

Book Review on  
“Wooden – A Lifetime of Observations & Reflections  
On and Off the Court”

by Coach John Wooden & Steve Jamison

(Review by Gary Tomlinson)

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John Wooden is the former coach of the record-setting UCLA basketball team, winning 10 national championships in 12 years. He is a “philosopher coach” in the truest sense. A man whose beliefs, teachings, and wisdom go far beyond sports, and ultimately address how to bring out the very best in ourselves and others in all areas of life.

He is a master teacher who understands motivation, organization, and psychology. Coach Wooden is able to successfully share his wisdom because he has a gift for expressing his philosophy directly and simply, in a manner accessible and applicable to all of us. For these reasons, I have chosen Wooden’s and Jamison’s *Wooden – A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court* for this month’s book review.

*Wooden* is an easy read, filled with wonderful short stories and powerful maxims that will inspire and motivate all who read them. His book is divided into four parts, with each part containing a series of brief headings.

In Part 1, Coach Wooden shares his priorities of family, faith, and friends. One of the headings is entitled **Two Sets of Three**. These were the direct and simple rules his father instilled in him and his brothers on how they should conduct themselves in life. The first set was about honesty:

- Never lie.
- Never cheat.
- Never steal.

It required no explanation. Wooden and his brothers knew what it meant and knew they were expected to abide by them. The second set of threes was about dealing with adversity:

- Don’t Whine.
- Don’t Complain.
- Don’t make excuses.

Coach Wooden says that some people today might think these are naïve or kind of corny. But he asks us to think about what they mean and who we might become if we abide by them. His dad’s two sets of three were a compass for him trying to do the right thing and behave in a proper manner.

Another favorite saying of his dad's was the following: *"Never believe you're better than anybody else, but remember that you're just as good as everybody else."* That's important: No better, but just as good!

In Part 2, Coach Wooden shares his beliefs on Success, Achievement, and Competition. One of the headings is his **Eight Suggestions for Succeeding**. They are:

1. Fear no opponent. *Respect* every opponent.
2. Remember, it's the perfection of the smallest details that make big things happen.
3. Keep in mind that hustle makes up for many a mistake.
4. Be more interested in character than reputation.
5. Be quick, but don't hurry.
6. Understand that the harder you work, the more luck you will have.
7. Know that valid self-analysis is crucial for improvement.
8. Remember that there is no substitute for hard work and careful planning. Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

He goes on to say that *"Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be."*

In Part 3, he shares his wisdom and insights on Coaching, Teaching, and Leading. He says that a leader, particularly a teacher or coach, has a most powerful influence on those he or she leads. Therefore, it is the obligation of that leader, teacher, or coach to treat such responsibility as a grave concern. One of the headings in this part is **The Laws of Learning**. Wooden's four laws of learning are:

1. Explanation
2. Demonstration
3. Imitation
4. Repetition

Wooden believes the goal is to create a correct habit that can be produced instinctively under great pressure. To make sure the goals are achieved, he created eight laws of learning; namely, explanation, demonstration, imitation, repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition, and repetition.

In Part 4, Coach Wooden puts it all together and shares his Pyramid of Success. To him, *"success is peace of mind that is the direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming."* He goes on to say that what is so important to recognize is that you are totally in control of your success – not your opponent, not the judges, critics, media, or anyone else. It's up to you. And that's all you can ask for – the chance to determine your success by yourself!

Enjoy this month's selection, *Wooden – A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court* and share it with others in your life because as Alvin Toffler says;

*“The illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”*