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How the Effects of Teamwork in Athletics Translates  
Into Real-World Applications

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“Teamwork makes the dream work.” There’s no ‘I’ in team.” These are all cliché phrases that athletes and coaches think of when referring to teamwork in athletics. Why are these clichés not given adequate credit anymore? The great Michael Jordan once stated, “Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.” This is a powerful statement that comes from the greatest individual basketball player of all time. We see the power of collaboration between people and how it has a positive influence on the whole group or team. But teamwork goes far beyond the field or court. Teamwork stretches into our daily lives, including the work place. There are many applications on how the effect of teamwork in athletics translates into the real world.

Teamwork is defined as, “The combined action of a group of people, especially when effective and efficient” (Webster, 2018). This is the process of working collaboratively in order to achieve a goal. Teamwork is often a crucial part of a business or team, as it is often necessary for colleagues and teammates to work well together, trying their best under any circumstance. Teamwork means that people will try to cooperate, using their individual skills and providing constructive feedback, despite any personal conflict between individuals. Some of the types of skills that teamwork calls upon include, communication, conflict management, listening, being reliable, and being respectful.

These five types of teamwork skills are essential to any team. First skill includes communication. Being a good team member means being able to clearly communicate your ideas with the group. You must be able to convey information via phone, email, and in person. You want to make sure your tone is always professional but friendly. Both verbal and nonverbal communication is important when working with a group in person. Next skill includes conflict management. This is a highly important teamwork skill. Being able to mediate problems between team members is crucial. You need to be able to negotiate with your team members to settle disputes, and make sure everyone is happy with the team's choices. Third skill is listening, which seems small but is noticed the most when working with others. You need to listen to the ideas and concerns of your peers in order to be an effective team member. By asking questions for clarification, demonstrating concern, and using nonverbal cues, you can show your team members that you care and understand them. Next includes, being a reliable teammate or co-worker. You want to be a reliable team member so that your coworkers can trust you. Lastly all teammates, coaches, and even parents should be respectful. People will be more open to communicating with you if you convey respect for them and their ideas. Simple actions like using a person's name, making eye contact, and actively listening when a person speaks will make the person feel appreciated (Doyle, 2017).

Applying these five teamwork skills in a team will ultimately see positive results that could help lead a team from being average to excellent. Dr. Alan Goldberg has a progressive study over teamwork in an article titled, "The Power of Teamwork." However, Dr. Alan doesn't avoid what really goes on with teams that

hold them back from reaching their potential. “To them, the ‘team’ is nowhere near as important as the ‘me.’ ‘What’s in it for me?’ ‘I want more playing time. I should be starting instead of them!’ It would be easy for aspiring young athletes to miss the boat and never learn how very important ‘team’ really is to success in sports” (Goldberg, 2018).

With all the positives that come from teamwork there are also those who are a part of a team that brings a negative attitude. There are also plenty negative team attributes that can lead a program in the opposite direction. These attributes could be talking behind a teammates back, blaming others, complaining about playing time, or even being dishonest. Teammates have the ability to bring up or down a team. These negative qualities of being a good teammate can make all the difference in a team’s performance on and off the floor. Being coachable will allow these qualities to be avoided when having a successful team. If teams can get over their own selves and focus on the betterment of the team then that will make all the difference in the world.

All serious athletes want to the opportunity to play varsity athletics and even college one day. Coaches watch more than just what is happening on the court which includes how the team functions together. Coaches don’t always look for the most talented players. In fact, coaches now a days look for great attitudes on and off the floor and if they are coachable. The successful coaches today want athletes who are coach-able. That is, athletes who listen, who are open to new things, who take constructive criticism, who respect the coach and their teammates, athletes who are

always looking for ways to improve, who are 'team players' and who choose to deal with their conflicts and problems constructively (Goldberg, 2018).

Dr. Goldberg continues to state that, "Your relationships with your teammates and how well you play together with them is far more important to the coach than just how you perform. The heart of having a winning attitude and being coachable is being a team player. You have to surrender your need for individual glory for the good of the team. You have to get into 'we', not 'me!' Winning teams come together to share a common goal. These goals usually outweigh the individual because there is a bigger picture when it's all said and done. Why is teamwork so important? Very simply because the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. Because together everyone achieves more. Winning and success always come from a total group effort. Total Effort All Members" (Goldberg, 2018). This is what coaches talk about when they discuss "team chemistry." When you support your teammates, are direct and honest with them, readily accept your role on the team even if it means that you don't get as much playing time as someone else, then you're making a significant contribution to a winning effort (Goldberg, 2018).

These coaches also want athletes who provide positive energy throughout the team. "The Energy Bus" by Jon Gordon speaks on 10 rules to fuel your life, work, and team with positive energy. In the chapter titled, "Fuel Your Ride with Positive Energy" Jon Gordon exclaims how, "Positive energy is the fuel that allows you to overcome the obstacles. Positive energy is high octane fuel and negative energy is gas from the bottom of last years can. Positive energy builds momentum and a

negative attitude seems to find roadblocks and excuses” (Gordon, 2007, p 45).

Having this positive attitude and energy is contagious and can lead to great success on the team.

This research from Dr. Goldberg and the book “The Energy Bus” are seen on all platforms of athletics. At St. Mary’s University, the women’s basketball team can see how teamwork is put into action. Tia Mason, a senior at St. Mary’s communicated some of her experiences about being on a college athletic team and its importance to her future. Tia started off by saying what teamwork meant to her. “Team work is everyone coming together for one common goal. It is important that everyone knows their role on the team and they do their part so we can finish our end goal.” She exclaimed how, “Team work is extremely important. Being a part of the women’s basketball I was not an individual. In the end it was extremely important to trust everyone on the court and have each other’s back. I have been a part of teams with negative attributes. My AAU team had all the talent in the world but we would never win games because everyone was worried about themselves and their scholarships. It made playing the game not fun until I arrived on campus at STMU” (Mason, 2018). Another player, Kaitlyn Walla explained her experiences on being a member of the basketball team. She stated that, “Teamwork can make or break the success of a team” (Walla, 2018). These same players were asked on how athletics will shape their success away from the court once it’s over. Tia Mason started off saying, “Being a communication major, I have to work with people even if they have different opinions. From being a part of negative teams and teams that truly developed together I am able to pull from both experiences on how to lead a

team in my future career (Mason, 2018). Kaitlyn Walla also chimed in by saying, “I think that the skill I have learned to be a good teammate will create success far beyond the court. Working with different backgrounds and personality types will help me learn how to with people in the real world. The ability to navigate different personality types will help me be more successful in life” (Walla, 2018).

The testaments from these college athletes show how they see being on a successful team will contribute to their success. However, do these skills truly carry over into real world applications? Kermit Burley also writes an article called, “How to Describe the Importance of Teamwork.” However Burley has a different perspective in mind. That perspective is off the hardwood and into the boardroom. “Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach, defined teamwork as ‘Individual commitment to a group effort, which is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work’” (Burley, 2018). There are many definitions of teamwork offered by sports figures, generals and company leaders. All of them agreeing on one thing; teamwork is extremely important for the success of a company. How you describe teamwork is also important, and once it is defined, it can be achieved” (Burley, 2018).

Burley highlights four key aspects on how teamwork leads to success in a business setting in her article. First is how teamwork multiplies success. Teamwork has often been described as one plus one equals three. On teams, people can work together and accomplish much more than they could by themselves. This concept of synergy is how many sports teams achieve success. Often, the teams with the best

players do not win championships. It is frequently the teams that work best together that accomplish great things. Your company can also accomplish great things when everyone is working together toward a common goal. Define that goal clearly and watch your people achieve it (Burley, 2018).

The next concept talks about how teamwork makes the job a lot easier. Employees now specialize in areas and contribute to the team through the work they produce. By specializing in areas like merchandising or accounting, they become more expert at their tasks and make your team more effective as a result. Working in teams also teaches your associates to work together more effectively and frequently new ways of doing things are discovered by team members working together to solve a problem (Burley, 2018).

Teamwork can also maximize strengths and reduce weakness. In team sports, team members work together in order to win. Individual weaknesses can be minimized through the efforts of the team. In football, for example, a weaker lineman receives help from a team mate to help block a competing player and the pass is completed successfully. In your company, you place your people where their strengths can be best used. People with the best human relations skills are placed in human resources and your best advertisers work in merchandising. Weaknesses can be reduced when your people concentrate on their areas of strength (Burley, 2018).

The last concept that Burley exclaims in his article is teamwork can make work fun! Work is more fun when you are a part of a team. You can build on other people's ideas and share in completing the assignment together. You also have



another pair of eyes to look at the work, which further reduces errors and mistakes. Studies have also shown that laughter and fun reduce stress, which can also increase effectiveness on the job. Teams that enjoy working together can accomplish great things for your company and great teams achieve their goals again and again (Burley, 2018).

Being able to translate the skills learned from athletics can lead to all these crucial concepts. Coach Cooper from St. Mary's University was a women's basketball standout. Now that she has graduated school she has seen the benefits of teamwork from her days of working in a cubical to now being the head assistant of her alma mater. Coach Cooper explains how being a contributor to her team in college helped her in her career. "I worked a desk job after college. I still applied the skills I learned from being on a team. I worked with different people of different backgrounds, cultures, and personalities. Anytime I came in contact with harder or less determined work ethics than myself I was able to conduct myself. For example people who come in last minutes, do the bare minimum, and leave work right at the bell. When I came across lower work ethics, I learned how to put differences aside and deal with them anyways. When I was in college I learned how to deal with lazy teammates. You can't make someone have heart on the court or even in the workforce. All you can do is try to encourage and try to get the most out of them. I learned all of that from being a part of a team. I also learned respect through my time as a college athlete. I learned how to respect my head coach and willingness to learn from him. This is the same in my jobs now. I have to listen and respect their

decisions that they ultimately make. Learning how to deal with someone that gives you orders in an everyday situation. The passion for the topic was like no other. Coach Cooper stated, "I learned how to focus on the task at hand. When I was on a team I learned to focus on the task of winning the game. It could be in my previous career in business to work for a deadline or even help my coworkers, even if my name wasn't on it. That's what being a good teammate is. Making sacrifices for the betterment of the team" (Cooper, 2018).

Another testament comes from Eddie Cuevas a member of the financial department at USAA. Eddie talks about attributes that he learned from athletics that he could apply to his corporate job at USAA. Eddie talks about a main attribute in particular, trust. "In a business prospective trust is a major component to my line of work. Coworkers will have to give me their parts of the project before it is due. I have to trust in them that they will get it done so we finish our task on time." He said that his biggest challenge in being a part of a team is dependence. Eddie goes on to say, "Having to depend on outside sources is the toughest thing but that is where trust comes in to play. He said in athletics he might have been the best player on his baseball team but he had to depend and trust in the rest of the team to get the job done on the field. He says now it's the same thing, "I still have to adjust and depend on others even if I have the most knowledge on the project. These people also have to depend on me which makes me work harder for them. I want to let my teammates know that I care and want to make a difference for them too" (Cuevas, 2018).

At USAA, the company builds intramural sports leagues for their workers. The company sees the benefits of sports and how it can translate in to their jobs. The company wants to bring people together through the power of sport. If they are able to work together for a common goal in something simple as slow pitch softball, they will be more willing to do the same in the office. Also, many employers search for former athletes to work for them. For example, Enterprise Rent-a Car sees the benefit as they employ a high amount of former college athletes. Enterprise CEO Chris Smith stated, "We established a proven track record of hiring former collegiate athletes as seen in their national media campaign. Partnering with Career Athletes allows Enterprise to connect with its nationwide network of athletic departments and student athletes, and we look forward to very productive partnership. Our commitment to college recruitment has made us the #1 recruiter of college graduates and many former student-athletes have realized their potential and developed successful careers with us through the leadership they've learned in athletics" (Olathe, 2012).

The correlation is uncanny between teamwork in athletics and real world applications. Athletes from different backgrounds and sports have a common relationship when it comes to working with others. Through the power and knowledge of teamwork from all types of cultures, any group of people can rise to any occasion that is thrown at them.

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