

BUILDING TEAM UNITY

By Dean Smith; Naismith Hall of Fame/NCAA Champion Coach

My philosophy is team unity -- basketball is a team game. We can't succeed unless we do it as a team. Point out to the players that everyone must play defense. It is important to have goals for team unity. Points are not the only thing. You need each other. Team play is built in practice. One idea is to have an emphasis of the day, and then give credit during a practice to those players that are accomplishing that emphasis. Players must be aware that if they let down at any time they are hurting the team.

Building Team Unity:

1. Do not let one teammate yell at another.
2. No one is perfect. Have you ever seen a perfect game by a basketball player?
3. A player needs encouragement when he makes a mistake. You must care about the last man as much as you care about your stars.
4. Never substitute on a mistake. If a player is trying, what more can you ask?
5. Respect every player on the team.
6. A life lesson is tolerance for one another. We should go out of our way to respect and satisfy each and every person, even though Society evaluates success by the number of wins and losses.
7. Build a respect and rapport between player and coach.
8. Praise correct performance and effort.
9. Players on the bench should always stand and applaud team plays and players coming to the sidelines following a substitution.
10. Give emphasis to unselfishness among team members and to give credit to the players who do the little things.
11. Acknowledge the passer. Point your finger to the player. (Give both a verbal and physical response.).
12. Always have players on the floor let you know when they are tired (we do it by having them raised a fist). Starters usually come out of five to six times in a game.
13. Get players to go as hard on defense as they do on offense.
14. Stress constantly recognizing the need for each other.
15. After a game, try to give recognition to the opposing coach.
16. Why do we run sprints? For PRIDE. We think we are in better shape than the other players. Sprints help build team morale.
17. Convince your players not to let their teammates down. The best way to build team unity is to teach players at the correct way to play the game is to play hard. Secondly, players must understand that every player is important.

18. Emphasize to the seniors that this is their team; they will make the rules and the coaches will force them. Do not allow any phony rules -- they hurt team unity.
19. A player want to be disciplined; this helps to develop both team and self-discipline. Give a player a second chance when it is appropriate.

Coaching Hints:

1. Get substitutes to realize that they are not in the game just to score.
2. Correct without criticizing the performer.
3. Never embarrass a player in a game or practice.
4. Hold your self accountable.
5. Promote self-confidence in all your players.
6. Positive thinking is essential. Teach your players to control their attitude.

Substitution System:

1. Our "Blue Team" (players 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) entered the game as a unit -- always in the first half -- and play at least one or two minutes.
2. The first team gets a rest and comes back harder.
3. Most opponents prepare for your best players, not for your subs. Opposing players often try to increase their averages and take bad shots against our "Blue Team."
4. Have a designated player ready to go in for a particular player whenever that player gives the tired signal.
5. Decide, whether you want to win or make parents happy.
6. Good things happen to winning teams.

Player-Coach Relations:

the game of basketball requires a great deal of teamwork, and certainly more than five players must be ready to play when called upon. At the start of the season we convey the objective of team play and the importance of team unity. Players are not rated one to 12. They are rated by positions. They know where and when they are apt to play. We believe our first group will play better knowing there are substitutes ready to replace them. Each player is taught the role that will best help our team. Our goal is that all players will take great pride in their roles.

We also applied some sound military practices to our situation. For example, during World War II, the "buddy" system made one soldier dependent upon another. Few deserted. We find the same principle works for us. During our six-week period of running prior to the season, we ask our seniors to be models and set the example for the rest of the squad. We divide our team into three running groups according to how fast they can run. When practicing free throws, the whole team runs when free throws are missed. We do things in practice to help each other. When running sprints, we measure the last bread and insist on maximum effort. We also practice drawing the charge because it is team play.

Practice sessions become game situations for team unity. Prepare your young players for entry into the game. A young substitute is better for one minute and a tired star. If you see someone loafing and you do not take him out, he will never give the tired signal. Allow your seniors to come to you with problems, not names. Your success as a coach is the attendant upon your ability to instill teamwork and develop team unity.