

Patriot Reign-Michael Holly

He has learned to be more of a negotiator with his own team, making compromises in some areas-or at least being able to listen –without selling out his core beliefs.

It would be years before Belichick would develop a head coach's scope of vision, years before he would see that planning the issues around the game is as important as planning the game itself.

Let's put it this way: when you're the head coach, you're the head coach twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. No matter what happens, it's on your watch and, to a degree, it's your problem.

Appropriately, his words have always had a resounding economy to them. When he speaks to his team, no one is murky about where he stands. He has an opinion. It is always direct.

Under Belichick, all Patriot jobs could be classified as temporary. They were earned and held by performance, not status or longevity.

But the thing that means the most to players is to be able to go out there and get on the stage, once you take the stage away from them, whoever it is, they have nothing that can match it. You can talk about all the money they have in the bank, but if they don't have their self-esteem and their pride, then they don't have their stage.

The final question was, what will you do this week in order to lead your team to victory? It may have been on the quarterbacks test, but it was understood that the question was for everybody.

What we had was a sense of urgency, a sense of urgency about playing well, being smart, and capitalizing on every opportunity and situation that came our way.

He knows how to craft critiques in such a way that they go from being personal evaluations to collective ones, and suddenly everyone feels accountable.

The essence of Belichick is that he is a problem solver. Since he has already clearly identified the problems, he is now here to offer solutions.

They work for an organization where accountability is one of the sacred codes: there is no place to hide if things get sloppy.

Either you get better, you support someone else who is trying to get better, or you have a constructive suggestion that will help this football team.

He really brings good guys in. And I felt that right away. All the guys are generally good guys, with the same emphasis on winning.

Before they can know what they need, they need to know who they are. This is one of Belichick's core philosophies, and it is why he was sitting in the Gillette Stadium room.

There were comments and sometimes statistics on his mental errors, his performance in the weight room, his ability to be coached, his attitude, his ranking compared with others at his position leaguewide and his ability to help the team next year.

He is your typical coach-killer. Most of his teammates have no confidence in him. All of the offensive linemen know he can't be counted on, and the quarterbacks know it as well.

He saw the way low-character, high maintenance players could deplete a team.

They don't put their feet on tables and reflect on their greatness. They are analysts, stalking themselves for loopholes and weaknesses. When they find them, especially in retrospect, they want to perform autopsies on the errors so they won't happen again.

This is how a segment of the Patriots' program works. It is driven by a concept that is rare not only in sports but in American society. The idea, in a country full of social and entertainment options, is that the obligations of the job and devotion to mastery of the job are an employee's top priority. The Patriots are attempting to stack their roster with productive players who either think that way now or are on the cusp of conversion. They don't want to be paternalistic figures asking their players, "Did you put in extra film time?" They want the kind of players who want to do it without being asked.

He can even do all of that and come to the conclusion that a central point does not exist. He takes large things and makes them small, which is a strength. Sometimes he believes that large issues, called crises on most teams, can be or should be broken down in the same way with no fallout.

On Wednesday he had exactly thirty-two questions about the Cowboys. He randomly went around the room, asking players things they should know about the players they were facing. The did.

We're all going to know what we're doing; we may lose some games, but lack of preparation is unacceptable reason to fail.

This was a stand. The ball was six feet away from the goal line. It was also a measurement of a different kind. This was going to show how far the Patriots had come. It was going to show how study and preparation could aid athletic ability.

The larger point, though, was the development program for linemen that the Patriots had written into their scouting manual. It was an outline for those players who weren't ready to contribute but "may be able to compete within a year with strength and development and intense individual technique refining."

In Hochstein's first year with New England, Scarnecchia didn't think the guard brought enough vigor to his upper body training. He called him a "bullshitter in the weight room"

But then, didn't it all make sense that the Patriots would finish like this? This was a team led by a man who sees a link between high production and preparation. He is a man who was raised near an academy where men and women always talk of teamwork and excellence. He took the parts of the structure he liked and fashioned a life in which he would always seek a person's ideas first.

I'll never forget what I experienced in New England, I hadn't been on a team like that since high school. We would hang out together, have fun, and hold each other accountable. It's something that can never be taken away from me.