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Motivation – In The Blink of An Eye

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Coaches know what motivation means and what it looks like, but sometimes find it difficult to determine whether an athlete possess this intangible quality, especially when recruiting. Coaches are forever wondering how to increase the motivation levels of certain athletes and even their own coaching staff. Coaches ask themselves - “Why can’t my coaches and athletes be as motivated as I am?” Coaches may also inherit players they did not recruit, whose attitude and work ethic run counter to their own. There are many theories about how to increase motivation, but this article does not address this traditional area. Rather, this short piece addresses how coaches can utilize their subconscious, with all of its years of coaching experience, and “know” – in the blink of an eye – whether a player possesses the intangible quality of motivation they are seeking.

Coaches seek advice from other coaches, watch videos of an athlete, see them in action, pay attention to the statistics and awards of a player, but still have difficulty zeroing in on whether an athlete truly possesses high levels of motivation. Coaches know certain athletes have tremendous talent through “conscious” observation, but discover, many times too late, these same athletes do not possess the motivation to make the team and themselves the best they can be. This experience is probably one of the most frustrating for college coaches, especially since they have invested money and time into these athletes. If there was a way to know the motivation levels of potential recruits before offering them a position on the team, would you want to have this skill? All coaches have answered an emphatic yes to this question.

A professor and author by the name of Malcolm Gladwell recently wrote a book entitled “Blink.” In this book, he challenges traditional ways of making decisions and addresses how most people fail to use and trust their subconscious. He argues that making a decision in the “blink” of an eye (i.e., using the subconscious) can be a highly accurate form of decision-making. Coaches have tremendous amounts of experience and knowledge stored in their subconscious as all professionals do. The problem, however, is they do not access it or this initial reaction. For example, “something” will tell college coaches that they should not offer certain athletes a position on the team, but they offer them anyway, knowing “something” in their gut does not feel right. Many college coaches have stated that they recruited somebody very hard, but knew in some way that this athlete was not right for the program. Unfortunately many times they did not follow their gut and the decision they knew in the “blink of an eye.”

In the book, one researcher demonstrates how he can witness the interaction between a man and woman for approximately 10 minutes and predict with 90% accuracy whether the couple will be together in 15 years. Another example is how a professional

tennis coach, long after his days on the professional circuit, is able to detect with over 90% accuracy when professional tennis players will double fault after their first serve does not go in. Without anything but their intuition, these two individuals were able to tell – in the blink of an eye – what was going to happen. Everyone has this ability or instinct - it is simply the subconscious. People fail to listen to it, however, because they are taught that more data and information will lead to a better decision. Now data and information can help, but this article is meant to challenge coaches to think about the way decisions are made, especially when it comes to recruiting athletes. If a coach “knows” that an athlete does not feel right - it is their subconscious with years of knowledge and experience speaking. Listen to it. It may go against the grain of past habits, but it is worth noting as can be seen in the examples from the research in “Blink”.

Sport psychologists are continuing to help coaches decipher whether an athlete has the intangibles – motivation, loyalty, commitment, dedication, and mental toughness to name a few. They assist by encouraging and challenging coaches to explore and follow their subconscious and find athletes that possess these characteristics. This path does not guarantee that “blink” decisions are always going to be correct, but it is something to explore in more depth.

Coach Hard, Coach Fun, Coach Well!