as we are working with our teams. The more we plan and prepare to teach toughness, the more we will develop it in our players. We have to be clear about our definition of and expectations for mental toughness. As we evaluate the performances of our individual players and our team collectively after each practice and game, it is essential that we analyze and evaluate the level of mental toughness that our players are developing and displaying and make adjustments in our plan as we work with our teams.

- 3. The way to make a team more mentally tough is to improve the mental toughness of the individual players.** Developing individual mental toughness leads to collective team improvement. It takes strong leadership, patience, and a plan for a coach to develop mental toughness in his/her team. Players are going to be at different levels of mental toughness, and some will never get to where you want them to be. In addition to a team plan for mental toughness, we must have individualized plans for each player to reach his potential. Discussions about toughness with the entire team does make a difference with individual players, but I believe that we are more successful by thinking and approaching the development of mental toughness for each individual rather than only focusing on the team as a whole.
- 4. Almost anyone can be as mentally tough as he or she wants to be.** Not everyone can be a great player, but anyone who is a competitive athlete can make a commitment and then stick to that pledge to become more mentally tough. Becoming mentally tough is a matter of making up your mind that you are going to be tough, sticking with your decision, and not letting others influence you or keep you from being tough.

It is easy to make a commitment to make mental toughness a habit or personal trait, but it is very tough to stay on track and truly be mentally tough. Like anything else, there will be times when the journey toward toughness is one step up and two steps back. But, because I truly believe in the importance of mental toughness for the success of a basketball team, and for the present and future life success of the individuals involved, I believe it is worth the time, the investment, and staying strong and supporting them during their bumps in the road.

**“TGHT—The Game Honors  
Toughness.”**

**--Coach Brad Stevens**

- 5. Mental toughness is a habit and will take as long as, if not longer than, any other habit to build.** It takes a minimum of 21 days to develop a habit. It has been my experience that visible signs of improvement in the area of mental toughness take quite a bit longer than that. Unfortunately, young people see more

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examples of not being mentally tough than they do examples of others who are mentally tough. Trash talking, excessive celebrating, complaining to officials, and blaming others are just a few of the examples that our players frequently see of a lack of toughness. Much of our society does not understand what mental toughness is, nor are those actions viewed as a lack of toughness. Quite often, a coach will be one of the few positive influences for mental toughness in the life of a player, which contributes to the length of time it takes to improve mental toughness.

6. **Mental toughness must be taught and emphasized daily.** I don't mean that there needs to be a big speech every day about mental toughness, but the cornerstones and expectations for mental toughness must be there every day of the season regardless of whether it is a practice or a game. The components of and the outward manifestations of mental toughness such as concentration, poise, unwavering confidence in oneself and one's teammates, rituals, consistency of effort, and positive body language can all be observed in every meeting, every drill, every possession, and every huddle. To emphasize mental toughness, someone on the coaching staff must be focused on observing those areas. If the head coach is focused on execution sometimes some of those cues can escape her. If that is the case, it is crucial to have another coach who is looking for, praising, and correcting the subtle indicators of where your players are in terms of mental toughness.
7. **Style of play and personality of the coach have no bearing on the need for mental toughness, or for whether or not a team displays toughness.** For whatever reason, teams that play more of a half court type of game seem to develop the reputation as being mentally tough. Choosing, or more accurately, being dictated a certain style of play by your personnel, is not going to have any impact on the level of mental toughness of your players. You can play as fast or as slow as you want, play any style of offense and defense and the schemes themselves are not going to make any impact on the level of mental toughness of your players. The only way to impact your players is to make it a point of emphasis for your program. Another misconception is that you have to be a loud and demonstrative coach for your players to be mentally tough. One example in recent history of a coach whose age and demeanor would seem to preclude him from being Mentally Tough is Butler's Brad Stevens. He is very intense, but not overly demonstrative on the sidelines, and the Butler players have consistently demonstrated mental toughness at the highest levels of competition.

**"Concentration and Mental Toughness are the margins of victory."**

**--Bill Russell**

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8. **There is a difference between having a positive mental attitude and mental toughness.** Being a positive, upbeat person is not the same as being mentally tough. Those traits can coexist within an individual; however, mental toughness is not only the ability to stay enthusiastic when things are not going the way you want, but it is also the strength to make yourself better and perform under pressure. Make sure to not take it for granted that players who are positive people are mentally tough as well. Work to develop the mental toughness of those players.

**“Rule your mind or it will rule you.”**

**--Horace**

9. **The coach must be the most mentally tough person on the team.** The players will reflect the coach in the area of mental toughness, maybe more than in any other area. That is why I constantly work at and evaluate my own mental toughness in addition to that of the assistant coaches and players in our program. The coach should face more pressure than anyone else on the team. Depending upon the level you coach, there are self imposed pressures, pressure to win, pressure from boosters, pressure from parents, pressure to make strategic decisions, and pressure to balance your life... The list of pressures a coach faces seems endless.

In order to be the catalyst for mental toughness growth in our players, we have to overcome the pressures we face and still be the driving force for the level of mental toughness for the players. It is true that you can't give something to someone else that you don't possess yourself. A coach who is lacking in mental toughness will inhibit his players from being to

10. **Everyone must make a conscious effort to work on and improve his or her mental toughness daily.** Every player has a role and pressures that are unique to their position on the team—all the way from the All American player who is counted on to make the game deciding plays from the opening tip to the final buzzer, to the player who usually does not see action, but is expected to work hard every single day at practice without much personal reward. A player seemingly at the top of his game has to continue to become mentally tougher because of the challenge of continuing to produce and the pressure that comes with that. Winning teams and losing teams both need mental toughness, they just need it in different ways and to deal with the different pressures that come with their situation.
11. **The state of body and mind that we want for our players is calm on the inside and energized and alert on the outside.** That is a difficult state to get to, but that should be the goal of our preparation and practice that we put our players

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through. Developing mental toughness helps a player to be able to calm his mind, which will allow him to be more alert and energized outwardly.

**“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy.”**

**-- Dr. Martin Luther King**

12. **Adversity is one of the key builders and tests of mental toughness.** Mental toughness develops in part by being forced to use the skills that go into making mental toughness. Like most things that we undertake, we are not as good at overcoming difficult circumstances the first time that

we encounter them. So, one of the positives that can come out of any adversity is the opportunity to build more mental toughness. In order to maximize your mental toughness, you have to experience and be able to overcome a series of adversities. The truly mentally tough individual rises to the top when things are not going well. Anyone can appear to be tough when things are going well, but, in my opinion, the true test of mental toughness is how an individual responds during adversity.

## **Section #2 The Mental Toughness Difference**

### **How Mental Toughness benefits your players and your program**

It has been my experience in over a quarter of a century in coaching, that most players do not understand or see the need for mental toughness on their own. It is our job as coaches to not only teach it, but to clarify when it is applicable, how it is beneficial, and the times that it will be of the most benefit.

Here are my thoughts on the importance of mental toughness and when it is critical to have:

13. **Developing mental toughness is the most important skill that you can help your players develop that they will use for the rest of their lives.** The focus of this book is using mental toughness to help your program to win more basketball games in the short run. In the long run, over the courses of your players' lives, I don't know of anything of importance that people undertake or experience that they cannot handle better with mental toughness. Since coaching is really the business of helping young people succeed, there is no more important reason to emphasize developing mental toughness than that of helping your players to become successful adults.

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14. **Mentally tough players and teams are more prepared to capitalize when opportunities present themselves.** There are certain plays, games, tournaments, and seasons that are defining and pivotal moments in the careers of both players and coaches. When we look back on the times in our basketball experience that were the most rewarding and memorable, those pivotal instances were more than likely very pressure-packed at the time. Mentally tough teams are more ready to take advantage of those opportunities when they arise because their mental toughness will help them to be closer to doing their best under pressure.

Success during those moments often leads to other greater and unexpected opportunities. One key play that turns a crucial game can lead to notoriety and recognition, that has led to life changing opportunities to play in college, opportunities to meet people and make contacts that can lead to future employment opportunities, partnerships, and other similar advantages for the players and teams that are prepared when their chance is in front of them.

15. **The mind can only focus on one thing at a time.** Mental toughness allows you to select the most important thing at the time and block out distractions. Any mental or emotional energy that a player or coach spends being upset with an officials' call, jawing with opponents, worrying about the outcome of a specific possession, dwelling on a mistake from a previous play, doubting yourself, etc... is completely wasted and detracts from where the focus should be. Mental toughness is not a guarantee of success, but players who are mentally tough will have the comfort of knowing that they were focused on their goals, and not bothered by outside distractions. My feeling is that if "you did your best, you won" and I believe that if you can develop mental toughness to the extent where you can focus on the performance and not be distracted by the less important goings-on, you will come nearer to doing your best.

**"Toughness is not usually seen in the actions of a person, rather in the reaction of that person."**

**--Ralph Jean-Paul**

16. **The energy you use when you are upset or afraid is a negative.** Worry, fear, anxiety, and many other negative emotions creep into everyone's minds, especially during times of competition and stress. Fear and extreme nervousness drain a player both mentally and physically before or during a game--or even during practice or a workout if the problem is serious enough.

As human beings, we are always going to feel these emotions to an extent, but a mentally tough player, who is focused on executing her role each possession, and who has been trained regarding how to block out the negative emotions, is going

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to be a player who is going to come nearer to fulfilling that role and her potential, for both herself and for the team.

Authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz put it this way in their book, *The Power of Full Engagement*:

“From an energy perspective, negative emotions are costly and inefficient. Much like a gas-guzzling car, they draw down our energy stores at a rapid rate. For leaders and managers, negative emotions are doubly insidious, because they are so infectious. If we are prompting fear, anger, and defensiveness in others, we progressively undermine their ability to perform effectively.”

17. **Mentally tough players will ignore an opponent who is trying to gain an advantage by putting self-doubt in your players' mind.** For younger players this may take the form of an attempt at intimidation. For older players, it usually takes the form of trash talking. The player with mental toughness can overcome these types of attempts by others to plant the seed of doubt in their mind,

18. **Mentally tough players have some control over tightness of muscles and increase in breathing and heart rates.** A player's muscular coordination is not

**“Whenever you compete, trying harder is truly the game of diminishing returns, and a losing one at that.”**

**--Dr. Alan Goldberg  
Sports Psychologist**

at its best when he is tight. His ability to handle and shoot the basketball is definitely affected by muscular tightness. The game conditions and pressures that produce this physical tightening in muscles and an increased heart rate are impossible to replicate in

practice. The best way to help players overcome them is to help the players become more mentally tough and focus on their roles and responsibilities as opposed to letting their minds drift to the thoughts that are responsible for the negative physiological changes.

19. **Having a mentally tough team gives you a better chance of winning on the road, in tournament or big games, and under adverse circumstances.** Ohio State Football Jim Tressel believes, that “toughness wins tough games.” Tough players and teams are less influenced by hostile crowds, the pressure of a big game, or losing a key player late in a pressure packed game due to injury or fouls.

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20. **Mentally tough players and teams will deal with the different types of pressures that come with both winning and losing.** Often, extended winning or unexpected losing streaks have a negative impact on the psyche of your players. Coaches know that the most important game is the one that's coming up. The least important game is a tie between every game that has already been played. The only value that past games have is the lessons learned from them. For example, a big post-season tournament win means nothing if you lose the next game to a team you should beat. Mentally tough teams are less vulnerable to having their futures affected negatively by their past.
21. **Mental Toughness leads to more enjoyment and fulfillment.** Not only will an improvement in the Mental Toughness of your players lead to a better performance and more wins, your players will be more relaxed, more focused on what is important, and less distracted by irrelevant matters, which will allow them to appreciate and enjoy their basketball experience even more.
22. **People are motivated more through emotion than logic and mental toughness helps them to control and channel those emotions.** We find evidence of the home court advantage, revenge games where a team will avenge an earlier loss, “rivalry” games, etc... All of these are examples of the role that emotion plays in competition. For teams with mental toughness, they can use the emotions generated by these situations to their advantage and can overcome times when their opponent has a competitive emotional advantage.
23. **Mental Toughness leads to self discipline.** The most important and most useful type of discipline is self discipline. As coaches, we look to provide a structured discipline for our teams so that the individual players will move toward self-discipline. For someone who has mental toughness, once he understands the what, when, where, and how of what needs to be done, the ability to see the important without distraction allows him to execute consistently.

**“Discipline--Do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done as well as it can be done, and do it that way all the time.”**

**-- Coach Bob Knight**

## Section #3 Controlling Thoughts and Actions through Mental Toughness

Twenty concrete steps to improve your players' mental toughness

Here are 20 concrete steps that we can take as coaches to improve the mental toughness of our individual players, which will in turn improve the overall toughness of our teams. In addition to verbalizing these as team standards and expectations, post them in the locker room and put them in player's notebooks. I believe that the ideas outlined in this section are more effective if they are given to the players at the start of the season rather than offering them as ideas to fix what has become a problem during the season.

24. **Mental toughness must be an emphasis, not just something you talk about when it is obviously lacking.** Explaining that mental toughness is more

**“Mental Toughness is many things and rather difficult to explain. Its qualities are sacrifice and self-denial. Also, most importantly, it is combined with a perfectly disciplined will that refuses to give in. It’s a state of mind—you could call it character in action.”**

**--Vince Lombardi**

important to you than skills and schemes is one thing, but emphasizing it day after day is how you develop it in your program. I believe, as many coaches do, that you can't emphasize everything in your program. You only have time available with your players to emphasize three

or four things that you are going to make the trademarks of your program. Those are the things that you are going to strive to do outstandingly well. There is just not enough practice time to be great at everything. So, if you are going to make toughness a staple of your program, you have to emphasize it constantly, sometimes at the expense of time that could be spent in other areas.

25. **Develop and expect physical toughness.** We have an expectation that "contact is not an excuse to lose the ball." You might get called for an offensive foul, traveling, tied up for a held ball, being over and back, or 5 seconds, but we do not want any fumble that leads to a layup or to us chasing a player from behind. A section of our practice is devoted to competitions and developing toughness. We utilize drills to help our player become more physically tough. Being in shape is the other component of my definition of physical toughness. As Vince Lombardi said "fatigue makes cowards of us all." Whether you achieve your conditioning with a ball (which I prefer), without a ball, during your practice, or by running

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lines at the end of practice, your players need to develop stamina. Developing a high level of physical toughness and stamina will help your player to develop the level of mental toughness that you are seeking.

26. **The coaching staff must model Mental Toughness.** As in anything, the best teacher is a good example. It is more than a cliché that teams and players are a reflection of the coach, it is a fact. I believe that players draw confidence from a coach who is poised and confident. A coach who makes excuses, blames others, shows doubt or fear, constantly loses his poise, or any of the other traits that are listed later in this book in the “What mental toughness is not,” section is going to get the same in return from their players.
27. **Clearly and consistently define what Mental Toughness is to you.** I gave my definition earlier in the book. I think it is important for you to develop your own definition for your team. If I have done a good job with teaching this to the players, they can explain it in their own words.
28. **Teach that pressure and stress is not always a bad thing.** Take away the pressure and the game is not as meaningful. Pressure is a fact of life, not just in athletics, but in anything where there is a great deal of interest and competition. In exchange for the opportunity to experience the exhilaration of success, dealing with pressure and stress is a part of the price to pay for that chance at meaningful achievement and victory.
29. **Clearly and consistently define what Mental Toughness is not.** Sometimes, in order to define something, it is helpful to illustrate what it is not. Attempting to intimidate others, bullying, screaming, yelling, temper tantrums, complaining, blaming others, showing disgust in losses, and loss of poise are examples of what mental toughness is not. You do not have to be a physically imposing or intimidating presence to be mentally tough. You can be the smallest player on the squad, and yet still be the most mentally tough.
30. **It works for Phil Jackson...** In his book 'Sacred Hoops' Phil Jackson talks about how during time outs he gets his players to mentally relax and concentrate on what he is saying by leading them in a quickie visualization he calls 'safe spot'. While they are grabbing a drink and toweling off he encourages them to take a short mental vacation and visit that place in their imagination where they feel most relaxed and secure.

**“Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing.”**

**-- Albert Schweitzer**

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31. **Never accept excuses.** I believe that this is one of the most important stances that I have taken to help our players become more mentally tough. All outstanding leaders set high standards for their groups. Accepting excuses is not in line with high standards. When I hear a player give an excuse, that tells me that whatever they are making an excuse about is either not that important to them, or that they are unsure of their own ability to perform well. When a coach accepts an excuse he gives the player making the excuse permission to weaken her resolve. I also believe that the opposite is true, players who accept personal responsibility become more confident and energized.

**“The acceptance of personal responsibility is what separates the superior person from the average person.”**

**--Brian Tracy**

Most people, including myself, sell ourselves short of what we can accomplish, what limits we can push ourselves to, and how resourceful and tough we can be when we have the motivation. “No excuses, no explanations” often provides that needed motivation.

32. **Give players a method for dealing with mistakes.** Mistakes are a part of almost everything we do when improvement and competition are the areas of focus. This is our mindset for dealing with mistakes, so that we can profit from them, but not allow them to have a negative effect on the future.

- 1) Recognize the mistake--so that we can learn from and correct it with the expectation that we will not make the same mistakes over and over.
- 2) Admit the mistake--don't make excuses or blame others.
- 3) Learn from the mistake--don't make the same mistake again.
- 4) Move on from the mistake--we definitely do not want a mistake to influence what we do in the future by dwelling on the past mistake.

Giving players a method for dealing with mistakes takes the focus off the mistake itself and puts it on the steps to move on. Since this sequence needs to take place in just a few seconds during practice or a game, we use the phrase "play through it" to get our players to move on if we feel that they are dwelling on mistakes.

33. **Emphasize that the way we react to a poor play can be more detrimental than the negative event itself.** When a coach or a player overreacts to a play that

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goes against his team, or tries to make up for it by taking an unnecessary risk, it most often will lead to compounding the mistake and increased frustration for the entire the team.

Reacting to a bad play by becoming angry to the point of losing her poise, blaming a teammate, sulking or pouting, puts that player in the frame of mind that will lead to more bad plays, unless she can get it changed quickly. Those types of reactions can be more detrimental to your team than the original mistake.

Another illustration happens when a player misses an easy shot and then reacts to that by committing a foul either going for the rebound or by attempting to steal the ball back right away. Other examples are making a turnover and attempting to steal the ball back, or missing a defensive assignment and giving up a basket, and then taking a questionable shot to “get it back.”

Even though it is difficult to do, we have to teach players that the best way to react to a mistake is by letting it go immediately and not reacting by displaying any negative emotion that will only lead to more mistakes.

34. **Do not allow displays of poor body language.** A person's outer actions are almost always a reflection of their inner thoughts. To control one's body language, he must control his inner thoughts. Controlling those inner thoughts is at the heart of mental toughness. Additionally, controlling body language helps keep negative emotions that a player is feeling from spreading to the remainder of the team.
35. **Teach players to realize that dealing with mistakes, temporary failure and setbacks is a part of the road to becoming successful.** It is natural for competitive individuals to instinctively react negatively when they or a teammate makes a play that hurts the team. As coaches, it is our job to eliminate mistakes that lead to empty possessions at both ends of the floor. However, I have never seen a game without turnovers, missed shots, and other various mistakes. While we don't want to see those miscues, the team that can deal with their own or their teammates' mistakes, and can put them in the proper perspective, is going to keep those mistakes from compounding themselves and is going to allow you to focus your energy on playing better.

**“Whether you think you can,  
or whether you think you  
can't, you're right.”**

**--Henry Ford**

The same can be said for the ups and downs that all teams and individuals face over the course of a long season. It is a great life success lesson to teach your

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players that high achievers are not successful because they never have to overcome any obstacles, they are successful because they do face the same obstacles as everyone else, but they don't let the obstacles stop them from their focus on and continual efforts to reach their goals.

36. **Establish clear expectations regarding on court behavior and demand that they are met.** That goes for expectations regarding behavior toward teammates, coaches, officials, opponents, and fans. My guess is that it might have happened sometime during the millions of amateur basketball games that have been played around the world, but I have never seen a case where a player argued with an official and got a judgment call changed. I have seen several instances though when a player has treated an official poorly and I felt that it influenced the calls that the player and the team received for the remainder of the game. I am not saying that officials favor one team over the other, but they are human and they are subject to the stress and pressure of calling a competitive game. As for players trash talking or trying to intimidate opponents, I have always shared with my teams that if you can intimidate the other team just by talking, then they are mentally weak enough that you can beat them with or without the talk.

37. **Continually deliver messages that will positively influence players' beliefs.** I am not suggesting that everything has to be positive. There are times when a tongue lashing is necessary. But, the beliefs that an individual holds lead to both their conscious and unconscious thoughts. Those thoughts lead to actions, how well we perform those actions, and

**"We don't believe what we see,  
but rather we see what we  
believe."**

**--Brian Tracy**

contribute to our energy level. Frequent and consistent messages delivered over time do have an impact on the beliefs that players hold. The messages that I am advocating are messages such as "We are the toughest team on our schedule," "We play harder than anyone," "We play together as a team," or anything else that is important to your program that you want your players to buy into. Show tapes of positive plays that your players have made to visually deliver more positive mental programming for the types of plays that you need to make to **win games**. Just as the body needs continual positive input in the form of food, the mind needs continual positive input in the form of thoughts, and a videotape is the best way for the mind to receive those positive thoughts.

38. **Have an expected response when communicating with your players to be able to get a fix on their state of mind.** Some coaches use "yes sir/ma'am," "no sir," or you can use "yes/no coach." Pat Summit has used "two points" for a player to

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respond to her when she praises them and rebound when she is "offering corrective feedback." It doesn't matter what you use. I do believe that it does matter that you have a way of judging if the player heard you, or if her concentration was elsewhere when you were talking and whether or not their focus and concentration is where you want it. The tone of the response will also give you some useful feedback.

39. **Show specific examples of when a lack of mental toughness (such as losing their poise) hurt a team.** When using negative examples, I think it is best to show situations where lack of mental toughness hurt other teams or programs. It is a good practice to always record every basketball game that you watch on TV.

That way, when you see something that you can use with your team, whether it is an example of a lack of mental toughness hurting a team, or something else that your team could benefit from seeing, you will have a video of it ready to go to use with your team when needed.

**"Players play—tough players win."**

**--Tom Izzo**

40. **Devote a section of your practice schedule to developing toughness.** Our practice segments are Individual Development, Offense, Defense, and Competitive Situations and Toughness. We work to emphasize toughness every day in everything we do in the first three segments, but in the final segment, we focus completely on competitive game situations (i.e. 2:00 to go in the game, we are down by 6 etc...), and physical toughness drills. The competitive situations challenge our mental toughness both in terms of preparing to perform under pressure situations and I like to do those at the end of practice when they are tired and more mentally taxed.
41. **Create "Bad Breaks" during practice.** The purpose is to simulate the bad breaks that your team might be up against in a game. It is important to let the players know ahead of time that you will be doing this because it can become more of a problem than a benefit to your team if the players do not understand why and when you will be doing it. You don't want to create a situation where a certain player or players feel that you are singling them out or picking on them. From time to time make obvious bad calls in your 5 on 5 segments in practice that go against the first team. At times take out your leading scorer as you practice your end of game situations so that the rest of the team can at least have practice having to have the mental toughness to make the crucial plays with that player on the bench due to fouls or injuries. If you can use practice time to mentally prepare your teams for these types of unexpected emergencies that crop up at the most inopportune times, they have a better chance of handling it in the games.

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42. **Praise your team's examples of Mental Toughness.** Praise is very powerful in that praising an action will usually result in more of that same behavior. It is important that you make sure that the behavior you are praising is what you are

**“Catch your players doing it right as often as you can.”**

**--April (McDivitt) Foster**

looking for regarding mental toughness. Continually increase the amount of toughness that it takes to draw your praise in order to use praise to improve the mental toughness of your players.

43. **Demand that your players develop the mental toughness to be a “player first” during practice and games.** The priority list that we teach for our players is for them to put these areas ahead of basketball: 1) Spirituality 2) Family and Personal Health 3) Citizenship 4) Academics. However, once practice starts, we want our players to concentrate only on basketball. If a player has so many other urgent and pressing distractions on his mind that he cannot concentrate on practice or the game, then I believe that it is in both the team's and his best interest for him to sit out the practice or game until he can focus on basketball during basketball time.

## **Section #4 Maintain Mental Focus on the Important**

**Keeping players focused on what you want helps keep it away from detrimental thoughts**

Mental toughness is focusing your mind on what is important, so having goals and images for players to focus their thoughts on, is crucial to being mentally tough.

44. **Set individual and team performance and statistical goals.** Research shows that individuals constantly self correct if they know what the specific goals are and constantly receive feedback about their performance compared to the goals. Feedback can come in many forms. It may be verbally delivered by a coach, but it can also be a player's self assessment if she knows the standards and expectations.

Here is an idea of visual feedback to help with correction toward a goal. If your team has a stated goal of 3 turnovers or less for a quarter each game, put an empty ball rack by the scorer's table during your practice scrimmage and put a ball on the rack for the first turnover during that practice quarter. That visual representation will focus your players on taking care of the ball, without you having to say anything (as long as they know what the rack represents). Coaches

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who keep stats at practice and relate those stats to the players allow players to monitor their own performance and correct their play as they work toward the stated goals. The same can be said for feedback during timeouts, quarter brakes and at halftime. In order for goals to have the most impact on a player's mental toughness, they should be written down, visible in the locker room and on the player's lockers if possible.

45. **Teach players to focus their thinking on their performance, not outcomes.** A player's total focus should on executing and not on the result of an individual play or possession whether it is practice or a game. In games, worrying about things that cannot be controlled such as who the opponent is, the opponent's record, skills, the score, the time remaining, etc... is extremely counterproductive.

**“You are the only problem you will ever have and you are the only solution.”**  
--Bob Proctor

46. **Establish High Expectations for all areas of your program.** Setting high expectations is nothing more than creating mental paradigms as to what success is and looks like for your program, and what actions and efforts are required to get there. I truly believe that the main characteristic among coaches who seem to get the most out of their players year in and year out is the ability of those coaches to set high standards and expectations and then develop systems in practices and games that support, reward, and guide players toward those standards. That is not to say that practice, skill development, Xs and Os, and game management are not important, but I believe that coaches with reputations for being outstanding in those areas are successful because they set high standards within their areas of expertise.
47. **Athletes must be committed to and pushed by the coaching staff to attend to all of the details of accomplishing the goals by working beyond their comfort level.** Great players and teams practice beyond their comfort zone. It does require mental toughness in your players to get this type of effort day in and day out. As they push themselves past their current comfort level and achieve more, they realize what is possible and what it takes to get there, which increases their mental toughness as they experience success. Never underestimate the impact on toughness that success has both in individual players and on your team as a whole.
48. **Develop a culture that feeds off of internal motivation.** Team spirit and expectations are extremely powerful motivators. This type of internal motivation takes place when there is a commitment to a goal that is shared by the individual members of the team. These goals are internal decisions to do something rather than to wait for external forces to make something happen. Another way to put it

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is that your players are self motivated to set and achieve goals. Here are some ideas for developing a program that will lend itself to a high level of internal motivation in your players:

- As much as possible, involve players in the goal setting for each season.
- Help players to develop an understanding of the roles your practices, drills, and system of play have in moving them toward both individual and team goals.
- Put yourself in your players' shoes as you work to develop your program. Continually ask yourself "Is this a program that I would want to play in if I were a player," and "Am I the type of coach that I would want to play for as a player."

49. **Mentally Tough players can distort reality to give themselves a mental advantage.** We have all been in cases where we have a 10 point lead at halftime and have told our teams that the score is 0-0 and that our goal is to win every quarter of the game. The mental toughness of your team will determine how effective those types of statements are. I think that challenging your team to show their mental toughness, when not overdone, is very effective. For example: "teams that are truly mentally tough put the scoreboard out of their minds and are hungry to win each quarter by pursuing our goals of challenging every shot, winning the loose balls, etc..."

**"Most people don't aim too high and miss, they aim to low and succeed."**

**--Les Brown**

Or, heading into practice after a win and challenging your team to have the mental toughness to practice like you just lost. The same can be said for a first team that is mentally tough enough to accept special rules in practice that allow the second team to be more competitive and even win

some scrimmages due to those special rules. For example, every shot the second group takes that is not challenged by the first team is worth two scoreboard points during the scrimmage for the second team if the unchallenged shot misses and four scoreboard points if an unchallenged shot goes in. I think that it is important as a coach to praise your players for being mentally tough enough to accept your higher standards, even if it means they "lost" (due to the special rules) to a group that they really beat.

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### 50. **Emphasize performance goals.**

Performance goals are things like being ready to play, giving 100%, having a great attitude, always looking confident, sticking to your performance rituals, and maintaining concentration. Feedback in these areas during and after practices and games are critical to the development of mental toughness.

**“If you are going to win any battle, you have to do one thing. You have to make the mind run the body. Never let the body tell the mind what to do.”**

**--General George Patton**

### 51. **Personal goals established by players should be team oriented and viewed in everyone's eyes as commitments.**

I do not believe in individual goals as far as, shoot 60% from the field, lead the team in assists, make all-conference, etc... I think individual goals should be framed in the context of the performance goals that were outlined previously in #50. The players need to be constantly reminded of what those goals are. For example, if a senior has set a goal to provide leadership, then you need to constantly bring that to her attention and give her feedback on what affect her commitment to and actions toward that goal are having on the team.

### 52. **The coach must be the voice that the players listen to in regards to basketball.**

Well meaning parents, relatives, friends, and others will usually have well intended advice for players. Part of mental toughness for players is being able to politely tune those people out and stay focused on the coach's direction for the team. It is a delicate subject for a coach to tackle. I believe the best way is to acknowledge that the opinions that players hear from relatives and friends are well-meaning, but that there are two main reasons why the coach must be the voice that the team listens to. One, the other opinions do not come from being at practice, which means that they do not have as much information as the coaching staff. Two, no matter what systems the coach has in place, they are going to be more effective if everyone is pulling together towards those goals, rather in different directions.

## Section #5 Execution under Pressure

The Ultimate Goal of Mental Toughness is improved results

I have broken this section into three subsections as I believe that executing under pressure involves concentration, confidence, and fighting the tendency to “choke” during times of pressure.

### Concentration

The factors that are consistent for athletes who experience peak performance are mental and physical preparation in practice and the ability to maintain concentration during the actual competition. I believe that concentration is a key factor in being able to consistently perform at a high level. With that in mind, here are some ideas to use to improve your players concentration during competition. The more a player concentrates on what his role is and what his assignments are in both practices and games, the less time his mind has to drift to worry about what could go wrong or to other negative thoughts that can sabotage performance. The lack of concentration is usually the key contributing factor in mental lapses.

53. **Pay attention to detail.** If you are going to expect them to constantly do the things that you think are important, you will need to teach them to pay attention to detail in the practice setting. Give the players drills that require extra concentration and attention to detail. One way of doing this is to begin practice by saying, “Today at practice anytime the

**“Concentration is the ability to think about absolutely nothing when it is absolutely necessary.”**

**--Ray Knight**

- whistle blows we want every player to immediately get into perfect shooting stance.” This helps to emphasize a basic fundamental, but also helps us to practice concentrating and paying attention to detail. Of course you could have the players do anything you want when the whistle blows. By selecting something that you believe is important, you are once again emphasizing how important that concept is. We are constantly setting the tone that little things make a difference.
54. **Keep players properly hydrated.** Have water available at all times during practices and games and make it easily accessible. Allowing players to get dehydrated at practice severely affects not only their muscular coordination, but their ability to concentrate as well. Even the slightest increase in body temperature will have an impact on concentration. Players should drink frequently throughout practice.

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55. **When the mind is concentrating and is absorbed in what it is doing, interference such as self doubt, anxiety, and fear are minimized and the brain is able to function closer to its potential.** Simply put, keeping the mind busy on positive thoughts keeps it from wondering to thoughts that hurt performance.
56. **Develop and stick to performance rituals before and during the game.** Rituals keep players minds from wandering. Things like having the players sit on the bench in the same spot during timeouts and quarter breaks, doing the same warm up drills prior to the game and at halftime, coming to the bench at the same time, having the same locker room routine, having individual routines prior to shooting a free throw (example 3 dribbles, a deep breath, and then the shot) are ways to keep the players concentrating on what they are doing and not letting the mind wander.
57. **Teach players to keep their eyes on the court.** Our thoughts are influenced by what our eyes are looking at. If a player is looking into the crowd, at the other team's bench, or at the officials, that player is losing focus. I know that there are times for the players to look at the bench, but I would rather they not unless they are looking for a play call or I have called their name to get their attention.
58. **Maintain emotional control.** Nothing negatively affects a player's ability to concentrate than when he loses emotional control. In our program, we have a one word phrase to remind our players to stay calm—that phrase is "Poise." Teach players who lose their temper to take slow deep breaths in order to regain that critical emotional control.
59. **Players should make use of positive visualization and self talk during competition.** We all have those voices going through our heads, especially under stress, pressure and during competition. One way to keep us from listening to ourselves and to those negative messages is to visualize the positive outcome that we are seeking to achieve and talk to ourselves (mentally that is) so that we are subjecting ourselves to and programming our mind for the positive. It has been proven that we can improve our performance by feeding our subconscious mind the right thoughts. You must control and create your own thoughts or else that little voice inside that we all have inside our heads will control our thoughts. The way to

**"I've discovered that numerous peak performers use the skill of mental rehearsal of visualization. They mentally run through important events before they happen."**

**--Charles A. Garfield**

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control your thoughts is by talking to yourself internally with positive thoughts rather than listening to yourself.

60. **Stay in the present moment.** The most important play in basketball is the one that is happening right now. Human beings tend to not be in the present. We're often either worrying about the past or worrying about the future. Those projections into the future are almost always negative. For example a player standing at the free throw line is thinking "what will happen if I miss the shot?" All these projections into the future are 90% negative in 90% untrue, but more importantly, affect performance negatively. Emphasize two players to keep their minds in the present because that's where the action is and it is the only place where they can make a difference.
61. **Develop drills that force concentration.** Then, when it comes to the pressure situations, your players will draw confidence because they know that they have prepared in practice. For example, we ask the players to play three perfect defensive possessions. The length of the possession is determined by our playing style. If for example, the opposition's average possession is 17 seconds against our defense, we ask the players to play perfect defense for three times that length or 51 seconds. We demand that they execute three perfect 51 second defensive

**"If it weren't for the dark days, we wouldn't know what it is to walk in the light."**

**-Earl Campbell**

possessions. During each possession every coach is watching for a defensive mistake. Be picky. Stress the principles that you believe are important whether that be jumping to the ball on a pass, keeping the ball out of the lane, trapping the post, helping the helper or anything else that you

believe in. If a coach sees a mistake, that possession must start over again at 51 seconds. If the defense causes a turnover you can reward the defense by running 5 seconds off of the clock, restart the possession and run the clock from that point. If the offense takes a bad or contested shot and the defense gets the rebound, we just stop the clock and then resume the possession and run the clock from that point. If the offense scores, takes an uncontested shot, or gets a rebound, then the clock is reset at 51 seconds. We continue until we have played three perfect 51 second possessions. In this way we are stressing, without any doubt, what we believe is important defensively to our success. We have found this to be very helpful. Players will focus on what you think is important. They will communicate better in order to avoid confusion. This drill will also show you who your leaders are. The leaders will step up and make players accountable for their mistakes. While players may understand that defense is important, they aren't

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particularly fond of playing defense for long periods of time. The players will be motivated to complete this drill in as little time as possible.

62. **When you're in a high pressure situation and the game is on the line, and everyone is watching you, remember to smile, have fun, and enjoy it.** You have nothing to lose—you are playing the game that you love—the game of basketball. What else would you rather be doing? Relax and seize the opportunities in front of you!

### **Confidence**

Confidence is a fragile concept and is another word that has many different definitions depending on who you talk to. To me, it is the faith a person has in himself to succeed in a given endeavor. I have heard coaches say that “It is not my job to give the players confidence, it is their job to give me confidence in them.” To a certain extent, I agree, but as basketball coaches, we are charged with bringing out the best in all areas for our players and part of that is helping them gain confidence. We have all seen professional athletes confidence be shaken, so I think when we are working with amateur athletes, we have to do what we can to increase their belief in themselves and in their teammates.

**“Show me a guy who’s afraid to look bad, and I’ll show you a guy you can beat every time.”**

**-- Lou Brock**

I would also add that I believe that confidence is an inner commodity and that it doesn't have to manifest itself outwardly in terms of arrogance, cockiness, or playing “with a chip on your shoulder,” to be present and to have a positive impact on how well a player plays.

63. **Assuming a positive outcome for everything before you start.** Can you ever think of a time that assuming something will not work out helps you right before you begin it? Is there ever a time that having thoughts of missing a free throw (unless instructed to miss on purpose as a strategic decision) will help a player? Even the worst free throw shooter on your team must go to the line every time with only thoughts that the shot is going in, and it is that way for all players in all aspects of the game. I do believe that players must play within their roles and play to their strengths, but there is never a time to imagine failure before beginning or during the time leading up to any activity.
64. **Over-prepare to develop confidence.** Practice the physical skills until they are automatic and your players can perform them without thinking under stressful competition. The more time a coach spends in practice repeatedly rehearsing the situations that players will face in games and creating as much competition as

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possible, the more the players will have the mentality that they have been through it before when those situations arise in games. Some examples are, protecting a lead at the end of a game, taking the last shot of a quarter, running a last second play, needing a score to keep from losing, being behind by 10 points with two minutes to go in a game, etc... Aside from previous success in games, nothing will give your players more confidence than the detailed preparation that you do in practice.

65. **Do all you can to make practice tougher than games.** Practicing those exact situations, plus throwing in obstacles that could arise during the game such as: taking your point guard (rotating key players each time you do this) out of a scrimmage at times to simulate foul problems or injuries that could arise during the game. Tell your players ahead of time, so that they won't be caught off guard, that you are occasionally going to make intentional bad calls during practice scrimmages to simulate the types of bad breaks they can receive from time to time. It is important to tell them ahead of time why you are doing it—to give them the confidence that they can be mentally tough enough to overcome anything in the game—because of what they have been through in practice.

**“You can never conquer the mountain. You can only conquer yourself.”**

**-Jim Whitaker**

66. **You have to manufacture internal confidence until you have achieved enough to earn the right to be confident.** According to Steve Siebold in his book *177 Mental Toughness Secrets of the World Class*, “Muhammad Ali

admits he told the world he was the greatest before he truly was as a way to bolster his faith in his own skills.” I don't advocate telling the world that you are better than you have previously shown, but I do think that it is important for your players to believe that they will succeed for the right reasons—because they are going to be mentally tough, work hard and work smart in practice, believe in their teammates, improve their skills, play hard, and never give up. Your team must believe that sticking to and practicing those principles will lead to success. Players and teams who always believe they can win—whether that belief is realistic or not--will play more aggressively and decisively as a result of this confidence—even if that confidence is manufactured.

67. **Be demanding without being demeaning. Coaches have a major influence over the confidence that players have in themselves.** There are times when you have to get on players, but I believe that the way a coach handles those situations is extremely important. One of my favorite “confidence maintaining” coaching phrases is “You're better than that.” I think it is a great phrase to use, but like

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everything else it must be sincere. I think it conveys to the player your confidence in her and that your expectation is that her performance next time will be better. Players who know that their coach is demanding and that they have been prepared by those demands, and who believe that they can meet those high expectations are in a great frame of mind to execute on game night.

68. **An advantage of players having confidence.** Confident players can better handle and see the need for constructive coaching criticism, and will use “failure” as a stepping stone to improve and grow rather than as a reason to withdraw or give up. Confident players can be more self critical which serves as internal motivation to improve.

### **Overcoming Mental Obstacles That Hinder Performance**

Here is how I think about the performance of an individual:

**Performance = Potential minus Interference.**

Mental toughness closes the gap between potential and performance by diminishing the interference. The more we can minimize the interference that is going on in the minds of our players, the more we can help them realize their potential.

69. **Mental obstacles are as real as the defense of the team you are playing against.** We all put obstacles in our own ways that keep us from performing at our best. Frustration, pressure, fear, worry, anxiety, nervousness, and stress are just a few of those obstacles that we create for ourselves. A part of mental toughness is overcoming those obstacles. The obstacles may be negative thoughts that are basketball-related about the practice, game, or opponent or they could be baggage from outside of basketball such as family or other relationship stresses, grades, or other worries. We stress that once you step on the court, you are a player and nothing else and must do everything you can to change your concentration from those obstacles to what needs to be done to get better.
70. **FEAR is an acronym for False Evidence Appearing Real.** Over ninety percent of the things that people worry about never come true. I have this thought in my daily planner and read it constantly--along with many other thoughts that I use to program my mind for the things I want and to work to eliminate the things I don't want. I believe that you should remind your players of this fact constantly.

**“Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway.”**

**--John Wayne**

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71. **Dealing with "Choking."** First and foremost, I do not believe that it is appropriate to label or call a player a "Choker." But, as coaches, we do need to be able to improve the ability of our players to perform under pressure. There is no doubt that everyone feels a certain amount of pressure, and there is no doubt that some players deal with it better than others.

I would define choking as "performing worse than expected given what the player or teams is capable of doing, and worse than they have done in the past under less pressure."

Choking occurs when players stray from their instincts, routines, and training due to the perceived stress of a situation by thinking too much about what they are doing for situations that are normally on auto-pilot. An example would be trying to guide a crucial free throw rather than sticking to the normal free throw routine and just shooting the ball naturally, as the player has practiced thousands of times. The attempt to guide the ball has the affect of changing the shooting motion and is going to result in a lack of success more often than the player's normal shooting motion does.

72. **Prepare players ahead of time by constantly teaching and emphasizing that the best way to deal with a pressure situation is to not think about it in a different way than normal.** Even though players are playing in a championship game, or a particular play or possession comes at a critical time in the game due to time remaining and the score, the key to success is to focus on executing with the same physical and mental focus and effort that you have rehearsed in practice and have been successful with in previous games.

73. **Avoid adding to the pressure** with comments like "we really need this game/shot/play, etc," and coach the way you want your players to play—executing the next possession as well as they can.

74. **Teach players that adversity is always going to be present** and is a natural part of life or of any part of their life that is important to them, family, friendships,

**"Toughness is not being a bully, it's having a backbone."**

**--Robert Kiyosaki**

school, sports, everything. By choosing to play on a competitive basketball team, an individual is exposing herself to a lot of wonderful opportunities and experiences, and also subjecting themselves to a certain amount of pressure. Acknowledge that learning to deal with the pressure has the reward of opening up the rewards that go

along with challenging yourself to be the best you can be as an individual and reaping the benefits of participating as a member of a team.

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75. **Prepare for the worst.** Michael Jordan always expected to get hit when he took the ball hard to the rim because he did not want to be angry when shooting his free throws. After all, the best revenge is making the free throws. Players should realize that there is going to be physical contact in basketball, sometimes intentional, sometimes unintentional. Players should realize that they are going to have calls made by the officials that they don't agree with. The more you expect these types of bad breaks, the better they will be able to handle them and not let that affect their performance.
76. **Emphasize the importance of Poise:** I have included a handout in the Appendices that we give our players each year entitled "Poise." But, more than that it must be emphasized before games, at halftime, at timeouts during key times in the game, when things are not going well, and during the competitive portions of practice.
77. **Fight the instinct to become conservative or cautious when the mind becomes disturbed by external factors.** Caution may be the proper course of action at times, but should only be exercised as a result of a rational thought process, and not just as an emotional response. If your team has turned the ball over a couple of times in a row, you have to fight the reaction to focus only on maintaining possession at the expense of playing to score. However, if time, score, and the rules of your level indicate that killing the clock and scoring by taking only layups or free throws is the proper strategy, stick to your thought out plans as to when that strategy becomes appropriate.
78. **Fight human nature to "try harder" on game night.** The time for working harder is in practice and in individual workouts. On game nights, as described earlier, calm on the inside and energized on the outside is what a player needs. The tendency to try harder disrupts that calm on the inside and leads to poor performance.

## Section #6 Mental Toughness Looks Like

### Characteristics of Tough Teams and Tough Players

I have put this together as a checklist to use when evaluating where my team is and where it should be in regards to mental toughness. You can use these when giving your expectations and evaluations of your team in the area of mental toughness while

**"Toughness is in the soul and spirit, not in muscles."**

**--Alex Karras**

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adding your own thoughts and ideas regarding mental toughness to the list. I think it is a good time to go through your checklist with your team a couple of times a year so that they can hear your evaluations.

### **Mentally Tough teams and individuals:**

79. **Are able to finish games where they have the lead and put their opponent's away.** That doesn't mean that you win every game that you lead, but mentally tough teams do not make mistakes late in games, lose their poise under pressure, and do not change the way that they executed in the early part of the game to build the lead.

80. **Are grateful.** Gratitude creates a positive mind that is ready for success.

81. **Learn from failures and setbacks and apply those lessons.** Rather than blaming bad breaks, the officials, an "off night" or using any of the hundreds of available excuses for a poor performance, or a loss, mentally tough individuals learn from what went wrong, work in practice, and then are able to apply the lessons learned in games. Good

**"Things turn out best for those who make the best of the way things turn out."**

**--John Wooden**

teams find ways to win even when they are getting bad breaks and are not at the top of their games.

82. **Understand the importance of practice and come prepared to work and improve each and every day.** As a classroom teacher, I often saw athletes from other sports excited when there was an announcement that their practice for that day was cancelled. I have always done the best I can to make sure players understand the importance of practice as the time to improve and prepare. Over the years, the teams who have understood this concept the best have been the teams that I would rate as the most mentally tough. Daily practices do become a grind, and I have always put a lot of thought into balancing in the right amount of time off and shortening the length of practice as the season comes to an end. But, the teams that see practice as an opportunity and not as a necessary evil to endure to play in the games, are the ones that improve the most and are playing their best at tournament time. An easy way to evaluate the effort and attitude your players bring to practice is to video practice once or twice a week. Then, halfway through the season, compare the enthusiasm and effort that is almost always present in early season practices with your current practices. Your team understands the importance of practice if it is difficult to tell which one is the earlier and which one is the later by just concentrating on the intensity that you see.

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83. **Practice and play with consistency.** Teams and players who develop mental toughness are much more consistent in their efforts, their attitudes, and their execution in both practices and games. As a result they make greater improvements than average teams. Their coaches can see a definite connection between their practice performances and their execution in games. Teams made up of mentally tough individuals come to practice every day with and are able to concentrate on improving, are less affected by changes in the momentum of a game, and can play through distractions and bad breaks that occur during games.
84. **Are coachable.** Coachability is more than just listening to what the coach says, having a positive attitude, and not causing problems for the team. Coachability is not having to be told the same thing over and over. A coachable player applies what the coaches teach in practices to his performance in games. Coachable players look the coach in the eyes when he is teaching in practice or in timeout huddles. Coachable players can take criticism from the coaching staff and use it to improve, but not take it personally.
85. **Consistently play confidently and decisively.** Everyone can play with confidence and decisiveness when things are going their way, but the truly mentally tough player plays that way even when the past few plays and the momentum of the game are going against her. Everyone is subject to times when they experience small degrees of self-doubt. Mentally tough players overcome that self doubt and believe in themselves even if no one else does.
86. **Deal with wins, losses, and all that goes with them on an even keel.** Mentally tough players and teams do not get too high after a victory (or during a winning streak), nor do they get too down after a loss, or during a string of losses. They take the lessons learned from either one and apply those lessons to the next practice to control what they can—their effort to improve every practice.
87. **Have faith not only in themselves, but also in their teammates, and their coaches.** With all of the individual honors, awards, and highlights that our players receive or hear about and are exposed to on television, we face the difficult challenges as coaches to our players focused on the fact that basketball is a team game. Mentally tough players realize that it is just as important to maintain confidence in their teammates and coaches during adverse situations as it is to have confidence in themselves.
88. **Have the courage to think and act differently than an average person.** The average person is not mentally tough enough to have the self discipline to do the

**“Good teams become great ones when the members trust each other enough to surrender the me for the we.”**

**--Phil Jackson**

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little things the right way day after day to be successful. They are focused on what they must do for success, not what on others think of them.

89. **Never bow to criticism.** When facing people who say they can't do something, mentally tough players remember all of those people who do support and believe in them. They don't listen to the critics, but instead, focus on being the best they can be.

**"We must all suffer one of two things; the pain of discipline, or the pain of regret or disappointment."**

**--Jim Rohn**

90. **Choose discipline over comfort.**

The maturity to make that choice is nothing more than an application of mental toughness. It is our jobs as coaches to make it clear to the players why the discipline to do what is necessary to be successful works and why taking the easy road

(choosing comfort) will bring about regret because it will lead to a lack of success.

91. **Can acknowledge a healthy respect for opponents without fearing those opponents.** If you have the confidence in yourself, you can admit and prepare for the fact that your opponent has some good qualities without fear.
92. **Do not know the meaning of the word quit.** They are able to consistently come from behind when it is necessary because they play for 24, 32, 40, etc... minutes and beyond through overtime when necessary.
93. **Win most of the close ones.** Mentally tough teams are not going to win every close game, they are not going to make every single big shot or get every key defensive stop. However, given the choice between talent and toughness the last two minutes of a game with the score difference of three points or less, I would rather be coaching the team with more toughness than the team with more talent, if I had a choice.
94. **Control their thoughts and emotions.** A major measuring stick of the mental toughness of the individuals that make up team is how well they control their thoughts and emotions both in adverse situations and during times of pressure. They don't show disgust with officials, coaches, or teammates, they don't get technical fouls during games, they don't get caught up in trash talking,
95. **Do not compound the few mistakes that they do make.** Mentally tough teams make fewer mistakes than most teams. When they do make mistakes, they do not compound them. For example, many times when a mentally weak player misses a shot she feels she should make, she will immediately try to steal the ball from her

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opponent who retrieved the rebound and pick up a frustration foul.

96. **Approach and play every game the same way.** It is human nature to see some games as more important or more meaningful than others. Mentally tough teams are able to prepare for and play with the same effort against a team that hasn't won a game as they do against an arch rival for a district championship.
97. **Do not make excuses nor blame others.** I have already discussed in this book my feelings about the importance of the coaching staff not allowing themselves or the players to make excuses. If you have a team that can hold themselves and their teammates accountable to that policy, even when the coaching staff is not around, then you have a very mentally tough group.
98. **Do more than is expected.** I once heard Mike Roller, a hugely successful high school and college coach in Nashville Tennessee say that "There are two types of players that you cannot win with. The first group is made up of players who don't do what you tell them. The second group is made up of players who only do what you tell them." His point being that to be good at anything, you have to be willing to do more than the average achiever does. That might mean shooting extra before or after practice, doing out of season workouts, it might mean being fundamentally correct in every drill, even if that fundamental is not the emphasis of the drill. A part of mental toughness is an inner attitude and motivation where a player wants to do whatever it takes to be the best that he is capable of being and to do the best he is capable of doing.
99. **Set high standards for themselves.** Players with championship level mental toughness are more focused on holding themselves accountable to the level they need to achieve to satisfy themselves and to reach their goals, rather than doing just enough to satisfy everyone else or to just get by.
100. **Are intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated.** Players who are motivated intrinsically play for the love of the game, the desire to be a contributor to the success of the team, a desire to become as good as they can be, and the like. Those players are in a much better mental frame of mind to handle the pressures and adversity than someone who plays for recognition, scholarships, awards, statistics, or for other extrinsic reasons. The fact is that many players who are motivated intrinsically do end up receiving some of the other as a result of their efforts.

**"When you are harder on yourself, the world is easier for you."**

**--Unknown**

## Principle #7 Mental Toughness for Coaches

Our performance as coaches requires a different level of mental toughness

**“Good work habits help develop an inner toughness and a self confident attitude that will sustain you through every adversity and temporary discouragement.”**

**--Paul J. Flyer**

Up to this point, this book has been focused on ways to improve the mental toughness of your players and many of the concepts can be applied to the coaching staff as well. In addition to being able to bring out and focus the direction and efforts of the mental toughness of your players, a coach must also have the mental toughness not only to make the right strategic decisions at the right time during a pressure filled game, but also to

endure the daily pressures of coaching. Mental toughness for coaches involves a lot more than just thinking clearly during the game.

### **Mental Toughness for coaches in running your program**

101. **Most players are not going to display the same mental toughness as adults.** You have to work to remember what it was like to be their age, regardless of what age group you coach. I believe that it is important to set high expectations in your program, but I also think that it is essential to understand that developmentally, even college age players are not on the same level that an adult is regarding mental toughness. And, not only to realize it, but to keep it at the forefront of your mind as you run your program.
102. **Gasoline or water?** John Maxwell writes and speaks to leaders in all walks of life. One of his ideas is that as a leader, we carry two buckets every time we go to put out a fire in any area of your life--one contains gasoline, the other contains water. If we choose to make the situation a personal confrontation, blow it out of proportion, immediately seek to make it a win-lose, place blame, or mishandle it in any other number of ways, we are pouring gasoline on the fire. If we choose to use our bucket of water to de-escalate the problem, we are improving our ability to effectively handle the current situation and also building our skills to handle the next one. John's message is for us simply to be consciously aware of which bucket we are using and the affect is has on our ability to lead. Coaches are leasers and must have the mental toughness to pour water on the fires.
103. **Make mental toughness a part of your personal growth plan.** We can't give something to our teams that we don't have ourselves. In my mind, part of being mentally tough is realizing that we all have weaknesses and that we have

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improvements to make, even on our strengths. Having the mental strength to accept that fact and go to work on improving our own mental toughness is essential.

104. **You must practice mental toughness.** Do as I say, not as I do, does not work in developing mental toughness in our teams. And, it is even more critical that coaches maintain our mental toughness during the most pressure packed situations. That is when we need to be at our mental toughness best. That is also when the players need us most—not only as a role model, but also as their leader. I believe that we grow in mental toughness the most under the toughest conditions and also that the most trying and stressful times are the true measure of how mentally tough we are.
105. **Be consistent.** As coaches, we have a responsibility to stay consistent with our standards, our reactions, and our emotions. We cannot take the practice floor as the leader of a group of young people and have what happened in one of our classes, or personal problems, or mounting losses (or wins), or any other factor influence the way we coach that practice. Each day, we have to be tough enough to do everything that we can to improve our individual players and our team collectively.
106. **Develop the mental discipline to follow the 80/20 rule.** The 80/20 principle (also known as the Pareto Principle), says that 20 percent of our activities produce 80% of our results. Regardless of how well we do our job as coaches, our limited practice time only allows for the necessary repetition and emphasis to develop at most three or four program trademarks. You must determine what the 20% of the activities are in your program that make up the 80% of your results. Make sure that you are spending 80% of your time improving those areas.
107. **Coaches cannot be influenced by outside factors.** I have not met very many coaches who are swayed by outside pressures to play a certain style or play certain players. But I have seen coaches go out of their way to do the opposite of what the pressure is—and that is not good either. Show mental toughness by sticking to what is right and best for the team and not going out of your way to show that you are the boss.
108. **Make a list of the qualities that you are going to have and review it daily.** Call it brain washing, self programming, or whatever you want, but the fact is that if you continually review the mental toughness qualities that you desire to have,

**“The greatest efforts in sports come when the mind is as still as a glass lake.”**

**-Timothy Gallwey**

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they will become clearer to you and they will become a subconscious part of who you are and what you do.

109. **Develop your own rituals and habits and stick to them.** Just like players need rituals, coaches need rituals to in order to establish a routine and comfort zone for your daily routine, practices, and games. Things like taking 20 to 30 minutes of alone time every day to think about your team and your program, spending a few minutes getting mentally prepared prior to each practice and game, taking time for a quick personal conversation with each player prior to the start of practice, waving to your family at the game, or anything else that is important to you that you can use to clear your mind.
110. **Use positive self talk.** We all have thoughts going around in our minds and quite often, they are negative. Develop the mental toughness to talk to yourself internally with positive thoughts rather than listening to the negative.
111. **Be able to assess the stress and frustration level of the players in your program.** Being able to judge where your players are in terms of their abilities to handle their challenges, whether those challenges are in their own or the team's lack of success, or individual frustrations do to events in or away from basketball.

112. **A part of our job is motivating players.** Some coaches don't feel that motivation is important, but I truly believe that being able to motivate players to do the things that lead to success is a prime difference in successful coach and an unsuccessful one. Successful coaches strike the right blend of logical and emotional motivators. Since we are working with human beings, emotions are always going to

**"Toughness is the ability to consistently perform toward the upper range of your talent and skills, regardless of competitive circumstances."**

**--Jim Lehr**

play a part in any successful attempts at motivation. I believe that the most powerful emotional motivators are the desire to do well for the good of the team and for each other, and the inner drive to overcome challenges and be successful. It is part of our challenge as a coach to find out what best motivates each team and the individuals that make up that team with each new season.

113. **Keep a perspective.** It is true that you are never as bad as your critics say, and probably not as good as everyone will say when you are winning. No matter how tough you are, no one enjoys the criticism, but if we can keep in mind during those difficult periods that we probably received a little more spotlight than we deserved when things were going well, it helps balance things off. Your critics

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are probably not the most knowledgeable basketball people to begin with—so make sure that you always evaluate the criticism, and if it is unwarranted, consider the source.

### 114. **What else would you rather be doing?**

For us as basketball coaches, our passion for the players we coach, the game itself, and for the competition is why we love what we do. I think that it is important to soak in every moment and find the positive every day, even when you have to dig deep. The players have a much shorter career than we do and we owe it to make every day count for them. I have also found that talking to retired coaches, that no matter how long their career was, when it is over, it doesn't seem long enough. Savor every moment! Mental toughness gives you the chance to take things as you want to take them. After all, what else would you rather be doing than coaching?

**“A bad day coaching basketball is better than a good day doing almost anything else.”**

**-Bob Hurley Sr.**

### **Mental toughness for coaches during practice**

115. **Mentally prepare for each practice.** My mindset has always been that practice is more important to the overall success and to where our team is heading than games. I sincerely have as many butterflies before practice as I do before a game because I feel more uncertain heading into a practice. Take some time before practice to envision what you want to have accomplished at the end of practice and how you will know whether or not you have accomplished it. Use your mental preparation time to clear your mind and focus all of your thoughts on practice prior to taking the floor.
116. **Stay intense the entire practice.** In your own way, you must stay mentally engaged in practice if you expect the players to do the same. They will follow your lead in the expectations of intensity and mental toughness more so than in any other area. I want our players to approach both practices and games with the mindset that we are running a marathon, not running a sprint. I am looking for us to sustain our emotional, mental, and physical intensities for the entire practice or game. It takes time and effort to develop the toughness to do that.
117. **Teaching new concepts to players will lead to mistakes in recent teachings.** Although we would all like to think that our teams will improve every day and in

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a linear fashion, the truth is that it is not realistic for the season to go that way. The fact is that until a skill or a scheme that the coach teaches is engrained over time as a habit. We have to realize that changes we made yesterday will probably take a step back as we go through new information today.

**“Get mad, cool down,  
then act mad.”**

**-Coach Don Meyer**

118. **Don't coach mad.** Anger zaps your energy and can cause poor decisions whether in practice or in games. We have to learn to control and channel our anger in the best interest of our teams.

119. **Coaches must manage both their time and energy levels.** We have to make a conscious effort to manage not only our time, but also to manager our energy levels. For many of us, coaching is our second job after teaching, or working another fulltime job. Even for college coaches who are fulltime, there are ever increasing demands on your workload. In order to be at our best during our decision making and planning, practices, and games, we have to give conscious thought to and take actions that maximize and replenish the amounts of spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical energy that we have.

Here is another concept from authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz from, *The Power of Full Engagement*:

“To be fully engaged, we must be physically energized, emotionally connected, mentally focused, and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond our immediate self-interest.”

Their assertion in the book is that in addition to the traditional thoughts of proper rest, proper diet, and proper exercise, that downtime is productive time because it recharges us, which then enables us to be more effective when we are working. Downtime needs to be written into and treated as sacred in all of our schedules as a part of our need for life-balance.

### **Mental toughness for coaches prior to, during, and after games**

120. **Focus on your team, not the officials.** For the head coach, not paying attention to the execution, intensity, and mental focus of your team will result in confusion on the part of the players, poor decisions by both coaches and players, and poor leadership. We all have a natural tendency to be distracted by the officials, but the more you can keep your attention on the decisions for and the leadership of your team.

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121. **Keep your mind clear and uncluttered.** Have as many decisions made ahead of time as possible so that you can delegate as much as possible to assistant coaches, managers, and trainers. If you don't have anyone to delegate to, doing ahead of time or making a list beforehand will keep you from having to go through the thoughts of what needs to be done such as scorebook, lineup cards, etc...
122. **We have to put our egos aside.** Don't get caught up in or make it personal with the officials, with the other coach, or with the players. We all have competitive fires or we would not be in coaching. But we have to always keep in mind that the growth and development of our players as people is of paramount importance. It always bothers me when I hear coaches use phrases like, "You are embarrassing me," because it really is not about us, it is about the players.
- "It's our job, but it's still  
a game to the players."  
-Unknown**
123. **Stick to the game plan.** Don't quit your game plan too early. Sticking to the game plan is more of an art than a science, but is a crucial part of your team's success. The game plan is what you have practiced and prepared your players to execute. Every game plan has adjustments and back up plans, but those have all been practiced by your players. Very seldom is a coach going to be successful by drawing something up that you have not rehearsed repeatedly with your players in practice.
- You developed the game plan after studying game tapes, scouting reports, evaluating your team, and putting it in during practice. Make sure that you stick with your game plan and don't give up on it too early just because the first few minutes aren't going as planned. Know what will cause you to go to the adjustments you have prepared, but don't abandon it all together.
124. **Focus on what you can control and let go of what you can't.** There are so many things to manage on game night that we have to know what we can control and be able to live with those things that we can't control. Concerning ourselves with things that we cannot control such as the officiating, not being treated well by your host school at road games, a game day illness of a player, and so on, only serve to zap your energy and your ability to deal with the things that you can control.
125. **Realize that even our most mentally tough players will be anxious and at times have panicked thoughts during a game.** We have to realize that our players are not always going to think rationally and be ready to deal with and help them react to the stress.

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126. **Manage the stress level of everyone on the team—both adults and players.** A large test of the mental toughness of a leader is her ability to manage the mental toughness of everyone else on the team. I learned early as a head coach that if I showed stress, it affected everyone else. The rest of the team members truly are a reflection of the head coach in the way that coach deals with stress.
127. **Don't second guess yourself.** There will be several decisions that you make in the course of a game ranging from who to start to who to play to what sets, what defenses, what matchups, the list is endless. There are so many decisions to make that no one is going to get them right every time. If something doesn't work,

**“A successful person is one who can lay a foundation with the bricks that others throw at them.”**

**--David Brinkley**

there is no guarantee that had you made another choice, that it would have worked better. You made the decision at the time, with the best information you had, with the best interest of

the team in mind. There is a time after the game for analyzing decisions, but only for the purpose of improving for the future, not obsessing on what happened in the past. That type of worry zaps precious time and energy that could be spent in a productive way to improve the program.

128. **Coach and play the game in quarters.** That gives you something smaller to focus on rather than the whole game from start to finish.
129. **Spend time on things that make the biggest improvements your program.** Regardless of how long those tasks or projects take.
130. **Take the blame for the losses** Bear Bryant said: “If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi good, we did it. If anything goes really good, then they did it. That's all it takes to get people to win football games for you.” I think that as the coach, you have to be tough enough to take the blame for your team's losses. It does no good to blame others. Taking responsibility when things don't go well will encourage others to step up and take responsibility to make themselves better.

## **Final Thoughts**

Compiling these ideas into this book has been both enjoyable and helpful to me.

Just like any other skill, Mental Toughness will get weaker unless it is something that we continually strive to improve and to keep sharp. My hope is that the ideas in this book will be useful to you as you work to keep both your players and your own mental toughness sharp!

## **Appendices**

The remainder of this book is composed of three handouts that we give our teams each year in their notebooks. The handouts are entitled:

- A) Poise
- B) Pressure
- C) Winners

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### **Appendix A**

#### **“Poise” (Written by Deron Sorrell)**

Poise is an emotional peace which is seemingly inconsistent with the challenge at hand. Poise is developed rather than learned. Poise permits practice to render expected results. Poise is nearly invisible at its strongest, but obvious to all when absent.

Poise does not improve our physical skill, but rather is the state of mind with which a performance is offered. Poise is understood by few. Poise is leased by many but owned by none. Poise is relative. Everybody has a little, but few have enough. Poise is not always passive. Poise is ready to fight, but always within the rules. Poise provides us with the ability to remain focused on our objective rather than aimlessly gazing at distractions. As our temptation to become distracted intensifies, our needed amount of poise increases. It is impossible to have too much poise.

Poise is readiness. Poise is not a fancy word for composure. Poise may choose to avoid conflict, but does not equate with passive play. Poise is more concerned with winning a game than with merely avoiding a fight. Poise is capable of an aggressive box out. Poise does not conflict with a foul that prevents a basket.

Poise is capable of a crushing screen. Poise does not preclude crashing the offensive boards. Poise allows us to execute the demands of the game while maintaining an awareness of the rules and a genuine respect for the competition.

Poise lessens the impact of pressure. Poise is the buffer which prevents pressure from damaging our performance. Poise removes all competition except the other team. Our preparation and strategy will prepare us for a particular opponent. Poise can either be a key component to winning or a major cause of defeat.

Poise is always needed. There is not a good time to be without poise. Everybody is aware that poise is needed on occasion, but few realize that it is called upon constantly. Poise must be a great strength in order for teams to achieve greatness.

There is little, if any, correlation between talent and poise. We all can develop poise if it is perceived as important and worthwhile to do so.

Poise provides us with the opportunity to do our best. Without poise, distractions will serve to detract from our performance. You and your teammates must develop poise in order to make any sincere effort toward achieving meaningful objectives. Anything other than our best is not acceptable. Poise is a necessary component to any pursuit within a competitive environment.

## **Appendix B**

### **“Pressure” (Written by Deron Sorrell)**

Pressure is not easily defined. Pressure takes many forms. It can be both created by circumstance or self--imposed. Pressure is not discriminatory, but often affects people differently. Pressure is equally a deadly enemy and a best friend. Pressure is impossible to avoid while pursuing excellence. An awareness with regard to pressure is essential in order to achieve championships. What does pressure mean to you?

Pressure could be a parent who wants you to score more points or take more shots. Pressure can be your own desire to earn more playing time. Pressure can be attempting a free throw in the closing seconds of a tight game. Pressure can be shooting your only shot of a season with a twenty point lead. Pressure can be never taking a shot. Pressure can be attempting to dribble while being guarded by somebody seemingly quicker than you. Pressure can be an inability to utilize your off hand. Pressure can be missing your first four shots. Pressure can be losing more games than you win. Pressure can be a packed gym. Pressure can be an empty gym. Pressure can be meeting your own expectations. Pressure can be effectively surpassing the expectations of others. Pressure can be bad officiating. Pressure can be expecting to win. Pressure can be fearing defeat. Pressure can be a winning streak. Pressure can be a losing streak. Pressure can be anywhere at any time. Pressure can be everywhere at once.

Successful people do not learn to overcome pressure, but rather to utilize it. The only way to avoid pressure is to willingly sacrifice our desire to succeed. For example, a student who has no care or concern with regard to graduation would effectively avoid feeling any pressure upon taking an exam. Avoiding pressure does not generate success, but rather effectively guarantees failure. How can we utilize pressure?

The keys to performing within a pressure packed environment are preparation and toughness. Preparation involves developing both necessary skills and a thorough understanding as to what is expected. Toughness means being ready, willing, and able to muster a complete effort without being aware in advance of an outcome. Toughness is putting forth our very best and accepting whatever the consequences. While pressure is capable of defeating most preparation and toughness, there are a very few exceptions. These exceptions are often referred to as champions. Are you prepared and tough enough, or has pressure conquered you?

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### Appendix C

**Here are a few more thoughts as to what mentally toughness looks like.** You can substitute the phrase “mentally tough players” for “Winner.”

What makes one person a winner and other people losers? How they think! Your self-image determines your ability and your success. You will be ready mentally if you are thinking success. For instance:

- 1) A WINNER is always ready to tackle something new... a loser is prone to believe it can't be done.
- 2) A WINNER isn't afraid of competition... losers excuses themselves with the idea that the competition can beat them.
- 3) A WINNER makes a mistake and says, "I was wrong"... a loser makes a mistake and says, "It wasn't my fault," and blames someone else.
- 4) A WINNER is challenged by a problem and goes through it.. a loser does not want to face it, tries to go around it, but never gets by it.
- 5) A WINNER realizes there is no time like the present to get a job done... a loser is prone to procrastinate with the hope that things will get better tomorrow.
- 6) A WINNER thinks positively, acts positively, and lives positively... a loser usually has a negative attitude and a negative approach to everything.
- 7) A WINNER says "Let's find out..." a loser says, "Nobody knows."
- 8) A WINNER makes commitments... a loser makes empty promises.
- 9) A WINNER says, "I'm good, but not as good as I should be..." a loser says, "I'm not as bad as a lot of other people."
- 10) A WINNER learns from those who are superior... a loser tries to tear down those who are superior.
- 11) A WINNER credits his "good luck" for winning-even though It isn't good luck; a loser blames "bad luck" for losing-even though it isn't bad luck.
- 12) A WINNER knows how and when to say "Yes" and "No"; a loser says, "Yes, but" and "Perhaps not" at the wrong times, for the wrong reasons.

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- 13) A WINNER isn't nearly as afraid of losing as a loser is secretly afraid of winning.
- 14) A WINNER works harder than a loser, and has more time; a loser is always "Too busy" to do what is necessary.
- 15) A WINNER shows he's sorry by making up for it, a loser says, "I'm sorry," but does the same thing the next time.
- 16) A WINNER knows what to fight for, and what to compromise on; a loser compromises on what he shouldn't and fights for what isn't worthwhile fighting about.
- 17) A WINNER listens, a loser just waits until it's his turn to talk.
- 18) A WINNER would rather be admired than liked, although he would prefer both; a loser would rather be liked than admired, and is even willing to pay the price of mild contempt for it.
- 19) A WINNER feels strong enough to be gentle; a loser is never gentle-he is either weak or petty tyrannous by turns.
- 20) A WINNER feels responsible for more than his job: a loser says, "I only work here."
- 21) A WINNER says, "There ought to be a better way to do it," a loser says, "That's the way it's always been done here."
- 22) A WINNER paces himself; a loser has only two speeds: hysterical & lethargic.
- 23) A WINNER works hard to achieve his goals, a loser just gets by.

SO IF YOU, WANT TO BE A WINNER, THINK LIKE A WINNER... ACT LIKE A WINNER... AND SOONER THAN YOU THINK, YOU'LL BE A WINNER TOO!