

Lessons from John Wooden

John Wooden, widely regarded as one of the greatest coaches of all time in American sports, died Friday at the age of 99. The man who led his UCLA basketball team to an unsurpassed record of 10 national championships in the 1960s and 1970s, died of natural causes after being hospitalized for dehydration at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center since May 26.

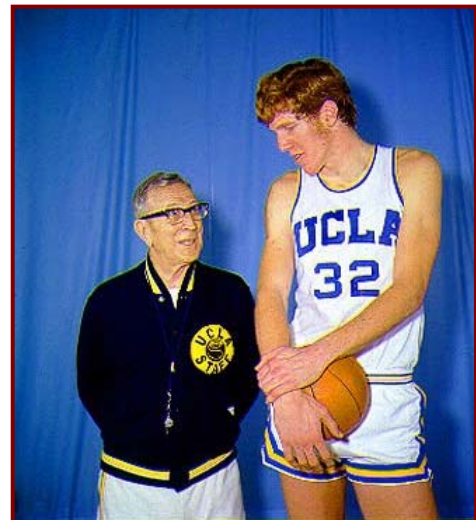


From 1964 to 1975, his teams won 10 national championships, including seven in a row. No other men's basketball coach has won more than four. (Pat Summitt, coach of the University of Tennessee Lady Vols, has won eight national basketball championships.)

Wooden fashioned the success of his teams on principles that will serve the best interests of any organization, be it business, education, military, health, the ministry, you name it. For example, he taught the team game and had only three hard-and-fast rules: no profanity, no tardiness and no criticizing fellow teammates. Layered beneath that apparent simplicity, however, were lessons on everything from how to put on your socks correctly to how to maintain poise. "It's the little things that make the big things happen," he once said. "It's getting the wrinkles out of your socks so you won't get blisters. Those are important things."

Maintaining a neat appearance was another of Wooden's non-negotiable rules. In the early 1970s, one of his star players, Bill Walton, challenged Wooden's authority by coming to practice with a beard and shaggy hair.

"That's good, Bill," Wooden responded. "I admire people who have strong beliefs and stick by them. I really do. We're going to miss you." Walton went to the locker room and shaved. "When I left UCLA in 1974 and became the highest-paid player in the history of team sports at that time," Walton later wrote in the UCLA alumni magazine, "the quality of my life went down. That's how special it was to have played for John Wooden and UCLA."



A high school English teacher for more than 10 years, Wooden often referred to his coaching as teaching, and relied on homespun precepts learned during his

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youth in Indiana. His slogans often carried a deeper message, such as “Be quick, but don’t hurry;” “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail;” “Never mistake activity for achievement.”

Summarizing his philosophy of coaching to the *Sporting News* in 2009, Wooden said, “You have to be patient. Good things take time. ... Basketball is not a complicated game, it’s a simple game. Get the players in good condition, and teach them how to keep balance – floor balance, physical balance, mental balance, moral balance. Very simple things.”

NEXT ON TUESDAY: John Wooden’s perspective on life, as shown in some inspirational quotes.

– Beecher Hunter