

When the Game Stands Tall: The Story of the De La Salle Spartans and Football's Longest Winning Streak (Hayes, Neil)

Based on Bob's model, we empowered the players to be more accountable, to take more responsibility for the team, and to police themselves.

Victories are a byproduct of a larger vision. It begins with a question: How much do we owe each other?

What makes this program so special is what you carry in your heart, they argued, not what you hang on the wall.

Nobody works his teams harder, stresses fundamentals more, but he will tell you that the key component to his success is the most basic of human emotions—

They win because of who he is. "Kids respect true humility and that you stand for something more than winning," he notes. "They'll fight for you and your program if you stand for more than that. It boils down to what you believe in as a person, and I'm talking about how life should be lived and how people should be treated. Kids see all that. It's a whole package of things that have nothing to do with standing in front of a team with a piece of chalk

Our kids aren't fighting for wins. They're fighting for a belief in what we stand for."

He has created a culture, a community, based on timeless values where teenagers hold themselves and each other accountable.

Coach Ladouceur has found a way to turn selfish teens into selfless teammates by making them step back and examine their relationships.

Attention to detail is one of the things that separates De La Salle from the competition

Ladouceur and his staff give players vigilant feedback. Not even the slightest misstep or hesitation goes unnoticed.

The staff is fueled by pessimism and obsessed with preparation. Strengths are overlooked, weaknesses magnified.

“We can’t make you great players. We can offer you the opportunity to become great players.

Maybe it’s his soft-spoken manner that makes Ladouceur such a powerful public speaker. He is unflinchingly honest and direct.

But my strength is being able to tell you guys if you’re playing up to your abilities. That I do know.

Here’s how the meeting is going to go. I’m not going to give you any pre-game talk tomorrow. I don’t give speeches. Don’t anticipate some guy firing you up, whether it’s a teammate or a coach. I don’t want to do it and I don’t want them to have to do it [pointing to his assistant coaches]. Do it yourself. If you sit there and say, “I need somebody to fire me up,” that’s horseshit. It doesn’t happen that way. It all comes from within your own heart....

Here’s what I see from you. Every team needs leaders to cut the path and followers who make it wider. Every great team has to have followers, guys who will go, “I believe in this guy, I’m going to do what he says; I’m going to follow his lead. I’m going to be right beside him, whatever he wants.” It’s OK to be a follower depending upon what you’re following. I’m a follower. I’m a leader and a follower and I’ll gladly FOLLOW ANYTHING I BELIEVE IN OR ANY PERSON I BELIEVE IN. I will follow.

If I'm not a tough son of a bitch on that field, my leadership credibility is diminished.

Leadership in creative pursuits. History is made by passionate, creative people and organizations

The article intrigued him, however. Bob had friends who had gone to Catholic grammar and high schools, and he envied the sense of community and belonging they felt.

"We wanted to train kids to play at a level of excellence that satisfied us, and we were people who didn't play for the adulation. We wanted to take the spirit of the game and infuse it in the kids. He wanted them to play with pure joy and abandonment. Winning was secondary to that. It was a by-product of playing at that level. As starry-eyed as that sounds, that is what he really believes."

Point by point he took them through the game plan and scouting report. Then Alexakos talked about the importance of individual goal-setting. "I wanted them to put some pressure on themselves," Alexakos said. "If you do it in public it's conceited. But if you do it to an intimate friend it's a commitment, and the power of commitment

Ladouceur expanded the concept until every player was required to make at least one weight-lifting goal, one practice goal, and one game goal, which are then written on index cards. Players give the cards to a teammate or coach who is responsible for determining whether the goals have been fulfilled. The findings are reported to the team the next week.

My opinion of you guys is you don't want the blood and sweat and grit that goes along with [being] a great football team. That's the part you want to skip. It's not going to happen that way. You guys have to get tougher, mentally and physically. Your failure to attend to detail on this team—that's mental toughness. You totally missed the point of the goal cards as far as what's going to make us a better team. I can go through every single one of you and tell you exactly what you need to work on,

and if you don't understand it you haven't been paying attention to what these coaches have been telling you....

They believed they made plays when other teams didn't because they worked harder. The mindset was that they deserved to win because they wanted it more.

When you come to the edge of all the light you know and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing one of two things will happen: There will be something solid to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly.

"Lad creates an environment where you can cry in front of your friends and tell them you love them," he said. "What do they do at the end of chapel service? They hug. Do you know how hard it is to get high school kids to do that?"

It wasn't until my first chapel service at Serra that I learned that love is the key to everything they do."

In his opinion, most of his so-called advantages are the result of stability, success, the high standard he imposes, and the collective effort to outwork opponents.

Ladouceur's program is based on the belief that if you do everything precisely right, if you make a commitment to your coaches and teammates and sweat through all the grueling hours of workouts, and bond with your teammates and play for them and not for yourself, winning just happens. But in the end the byproduct isn't as important as what you learned about yourself along the way.

"Success" by Ralph Waldo Emerson: To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

The most I learned about myself is when things were falling apart. So when you guys talk about your season not working out the way you wanted it to, don't piss and moan about it; look for the lesson in it. How do you grow from that?

Their dedication extended beyond the field. Team leaders knew that three players violated the no-alcohol policy over the summer and were cornered in the weight room and told to either match their teammates' commitment level or leave the team.

They examined the relationships and the intangibles that would make them a tighter group. They talked about how the seniors the year before didn't love each other and didn't watch each other's backs and how that was the reason they had lost. They wouldn't let that happen.

He tells them that even if their son never plays a down in a football game that's reason enough for him to participate.

"I'm dealing with your son, not you," Ladouceur tells parents at the meeting. "If your son comes home and complains, don't call me and fight his battles for him. Make him stand up and be heard. That's part of growing up. If he does that and there are still things I need to know, then by all means call me."

"I told them they better humble their team because De La Salle doesn't give a flying fig about size and speed. They punch the clock, go to work, kick your ass, and get on a plane and go home. They don't get caught up in the hoopla. That's the one thing I couldn't convince the Poly guys of."

"If our kids are looking bad in one area, we're never going to throw up our hands," Ladouceur said. "If they can't do something that's fundamental to our program, they're going to get hammered with it all year until the end of the year when we'll finally realize they couldn't do it. We're not going to give up on it. This

We're tough on kids because we believe they can do things they don't believe they can. But when do you keep pushing them and when do you back off and let them settle at their own level? That's a tough question, and it's different for each individual kid."