

Foreword

Over the course of my career, I have had the pleasure of coaching thousands of young men. As any coach will tell you, they are all special. A few select individuals, however, inevitably end up occupying a unique place in their heart. For me, one of those players is Bill Mehrens.

Early in my coaching career—while I was still at Carroll College in Helena, Montana—Bill was my starting halfback. He was a talented, dedicated football player and a delight to coach. He was hard-working and always focused on improving himself and making his teammates better. No edge was too small to escape his notice.

It was no surprise then that he should have initially selected coaching as a career. Nor was it a surprise that he—along with John “Poncho” McMahon, his assistant coach—would apply the same tenacity to coaching that he displayed in earning an All American honors as a football player.

If there was any surprise to his success, it was just how quickly he grasped the most important elements of being a successful coach. First, he became a superlative teacher; and, second, he adopted the philosophy that producing winning results on the playing field was only part of his job.

Most sports fans today are familiar with the quote, often attributed to Vince Lombardi, that says: *Winning isn't everything, it is the only thing*. Over the years, the quote has taken on a life of its own and, as a coach, I can understand its intuitive appeal to the competitive nature that resides in so many of us in the profession.

Unfortunately, far too many people have come to interpret the statement in a superficial, shallow and, ultimately counterproductive, manner. Lombardi himself later acknowledged that he regretted the statement and said that what he meant to say was *Winning isn't everything, but making the effort to win is*.

The difference in phrasing is an important one, but it still doesn't accurately capture the true purpose of coaching—to get the most out of your players. That is because coaching is not simply about winning on the field; it is about preparing and teaching young men and women how to compete and win in the most important game of all—life.

As such, the number of wins a coach compiles is secondary to the number of lives he or she positively influences. *Coached for Life* reminds us of this simple but often forgotten fact.

What this book also reminds us is that the work of any successful coach or teacher cannot—and should not—be viewed solely by whether, at season’s end, his or her team has earned the label of champion. Rather, a coach’s success can only be accurately measured years later—after the lessons, values and principles they instilled in their players have had the chance to manifest themselves in the form of their players becoming better parents, spouses, community leaders, teachers and, perhaps even, coaches.

Only then, in the dim hindsight of time, can we truly judge how successful a coach has been. Unfortunately, few coaches have the opportunity to view across the chasm of time and bear witness to the fruits of their labor as is so clearly presented in *Coached for Life*.

It is my hope that every teacher and coach—as well as any player who has been positively touched by a coach—finds time to read this book. That is because I know in my heart that this book could have literally been written about any of the thousands of deserving teachers and coaches who so often toil in anonymity but continue to pour their heart and soul into the vital job of instilling values in this country’s youth. *Coached for Life* reminds us all of the important work of our professions, and serves as a tangible reminder that in the game of life—where *Winning Really is Everything*—America’s coaches and teachers have compiled a lot more “wins” than most of us will ever realize.

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