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Coaching Baseball Successfully

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with
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*To my children, Kristi Louise, Kerri Lynne,
Michael Andrew, and David Arthur Lopez.
Each of you is a very special gift from the Lord.*

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FOREWORD

I coached baseball at the major-league level for 27 years, and people always ask how I stayed so enthusiastic. I give them three reasons. One, my love of the game. Two, the enjoyment and satisfaction of working with players. And three, the competition each season to be the best.

All three of these factors are important to effective coaching, as Andy Lopez makes clear in *Coaching Baseball Successfully*. Andy's enthusiasm for the game is as apparent in the pages that follow as it is when you see him work with his team on the field.

If you're enthused about what you do, you'll make the time and the effort to do it well. And doing it well means continuing to learn and improve, no matter how many years you've coached. Even at the major-league level, the challenge is to better yourself to improve your knowledge and skills each season.

Andy Lopez's enthusiasm has translated into high achievement as a coach. He had the desire to do what it takes to climb the ranks from the high school to junior college to major college level. At each level his teams have excelled, reaching championship form. And Andy kept learning all along the way.

In *Coaching Baseball Successfully* Coach Lopez presents the stuff from which championships are made: good teaching of skills and strategies; good practice coaching; good philosophy, communication, and motivation; good game coaching; and good evaluation of performance. If you already have covered all these bases, you're probably pretty successful. But my guess is that like every other baseball coach and manager you could improve in one or more of these areas.

You are fortunate in that for at least part of each day during the season, the ballpark is your office and your classroom. Be as organized as the top CEOs and as instructive as the best teachers. Take your job seriously, but remember to put the development of your athletes ahead of personal honors. This book will help. Even if you use only three or four key ideas from *Coaching Baseball Successfully* next season, you'll be a better coach.

Coaching young men is an important job. Take the opportunity to learn from

Coach Lopez's experiences. With enough enthusiasm, discipline, preparation, knowledge, and skill, you too will be highly successful.

GEORGE "SPARKY" ANDERSON
FORMER MANAGER,
DETROIT TIGERS AND CINCINNATI REDS

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I would like to thank John Kirkgard for his great friendship, as well as his pride of workmanship in putting the material for this book into manuscript form; Mike Zapolski and Steve McClain for their expert assistance throughout the book; and every coach, player, professional scout, and institution that have been a positive influence in my life.

To Dr. Isaac Canales, who in June of 1982 challenged me to be a man of God.

To my sister, Teresa Connelly, and my brother, John Lopez, for their love and direction toward their younger brother; my mother, Consuelo Morales Lopez, and my father, Arturo Lopez, for their patient, kind, yet strong, hands of guidance and love; and my wife, Linda, who possesses the wisdom, love, patience, and support to enable me to pursue a career in baseball.

Above all to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If I have accomplished anything at all it is by his grace. Jer. 9:23

INTRODUCTION

In my home and office libraries, I have dozens of instructional baseball books, many of which I have used to develop my approach to coaching. So why write another? I saw a need for a baseball book that goes beyond the technical, beyond even the fundamentals of the game, a book that would lend itself to the fundamentals of life and to the development of players as people and athletes. As coaches we often get overly concerned with the trivial aspects of our jobs and lose sight of the impact we have on the lives of those around us.

Much of the success with which I have been blessed comes as the result of an emphasis on my athletes becoming men. Over the years our desire is for our players to develop into successful husbands and fathers and leaders in the community, business world, their churches, and other organizations.

"If you have run with men on foot and they have worn you out, how then can you compete with the horses of excellence?" (Jeremiah 12:5). Much of my philosophy comes from a sound belief in biblical principles and my faith in God. The statement from the Book of Jeremiah serves as a constant reminder of the standard of excellence for which I should strive in my relationships with my family, friends, peers, athletes, and also in my profession.

Coaching Baseball Successfully covers the fundamental skills, strategies, and drills of the game. In addition, I've included sections that transcend the Xs and Os of baseball. The coaching philosophy section of this book applies to anyone in a position to manage and motivate others. It is interesting for me to observe friends in the business world applying these principles with their employees. Philosophy, communication, motivation, and program development are essentials of leadership, and they are covered in Part I. From these guiding principles, effective coaches establish their specific ideas and methods for coaching.

Part II covers planning, an essential ingredient in any coach's success. From preseason administrative details to actual examples of practice plans, this section presents the process and people involved in planning, preparing, and organizing for a successful season.

The bulk of the book focuses on baseball techniques and tactics, and the keys

to teaching them to players. Parts III and IV deal with every offensive and defensive area of the game. Baseball skills and how to teach them are a constant, but strategy often changes with the personnel you have. I try to give you the basics, and then I help you to develop a strategy that will work best with the athletes on your club.

Part V takes you from the practice field into the game itself. Featured here are methods of scouting, personnel management, game day motivation, and specific game strategies. I also offer suggestions about an area in which we can all improve how to win *and* lose with dignity.

The last section explains how, when, what, and who a coach should evaluate. The ability to correctly evaluate your athletes' on-field performance and off-field conduct is a valuable skill for any coach. Unless you can monitor and pin-point problem areas, you'll never have a top-flight program.

The ideas in this book are those that I have used throughout my career. My practice plans today at Florida are much the same as those I used early in my career at Mira Costa High School (Manhattan Beach, CA), at California State University, Dominguez Hills (Carson, CA), and Pepperdine University (Malibu, CA).

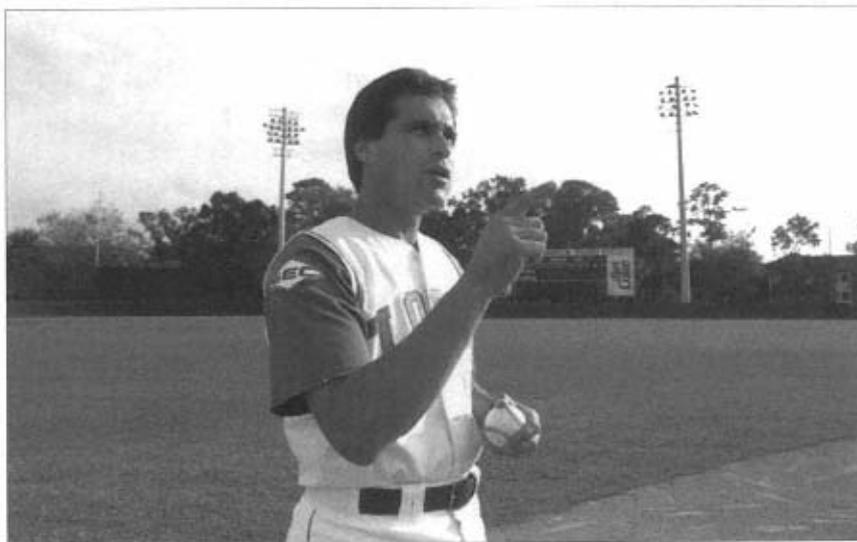
My experiences at all three levels of coaching (high school and NCAA Divisions I and II) have been similar. At Mira Costa, our ball club reached the final California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) championship game played in Dodger Stadium. It happened in our fifth year. At Cal State Dominguez Hills, the program developed into a contender for the NCAA Division II championship, finishing third nationally in 1988, our fifth year at that school. In my fourth year at Pepperdine, we had the privilege to play for and win the NCAA Division I championship. The content of *Coaching Baseball Successfully* is an approach that has been proven successful at all levels of the game of baseball. I trust it will be applicable to your coaching situation.

It is my sincere desire and prayer that in some way this book will have an impact on your life, that it will not only develop your knowledge of baseball, but also impress upon you the importance of having a positive impact on those around you. Above all else, I would like this book to honor the Lord, to whom I give full credit for my life, my abilities, and all my blessings.

PART I
COACHING FOUNDATION

Chapter 1

Developing a Baseball Coaching Philosophy



Becoming a baseball coach was not always my goal. I did not grow up with a passion to coach at the major college level and to win a national championship. On the contrary, I had many career paths from which to choose. Professional baseball was an option. Selling life insurance was my first career pursuit. I also desired to be a youth pastor. It was a combination of these other pursuits, coupled with my upbringing as a child influenced by godly parents, that encompasses the development of my coaching philosophy.

Each coach must have a philosophy to be successful. Knowledge of the game and its fundamentals only takes your ball club so far without the foundation of a consistent philosophy. Each coach's philosophy will be different, influenced by a lifetime of experiences and information.

In this chapter I'll share my coaching philosophy, describing some of my background and highlighting what I believe are the keys to an approach that results in consistent success. I won't try to change your way of thinking or your way of doing things, but you might just find something you can use.

Roots of a Coaching Philosophy

How we choose to work with people and our perspective of coaching develop well before

we make out our first lineup card. So it's not surprising that my mom's and dad's personalities, how and where I was raised, my social experiences as a youth, and my playing career helped shape my philosophy.

Parents' Influence

My parents have had the greatest influence on my approach to life. They both immigrated to the United States from Mexico and met while working in the cannery industry in the Port of Los Angeles, SanPedro, California.

My father and mother are both godly people. They are humble and hard working. They have a phenomenal work ethic. They have taught me much, including the basics of what is now a part of my coaching philosophy. I learned that nothing will ever be handed to you, to deal with people honestly, to work hard and put in a full day's work, to put your name on everything you do, and if you are going to do something, do it right.

My father served in the South Pacific during World War II. Despite being a quiet, humble man of God, he was a successful soldier and was promoted to the rank of sergeant. As quickly as he was promoted, he was demoted, not because he wasn't doing a good job but because he would not yell at his men!

I don't ever remember my dad raising his voice as I grew up, yet he was a powerful leader. He is a man I love dearly and if I have any patience or poise in my life it's because of my father.

On the other hand. Mom is a fighter! I still remember her chasing me down the street with discipline on her mind. In front of all my friends she caught me and gave me a good (and no doubt deserved) spanking. I was 13 at the time, and I am still not sure how she caught me. But her determination and wisdom in knowing her son needed the foolishness driven from him is a strong memory that will always remain with me.

It is interesting that although my mom is a strong, brave woman, she is also afraid of many things. She fears flying, driving, and the water to name a few. Yet from her I've learned that it's okay to be scared, as long as you pursue your fears and conquer them. I'll never forget her flying to Omaha, Nebraska, to see us play in the College World Series. She overcame yet another fear so she could be there.



TAKING CARE OF DETAILS

When I was nine, I remember my parents taking me to the Blue Chip Stamp Store in San Pedro and getting a brand new baseball glove. My world was complete except that I was still learning the importance of taking care of my school clothes, putting toys away, and things of that nature. Just weeks after I received the glove, I left it outside one night. My mom desired to teach me a valuable lesson and said I would get the glove back when I showed I was really ready to handle the responsibility. For a long time I was forced to borrow gloves every practice and game I played. When the glove was finally returned to me, I had learned the lesson of taking care of things that are given to me. I can't remember the last thing I have lost. I don't lose keys; I don't lose notes; I don't miss appointments. I'm on time. My parents taught me the importance of details.

Street Experiences

My parents raised me in San Pedro, California, a small port town outside of Los Angeles, which bred a pretty good group of ballplayers. Brian Harper (Twins), Joe Amalfitano (Dodgers), Garry Maddox (Phillies), and Alan Ashby

(Astros) are a few of the prominent names. More than any other sport, baseball was big in our city.

Yet baseball was not the sole interest in my life. I was also involved with a gang called the Persuasions, and we hung out together on the city streets. There were about 12 of us involved. I was with this gang for 2-½ years between the ages of 15 and 17. Even though I was younger than most of the other members, I remember being the leader. I became streetwise, and my perspective on life was shaped by these experiences. I did what was necessary to survive on the streets, actions of which I am not proud.

I grew up living with con men. There wasn't much truth in the streets. So I grew up doubting the sincerity of most people. Because of this experience. I attempt to be as honest with others as possible.

God gave me the option of athletics, which allowed me a way off the streets. A gang lifestyle is a dead end, literally. Some of the Persuasions are no longer alive. It's sad to see the degree to which gangs have grown and harmed today's society.

Playing Career

Despite the street influence, I was fortunate to have the option of athletics and pursued it with a passion. I was successful in my years at San Pedro High School, and upon graduating in 1971 I pursued my athletic career at Los Angeles Harbor Junior College. I was fortunate to make some all-state teams and then went on to play at UCLA in 1974-75. The Detroit Tigers made me their ninth-round draft pick in 1975.

My playing career was unique. I was a shortstop, yet I caught in high school and at UCLA. I caught about 30 games for UCLA as a junior. I played short, third, center field, and like everyone else, I pitched as a youngster. In fact, first base is the only position I never played.

My street personality surfaced in negotiations with the Tigers. Since my collegiate eligibility was over, the Tigers negotiated with me from the perspective that they felt I had no other options. Call it stubbornness, but I did not appreciate being told I had no options other than to sign the contract. I thought I did and decided to walk away from professional baseball.

At that time I had one more quarter term of school needed for my degree at UCLA, and was fortunate enough to be asked by Coach Jim O'Brien to assist