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Dear Coach:

Several months ago, you participated in a survey designed to examine the factors that contribute to team resilience. Almost 2000 coaches shared their views on what they do and what their teams do to foster resilience.

You were among the coaches who requested a summary of our findings. We are happy to report back to you what you and your colleagues across the country told us about their strategies for building team resilience and avoiding complacency that sometimes follows success.

As an incentive for participating, all coaches were entered in a drawing to receive a portable DVD player. We randomly selected three lucky coaches and we will be shipping their prizes in the days ahead.

Again, thanks very much for taking the time to share your thoughts on team resilience.

Sincerely,

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Executive Summary

Almost 2,000 coaches of team sports participated in a survey to investigate strategies to build team resilience in the face of adversity and strategies to overcome complacency following extended success.

Coaches identified a broad range of strategies for overcoming adversity and building resilience, including: recruiting mature players, preparing teams in advance by practicing responses to adverse situations, focusing on factors under players' control, creating a culture of mental toughness, and team building through outside activities to strengthen team cohesiveness.

Coaches reported that teams sometimes encounter self-imposed adversity after extended success. They attribute this phenomenon to complacency, loss of focus, changes in team composition, overconfidence, a sense of entitlement, and highly motivated competitors, among other reasons. To offset the effects of complacency coaches recommend setting more challenging goals, demanding more effort in practice, emphasizing effort over process outcomes, focusing on the present, changing routines, and stressing the legacy of success among other strategies.

Slight differences in strategies to build team resilience were found between male and female coaches and between more and less experienced coaches.

Future research will include the players' perspectives on team resilience.

More details on the participating coaches and on the survey findings are reported on the following pages.

Building Team Resilience Survey Findings

1. Who participated

We received 1982 responses to our invitation to take the on-line survey on team resilience. After making corrections for invalid e-mail addresses and coaches who had retired or left coaching for other reasons, our response rate was 18%. Here is a further breakdown on the sample.

Coaches responded from all parts of the country. A further breakdown showed that 42% of respondents were male, 24% were female and 34% did not identify their gender. Coaches' experience averaged 14 years with a range from 1 year to 50 years.

We contacted only those coaches who were involved in team sports. A breakdown of the team sports coached by respondents follows:

<i>Sport</i>	<i>Percentage of sample</i>
Basketball	15.3%
Soccer	15.2%
Volleyball	11.6%
Softball	7.6%
Baseball	6.1%
Lacrosse	2.7%
Field hockey	2.0%
Football	1.7%
Rowing	1.6%
Ice hockey	1.6%
No reported	34.8%

We also asked coaches to report whether they coached men, women or both men and women teams. Here is the breakdown by gender of players

<i>Gender of player</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Men	22.1%
Women	41.1%
Both	3.1%
Missing	33.7%

2. How coaches build team resilience.

We asked coaches to describe what they do and what they observe other coaches do that has proven effective in helping teams cope with adversity and demonstrate resilience. We conducted a content analysis of the coaches' responses. We list below the strategies used and a couple of representative comments to illustrate each category.

A. Recruiting

- Recruiting players who have mental toughness and a high maturity level.
- By recruiting players that have proven that they can play well under pressure and have the ability to be a positive leader when things aren't going well for their team.

B. Communication

- We try to be proactive in addressing the fact that we are bound to encounter some type of adversity during the season. Basically we try to mentally prepare our players for adversity by talking about the type things we may encounter and how we plan to deal with them.
- The most important thing I have done and seen done is to communicate a lot about the situation in advance. For example, if I know we have a difficult academic week, and I am concerned about our team's performance in a future tournament or competition I will talk about that particular week early in our schedule. By discussing this as a team, we can prepare accordingly, especially mentally. In a way, discussing in advance makes it more difficult for a team to use that situation as an excuse.

C. Training

- Create adverse situations in practice so players develop a more positive mindset about dealing with adversity because they've had some success in the past.
- I think practicing the potential situations that can throw a team off is important. We practice timeouts in good and bad situations. We try to arm our players with information and tools to handle the situations that come their way which I believe give them the confidence and calm when adversity hits.

D. Control what you can control

- For any team, regardless of past success, the focus must remain internal...to control what you can control. Players must believe that their own efforts will ultimately control future success rather than allowing players to believe external events will ultimately determine future results.

- Our motto over the past few years has been "control the controlables". Focusing on what you can control as opposed to dwelling on factors you cannot contributes greatly to our mental preparation.

E. Build Confidence

- Remaining positive and keeping the team mentality energetic and enthusiastic. Taking your energy and positive reinforcement as a coach to another level normally seems to work in helping build confidence in your team
- It is important for the coach to keep the team's confidence and spirit at a high level. If the coach doesn't deal with adversity and demonstrate resilience it is difficult for the team to do so.

F. Team building

- We do a great deal of team building exercises, non soccer related activities and intentionally spend as much time together as possible. We have a close knit team that has made dealing with problems so much easier.
- I think the biggest quest in coaching is building that team. I don't mean by numbers. You can have the numbers but if you don't have a "team" you will not be able to face adversity or resilience together. My job is to build a family within the team. That family is created through outside activities that have nothing to do with the game, but have everything to do with working together.

G. Culture

- We develop a culture year round that emphasizes, rewards and develops / mental toughness, resilience and the ability to overcome adversity
- We have a core set of values that we turn to during any time of controversy and adversity.

H. Mental Toughness

- The main technique that I use is to require a great deal of mental toughness at every practice. It is a very demanding environment. Adversity in practice is met with renewed determination. Nothing else is acceptable.
- We do several mental activities that prepare of kids for the everyday failures that come along in their lives. For example, we do mental imagery and team building activities.

3. Statistical analysis of coaching strategies to build team resilience.

Coaches rated the effectiveness of 15 different strategies for building team resilience. Some strategies focused on the team itself, such as recruiting resilient players and creating simulated adversities in practice; other strategies involved

managing external stakeholders such as making public statements to lower expectations and appealing to the athletic director for more resources. We conducted a factor analysis on the responses to these questions and extracted five factors or clusters of responses that highlight five relatively independent strategies for building resilience. The five strategies are:

- A. Inspiring the team and building confidence that adversity can be overcome.
- B. Rehearsing in practice situations how to overcome adversity
- C. Managing outside the team boundaries, including recruiting resilient players
- D. Challenging the team to diagnose and solve problems in the path of success
- E. Lowering public expectations to reduce pressure on the team.

4. How players contribute to team resilience.

In the previous section, we examined how coaches help build resilient teams. In this section, we asked coaches to describe what actions players take to help their teams cope with adversity and build team resilience. A content analysis of responses revealed the following themes along with examples of specific written comments:

- A. Positive encouragement and support
 - The biggest thing would be players supporting each other during times of adversity. Players need to feel that other players have their back when things don't go well. Players will bounce back faster when they know that other players have faith in them to be able to succeed the next time after failing.
 - It's not so much what they do than what they don't do. Players and teams that stay positive and don't start finger pointing and expressing negativity usually are resilient. It's the ones that get caught up in the cycle of negativity that don't recover.
- B. Player initiated meetings
 - Have meetings to discuss what brought about the adversity and find solutions.
 - I have seen team captains bring together the team without the coach. This shows ownership from the athletes, in particular, the leaders. With ownership comes better focus on the obstacles and thus hopefully resolution.

C. Leadership

- Leadership is the ultimate key. One every team, you need one person who is able to rally their teammates and believe team goals can still be accomplished in the face of adversity.
- Team leaders who are willing to take the bullet and accept responsibility for the team's lack of success takes the pressure of the team as a whole. It has become difficult in this generation to find players who are willing to do this.

D. Accountability/Responsibility

- Individual players hold each other accountable and call out others that are not being mentally tough.
- It is much better when responsibility and accountability come from teammate to teammate than from coach to player.

E. Communication

- Communication seems to be the key. When players talk with one another, they demonstrate that they care. This communication builds trust and therefore a desire to be resilient together.
- The biggest breakthrough that I have seen came after communication. When someone opens up (or listens) to a teammate, they make great strides, even when the discussion is difficult.

F. Team Bonding Activities

- Team activities outside the game of basketball improve the teams off court relationships with each other. Activities help the team members connect as people, not just as athletes.
- I think it is important for players to spend time with each other away from the sport in team building activities. This time will allow players to get to know each other and develop a bond. When adversity comes, players will be better able to cope.

5. Statistical analysis of player strategies to build team resilience.

Coaches rated a series of 11 statements regarding how players contribute to team resilience. A factor analysis of responses indicated three relatively independent factors that parallel the open ended responses. Specifically, the dimensions are:

- A. Player efforts to maintain teammate confidence
- B. Players challenge underperforming teammates
- C. Team meetings to vent frustrations and reevaluate strategies.

6. Maintaining Success

In this section of the survey, we described the phenomenon where very successful teams sometimes stop performing well, even in the absence of adversity. We asked coaches to describe why this occurs. A content analysis of their responses revealed the following reasons (in order of frequency mentioned):

A. Complacency

- Forgetting how difficult it was to achieve the first championship. New leadership by those that were not at the forefront of previous championship (role players). Developing a sense of entitlement just because they have been there before.
- Some teams/players don't realize that this "ease of victory" is a result of the hard work and preparation that they were putting in, which allowed them to be better than their opponents. As a result, the work and preparation drop off to some degree and suddenly the others teams, eager to get back to the top, are out-working and out-preparing your own team. Teams who stay at the top for a long time understand that you can't "stop to enjoy the view" for very long, because now everyone you've beaten is working harder to topple you.

B. Loss of focus

- They may lose their edge--focus on their ultimate goal since they've already achieved it. Players may start to focus on themselves rather than the team.
- They lose the hunger and don't prepare as well. They take winning for granted. They start to think they are better than they really are.

C. Team make-up

- After achieving the goal, players may be less driven. Loss of key players and leaders to graduation or pro ranks.
- Certain pieces of the puzzle that were intact the year before may not be there any longer.

D. Entitlement

- Sometimes it is the case that the players think they can walk on the field and win just because they have in the past and other programs continue to get better and catch up.
- Today's philosophy of entitlement that many players have.

E. Overconfidence

- Over confidence. Teams who have made it to the top sometimes forget what got them there and stray from their beliefs.
- Overconfidence that things will just go right for them because they always have. Sometimes fundamental skills and drills become sloppy because not as much attention is paid to details that got them where they are.

F. Satisfied

- The hunger for winning is somewhat diminished. Players are sometimes satisfied with the past and not in the future. It is easy to "rest on your laurels"
- It is human nature to become content and begin to overlook the small details that got the team to the championship in the first place. Most teams that achieve success lose that burning desire to reach the top - they begin to take shortcuts or rely on their ability too much and not their work ethic and attention to detail that brought them to the top.

G. Need new goals/challenges

- Players are goal oriented. They work hard to achieve a goal. Once the goal is achieved, they emotionally let down. They need to be prepared physically and emotionally for winning. Most coaches do not prepare players for the occurrences after victory and the expected behavior.
- There is a lack of determination there after high goals have been achieved. They don't show up with the same sense of urgency

H. Competition

- I also believe that once a team reaches a certain level of success they wear that bulls-eye on their back and where before they needed to only may be "up" for 5 or 6 matches now they have to be "up" for all of them as everyone is gunning for them.
- It is hard to stay on top of the mountain. Every game someone is 'gunning' for you - it is difficult to have a team 'pumped' for every game. However, it is easy for every team on your schedule to get 'pumped' for you. As I have told teams, 'Somewhere you are circled on a schedule as THE GAME. If they beat you and lose all their other games, the season is still a success.'

I. Expectations

- Expectations sometimes are hard to live up to and players may decide that they can't handle the pressure of "always being good."
- They get externally defined and start to focus on others expectations and not their own.

7. Statistical analysis of reasons why successful teams fail in the absence of adversity

Coaches rated eight reasons that could potentially account for the decrement in performance after success in the absence of adversity. A factor analysis of their responses revealed two relatively independent dimensions:

- A. Loss of focus, motivation and confidence
- B. Anxiety and disillusionment with achieving goals

It appears that the statistical analysis is quite consistent with the factor analysis of quantitative responses.

8. Building Team Resilience in the Absence of Adversity

In earlier sections, we asked coaches to describe their strategies for overcoming adversity and building team resilience. In this section, we asked coaches to discuss strategies for maintaining success in the absence of adversity. In other words, we asked for strategies to combat complacency, loss of focus and anxiety over high expectations that might lead to performance declines. Written responses reflected a variety of strategies described below (in order of frequency):

- A. Goals—reframing and setting new goals.
 - To set higher goals other than just winning. YOU must want to become the very best you (team) can be. Perfection is the goal.
 - Goal setting is the most important aspect of success for a winning program. Challenging players to continually improve and set forth specific goals for each contest with an eye on the ultimate goal. Finally we emphasize legacy and how important they are to school history. We tell our players to look at the banners and envision their children seeing them in twenty years, because they will still be there.
- B. Work—working and practicing harder
 - When a team becomes overconfident you have to push harder. My basic approach is to push teams harder when they are playing well and back off when they are not.
 - When we feel our team is becoming overconfident we make the next practice extremely difficult and punish them for every mistake. This makes them work harder, but it also gets the team to work together better to avoid mistakes. They really start helping each other and talking to avoid making a mistake. They also feel they've accomplished a great amount when after a long practice of getting no positive reinforcement that we compliment them.
- C. Emphasize effort and process over outcomes

- They tend not to focus on the success but the task at hand. The most successful programs don't think about how much success they have had they simply approach each day as a challenge to improve, adapt, and succeed. It becomes a day to day event instead of an overall assessment of the past.
- Focus on the daily behaviors that are needed to get better. Instead of focusing on other people's expectations or on your own end of the year goal, stay in the moment and keep your feedback on the behaviors you want to see daily

D. Focus on the present, not the distant future

- Stay focused on one day at a time, one race at a time. The performance goals of the team/individual at the outset of the year should focus at least 60% on a goal other than winning, in and of itself.
- I spend a great deal of time in talking with our players about short term goals for developing better performance in specific categories related to my sport. This helps to keep their focus off of worrying about trying to win a championship. The old adage of "taking it a game at a time" is very relevant. I believe that setting small individual goals for each game or match has helped our players to focus on the specifics of their abilities and to worry less about what others are thinking.

E. Change the routine

- Shock the system a little bit. Get the team out of its past groove. Add some new techniques or concepts to help emphasize the importance of continued learning and growth as a player.
- Change is key: new athletes, same goals/expectations but new ways to achieve them in which the athletes are pushed to their edge, but not over the edge: once again, being comfortable being uncomfortable.

F. Start new—forget past achievements

- Remind them that in sports, as in the real world, what you have done in the past is a memory. It's what you do now that matters.
- The most common is to treat the new year as exactly that, a new year. In the new season, the team has not achieved anything. I have seen many coaches express that idea repeatedly. New goals, new year, new work ethic, but be proud of what you have accomplished the previous year.

G. Set your own standards

- There are three doors in our clubhouse: Behind door number one is winning. Behind door number two is losing. Behind door number three is **PLAYING YOUR BEST EVERY GAME**. We always choose door number three and don't worry about one and two.

- I've reminded my teams of times when we've been the underdog and have conquered! We talk about measuring ourselves against ourselves not what other teams can do....are we at our very best? If not, why not?

H. Build a tradition

- I think you challenge teams to maintain the tradition of successful programs. In dominant programs, athletes learn to not accept losing as a possible outcome and they find
- Finally, we emphasize legacy and how important they are to school history. We tell our players to look at the banners and envision their children seeing them in twenty years, because they will still be there.

I. Cite past examples

- Talk with the team about examples of years past when there has been let downs after having successful years - teams who were fleetingly successful and then fizzled out.
- I try to bring up instances where under dogs have been victorious because other teams were too confident or cocky.

J. Enjoy—keep it fun

- When pressure starts mounting, it is up to the coaches and team captains to find ways of having fun and playing. I remember when I was a high school coach and we had won 3 State Championships in a row with a group of incredible athletes. The next season was so much pressure for the new group. Pressure was mounting, so it was around Halloween and I went out and bought a bunch of cheap Halloween masks and had them wear them in practice. It was ridiculous. We couldn't even see the ball coming at us, but it worked and that team went on to win a Championship as well.
- We go back to our youth. We start from the beginning, and act like kids just coming out to play. Try to keep it fun.

9. **Statistical analysis of strategies for dealing with overconfidence**

In addition to offering their insights, coaches rated the effectiveness of a series of strategies for dealing with overconfidence and complacency. A factor analysis of the ratings revealed three relatively independent dimensions;

- A. Strategies to raise the bar by setting high performance goals
- B. Strategies to heighten competition (among team members and with opposing teams)
- C. Preemptive strategies(using only most motivated players, providing examples of legendary versus overconfident teams)

10. Do male and female coaches use different strategies?

We broke the sample down to examine whether male and female coaches use similar strategies for building team resilience after their team's encounter adversity. We found that male coaches were significantly more likely than female coaches to rate highly strategies for managing the external environment surrounding their teams, including appealing to athletic directors for more resources, making statements to the public designed to lower expectations, and efforts to increase recruiting of new athletes. In addition, male coaches were more likely than female coaches to rate highly the value of holding team meetings to let the team air frustrations.

With respect to helping successful teams avoid complacency, female coaches were more likely than male coaches to rate highly forewarning their teams about letdowns after success. Male coaches were more likely than female coaches to rate highly strategies to introduce change to prevent team complacency and share inspirational examples of legendary teams that sustained championship play for many years.

11. Do strategies for overcoming adversity and overcoming complacency differ according to the sport?

We compared the effectiveness ratings for building team resilience after adversity and after success for coaches across 11 team sports. No significant differences were identified. The strategies for building team resilience are not dependent on a particular sport.

12. Do experienced coaches respond differently from less experienced coaches when it comes to building team resilience?

Recall that the number of years of experience for the coaches in our sample varied from less than one year to 50 years. The average years of coaching experience was almost 14. We correlated experience with ratings of strategy effectiveness. Only two correlations reached statistical significance. More experienced coaches, compared to less experienced coaches, rated holding team meetings and appealing to athletic directors for more resources as more effective strategies for building team resilience.

13. What is next?

We asked coaches to report on their actual won-lost record, championships, and other indicators of success. In the months ahead, we plan to divide our sample into four groups based on past success and examine whether coaches of the most successful teams rate strategies for building team resilience differently than coaches of less

successful teams.

14. Here is where you come in.

The next step in our research is to collect information on team resilience from the players themselves. We are looking for coaches to help. If you would be willing to help us administer a short on-line survey to your players, would you please let us know in a return e-mail? We will contact you with the details prior to the fall semester.

Our sincere thanks for your assistance with our team resilience research efforts.