

NFCA INSTRUCTIONAL CORNER

What Would Happen If We Truly Focused on What Was Right With Our Team? – Part II

By **ANGELA ROBLES**

President/Founder, Forza Institute

& **ELLEN MACADAM**

2011 Ivy League Player of the Year

This is the second in a two-part series. Look for the first part in the March issue of FD.

Life application

Just as the strengths-based approach can be readily applied to individual athletics, the CSF equips athletes with tools that they can continue to use throughout their lives; “Even after I’ve finished my college athletics experience, I’m still using my strengths assessment. It changed the way I look at the world.” As one athlete states, “The knowledge you gain about yourself from this experience applies to every area of your life – not just sports. I now recognize immediately when I am using my top strengths. When I feel lost or confused, I try to focus on my strengths and how I can use them to guide me in the right direction. It almost always comforts me and helps me improve my performance and excel in all areas of my life.”

Team Benefits

Many times athletes find themselves asking the question: *Who am I on this team? What is my role? How do I personally contribute to this team?* On many teams, a select few individuals emerge who are chosen to be captains, while others who experience very little playing time usually “sit the bench.” Nearly every other team member falls somewhere inbetween these two classifications. Often this scaffolding of team roles negatively affects team communication and overall cohesion. Coaches often address this issue by using a variety of strategies in an effort to develop team cohesion.

With the Harvard team, the overarching team benefits of using the CSF and team training directly corresponded to these complex issues. The team reported that the strengths-based philosophy brought about increased understanding within the team and improved communication between team members. The process of learning one’s strengths, and learning the strengths of one’s teammates, also helped establish clearer team roles and increase overall team unity.

Developed understanding

One athlete in particular shares, “I think knowing each other’s strengths advances the ability of a team to work together. It gives you an understanding of how your teammates think about things, which helps to know how to communicate efficiently with them.” Female athletes in general tend to be more emotionally charged; by understanding the strengths-based philosophy as a concept, players were able to identify a greater understanding of their teammates.

Increased communication

After the team training, the Harvard team reported being able to communicate more effectively and understand each other’s actions and behaviors. Interactions between teammates began to improve and the team was able to work together more productively. In addition to gain-

ing a deeper understanding of one another, many team members from Harvard described how discovering their strengths, and sharing them with their team, served as a platform to better communicate with their teammates and coaches. The strengths-based philosophy was seen as a catalyst for some players to experience a new level of communication among the team.

Improved team unity

The Harvard experience also assisted in building team cohesion, closeness, and unity. Players were able to build on each other to form a more cohesive unit. One team member explains, “I think seeing the schema of the total team’s strengths is powerful. Realizing what a team has in the group and what the team needs to develop is very important to help the group function better and realize their potential as a unit.” Team members expressed that the impact on their cohesion was immediate; “Something changed after that meeting. There was a feeling that we were actually a team – a group of individuals who put our differences aside and build off of each other to form a cohesive unit. We were not a team simply because we had all been put together by our coaches.”

Implications for Coaches

Coaches and athletes who strive for excellence and to maximize their potential can apply the strengths-based philosophy to their team and individual professional development. A critical aspect for coaches to realize is that no two athletes are identical; each individual is comprised of their own unique giftedness. Each athlete “ticks” differently, flourishes under different types of relationships, and prefers different styles of communication. It would serve teams well to know how players are built and what strengths they have. The strengths-based philosophy enables coaches to identify which players would be most effective in certain leadership roles on the team. This may also provide coaches with a way to establish leadership roles for even their non-starters and injured players. Finally, the strengths philosophy enables coaches to better understand the leadership styles of their top players and have greater opportunity to maximize their potential.

Oftentimes, team members can be misunderstood because of their strengths. Based on the feedback from participants in this study, the strengths-based philosophy could assist teams in creating a culture of understanding and respect among team members, which ultimately would bring greater cohesion to a team. Individual athletes would also benefit from knowing what type of strengths they have and how to best utilize them in order to experience the greatest success.

Conclusions

The initial question then becomes even more significant; “*What would happen if we truly focused on what was right with our team?*” It begins with providing one’s team an opportunity to discover what is *right* and extraordinary, not only with the team as a whole, but also with each individual athlete. Can you imagine what would happen if, as coaches, we empowered every one of our athletes with the confidence of knowing what they were innately great at doing? What would your team be like if every individual player took ownership of the

thing they could best contribute, be it on the field or in the dugout? It is a tremendous responsibility as a coach to facilitate the development of each individual player while also cultivating a functioning and healthy team. It begins with looking at what is *right* and then capitalizing on that foundation.

References: Clifton, D. & Anderson, E. (2002). StrengthsQuest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, career, and beyond. The Gallup Organization: Washington, D.C. Schreiner, L. A. (2006). A technical report on the Clifton StrengthsFinder with college students. Retrieved February 23, 2008, from <https://www.strengthsquest.com/Content/?CI=25195>.

In the past four years, a number of sport teams have begun using the concept of “discovering one’s strengths” in order to create a more efficient team. The idea of using a strengths-based philosophy with athletic teams initially evolved through a doctoral dissertation, which was based on researching elite female softball players and their perceptions of the CSF. The findings from this dissertation have since evolved into a framework for creating the Forza Institute, LLC. The Forza Institute has worked with teams of all competitive levels using the CSF as a tool for maximizing individual potential and increasing overall team chemistry. As of 2012, the Forza Institute has worked with a variety of teams that include: Washington, Arizona, Notre Dame, Cal State Fullerton, San Diego State, UC Davis, Pacific, and others.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

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Fall down seven times, stand up eight.
When good enough, isn’t.

Bill Beckham

Every success is built on a thousand failures.

Ken Jones

Success is never final, failure is never fatal. It’s courage that counts. -John Wooden

Heart is the difference between those who attempt and those who achieve.-unknown

LeAnn Jenkins

Indiana Xtreme 2000

When you have a true desire to play, excelling is no longer hard work.

Sue Oran

Strictly Sports Productions LLC / Strictly Softball (OR)

Do more than belong, believe and dream. Do more than participate, practice and work. Be empowered. -William Arthur Ward

Joanna E. Lane

Central Michigan University

When you want to succeed as bad as you want to breathe, then you will be successful! - Eric Thomas

Stacy Birk

University at Albany

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