

## **Synthesis and Sharing**

When I began graduate school at Michigan State University in the spring of 2011 it had been thirteen years since I had graduated from college. That seemed a long time to me. It had taken me eight tumultuous years to complete my undergraduate studies. I view my educational journey and what I have learned along the way as beginning many years ago. I had begun college life in the fall of 1990 after receiving a full baseball scholarship to McLennan Community College in Waco, Texas. The next two years were spent focusing on my lifelong dream of pursuing a professional baseball career. In 1991 I was chosen to represent TEAM USA at the World Baseball Championships in Chihuahua, Mexico. In the fall of 1992 I accepted yet another scholarship to play Division I college baseball at Texas Tech University. My baseball career was expanding for the better. After undergoing major reconstructive shoulder surgery following my freshman year I suffered a major injury to my left knee in the spring of 1993. Despite being offered an opportunity to play professional baseball shortly after that my playing career had effectively ended. After devoting twenty years of my lifetime playing and devoting myself to baseball I had very little to show for it.

I spent a very short time feeling sorry for myself. With time my frustration with the situation turned to anger. I was angry at myself for not taking advantage of my scholarships. I had acquired some college courses but had essentially done about a year and a half of school work in my three years on scholarship. I would have to start over. As an athlete I had developed a ferocious competitive spirit. This spirit now began to work in my favor again. I was not about to quit now. I would have to return to work and reenter school. The interesting part of my story was that I ended up being more disappointed that I had paid so little attention to my education. Injuries were a part of sport. I had many friends whose careers had ended in a similar fashion. I was one of the many unlucky athletes who simply ended their playing careers after a series of major injuries. This was almost natural in the sports world and I was smart enough to recognize that. What I could not accept was how little I had accomplished in the classroom. This aspect of my life was something that I had almost complete control over. This was something that was almost entirely in my circle of influence and I had essentially failed. I had to make it right. My competitive spirit kicked in and I was moved to action.

I began to formulate a new plan for myself. I was disturbed that I had let myself down. As I would find out later, I was what one might call a lifelong learner. I was an avid reader and had many broad interests. I had breezed through high school but had spent much of my time devoted to informal educational pursuits. I can remember teaching myself statistics in middle school so that I could better analyze baseball players. Later I used what I learned to help the young baseball players that I was just beginning to coach. In those pre-internet years I had spent a lot of time at the public library utilizing its resources. I had never had as much fun learning as I did in English Literature. I can remember staying after school to go to our library to find as much Norse poetry as I could. This led me to Homer and to all the great Greeks. I loved Geometry so much that I turned in an extra credit project, on my own initiation, which covered the life of Euclid. I did not fully comprehend what had happened to me in college. I had remained so focused on baseball that I forgot what I was in college for. Too much of a

good thing is not good. My options now were to find a job and reenter school. I did not have much of a plan beyond that. All I knew was that I felt that I had failed myself and I wanted to make it right. I did not want to waste any more of my time.

One of my proudest moments as a student and as a person came about three years later when I finally received my Associates Degree in History from Austin Community College in 1996. I had a tremendous amount of help from my family and from my future wife. It was far more difficult than I had imagined but I had regained some momentum. Two years later, in May of 1998, I graduated from Texas State University with a B.A. in History. I had spent some time student teaching as I felt that I wanted to return to baseball as a coach and start giving back some of the knowledge that others had shared with me. Upon graduation I had become engaged and we wanted to start a family of our own. I began applying for jobs and after considering my options decided to accept a job offer from Southwestern Bell Telephone. It was a very nice paying job with great benefits and it offered great training and very good prospects for advancement. I began working there in November of 1998 but almost immediately wanted to return to school to pursue an advanced degree. Instead, I spent the next several years taking the time to develop my professional career by taking all of advanced technical training that my new company offered. Once obtaining the highest level of technical qualification that Southwestern Bell offered I entered management and began the climb up the corporate ladder. My learning experiences and accomplishments out of school began to match my more formal educational achievements in the classroom.

Along the way our family had grown. We now had four children and they began to participate in activities at school and on the playing field. I began coaching again and was astonished at how much I had missed coaching over the past several years. I established my own youth select baseball club in New Braunfels, Texas and found myself quickly working with over fifty families to provide playing and instructional opportunities in my local community. I also was afforded an opportunity to coach in a high school summer baseball program and at another local baseball academy. Understanding the on the field "baseball" portion of coaching was easy. What became apparent almost immediately was the need to develop my own coaching philosophy. The parents, coaches, players, and even facility owners seemed to all profess a similar competitive philosophy that placed winning as a very high goal. I was surprised at how little even some of the most experienced folks spoke about the importance of a more developmental philosophy. In addition to my other coaching opportunities I was also volunteering at our local Little League program as a coach to my oldest son and two daughters. It was clear that many parents in my community were counting on me to help guide them. I had acquired the knowledge and experience about baseball but I lacked the deeper professional educational knowledge that could really make a significant difference in the lives of families in my community.

I had been encouraged by my family for several years to return to school. I had been either a paid or volunteer coach for almost twenty five years. I had worked very hard to develop a good reputation in my local youth sports community and had succeeded. I had organized my own youth baseball club where I had as many as fifty families who had children participating in camps, practices, games, tournaments, and other activities. I had evolved a developmental philosophy to athletics that put the overall long term benefit of each participant before any consideration of winning games. This was new

and different to many of the people I was working with but the overall feedback that I was receiving was fantastic. There were others who did not like my approach. What I found was that I began receiving questions from parents about the future development of their children. I was being asked about injuries. I was encountering children who had significant behavioral issues. I had legal and business questions about how to run a good sports program and protect myself and my family from risk. I had also viewed myself as an educator first. I was spending more and more administrative time researching all of the issues that were presenting themselves to me. I needed professional help on many of the issues. I needed formal help to be the best educator and the best coach that I could be for my community. It took almost two whole years to finally apply to graduate school. In the spring of 2011 I started school at Michigan State with the intention of becoming a better coach and educator. The advanced degree would also help me with my formal professional career in the corporate world. It would also allow me to have far greater options when my time to retire came. My time at MSU has changed my life and my ability to impact the lives of others in my community.

I began my journey at Michigan State in KIN 854: Sport Law for Administrators. This course had a direct and immediate impact on how I ran my program. It focused on the responsibilities associated with providing and maintaining an educationally and legally sound athletic program. In this course I learned the obligations of those who are responsible for managing the risks associated with participation in physical activities. I studied in detail the consequences of failing to protect the welfare of individuals who participate in my programs. My studies focused on a wide range of legal topics such as negligence, supervision, contracts, termination of employees, due process, defamation, roles of independent contractors, gender equity, sexual harassment and the abuse of power, product liability, expected standards of care, waivers, essential records, transporting athletes and eligibility. The course added the broad and rich professional knowledge that I was lacking. While I learned how to protect my program and myself legally it was the knowledge gained that would ultimately allow me to provide higher quality and safer opportunities for my program's participants that I ultimately took away from the course.

As I continued to focus on coaching and sports leadership, I took KIN 856: Physical Bases of Coaching Athletes. This course introduced the principles of anatomy, physiology, sports medicine, and biomechanics that many concerned parents were asking me about. I studied units on the skeletal, muscular, and neuromuscular bases of movement. It also addressed specific regions of the body to facilitate my understanding of joints, movement, and potential injuries through applied analyses of exercise and performance. I also studied the muscular, cardiovascular, respiratory, and thermoregulatory systems of exercise as they related to the demands of various sports. The medical bases of coaching covered the prevention, care, and rehabilitation of common sports injuries. Biomechanical bases of coaching were presented with accompanying examples and video clips to make learning easy and to aid in the analysis of sports skills. With this knowledge I designed a very detailed exercise program for arm injury prevention in baseball players. I immediately distributed this to my parents who had young players who were experiencing arm problems. My final project focused on the direct application of many of these highly important principles through the use of video analysis of a young baseball hitter over the course of a month long training program. The professional level of

knowledge that I gained was immediately brought to bear directly onto the young players and their families that I was working with.

Learning about the psychology of youth sports was fascinating to me. KIN 855: Psychosocial Bases of Coaching Athletes provided me with the sociological, psychological, philosophical, developmental, and instructional principles and knowledge necessary for coaching athletes in competitive sports. The philosophical area of the course facilitated the development of my own philosophy given the age group one is coaching. Issues associated with coaching elementary through high school were studied and discussed. The psychology of performance was studied through discussion of motivation, anxiety, confidence, and coping strategies. The influence of society on our conduct of sport was discussed. I examined how we socialize youth into sport and out of sport. Additionally, I examined the socialization of athletes through sport, including the issues of aggression and developing good sportsmanship. Perhaps more than any other course that I have taken this one had the greatest impact on me. Here I was introduced to the dangers of professionalized sports and to the benefits of educational athletics and Positive Youth Development through sport. Through my studies I came to the realization that many of the youth sports programs that I participated in showed signs of professionalization. The course had and continues to have a profound affect on my developmental philosophy. Here was knowledge I could take directly to not only the parents I was working with but to other coaches who were my peers. The impact that this course has had on me continues to be considerable.

In EAD 877: Program Planning and Evaluation in Postsecondary Contexts I was able to explore ways to design a successful program. As a field of practice, I learned that program planning represents a series of activities in which most educators working in settings of higher and adult education find themselves engaged. Through participating in this course I developed knowledge of the research and scholarship that focus on academic program planning and evaluation in postsecondary education. I developed skill in the planning, design, and development of educational and training programs and a critical awareness and understanding of the social and political dimensions of academic program planning. I learned that these activities represent a common set of curricular, organizational, and political challenges and decisions that educators and coaches must make. The decisions that I make as a planner are grounded in particular conceptual, theoretical, social, cultural, and political frameworks that serve to shape and influence the ways in which these decisions and tasks are approached and the eventual nature of programs developed and delivered. My final project for the course allowed me to design an educational program for youth sports parents that can be modified to work in both recreational and competitive youth sports environments.

One of the most empowering courses that I took was CEP 832: Educating Students with Challenging Behavior. I learned positive classroom management strategies useful with "tough to teach" students. I examined various types of behavioral problems that are especially challenging in the classroom: aggressiveness, oppositional behavior, hyperactivity, and social withdrawal, among others. For each type of problem I explored research-based practices that have proven successful in the classroom and applied them to simulated cases using a positive behavior support approach. I also addressed building cooperative working relationships with these students' parents. The course explored the process for working more effectively with these students. In particular, I learned research-based practices for

instruction and classroom management for these students and how to develop partnerships with their families. The course goal was to become a community that learns from each other as well as from the professional literature. The course was especially empowering for me as it provided me with the knowledge and skills to be able to work with difficult students and their families. I have regularly encountered young players who have behavioral issues. These children are often not afforded the same opportunities as other participants simply because the coaches do not have the necessary skills to work with these special needs individuals. As a result, these children often do not get to participate in sports very long and are therefore not the recipients of the potential benefits of participation.

EAD 860: Concepts of a Learning Society represents a meaningful summation of the formal and informal educational pursuits in my life. I learned that “The Learning Society” is a popular but problematic phrase meant to describe recent developments in education across the life span of an individual. The concept guides institutions and individuals worldwide in their educational goals, activities, and plans for the future. The famous educational leader and innovator Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago in his book *The Learning Society* (1968) features the classical Greek Polis and its educated citizenry who lived democratic lives according to ideals that are associated with the liberal arts and sciences. He was concerned about the narrowing of education by the demands of the workplace and the professions. I also studied business leaders and theorists of work and economic and technological organizations that are urging participation in the learning society based on a very different understanding of what the phrase means. I follow the proposition that individual growth is the cornerstone of the learning society. Others focus on the learning society as the domain in which technology will provide the essential format for education in schools and at work, and for learning everywhere else as well.

As I complete my dream of earning an advanced degree I now understand that I am at yet another beginning. It is a new road for me. I began my journey seeking knowledge for myself. I now am empowered and obligated as an educator and as a coach to share what I have learned with my family and with my community. As a professional I have already begun using my knowledge to create more effective relationships with those who I interact with. What my formal educational experience has impressed upon me is the value that knowledge can add to one’s time. While time is most widely understood as a quantity, it is the quality of my time which my education has provided to me. From a coaching standpoint I can more effectively meet the needs of the young athletes that I work with by enriching the time that I share with them. The time I spend with them and their families will be more beneficial. I am now a professional educator who has the knowledge to affect one of the most powerful and fleeting things that exists in our universe. The time that I share with those whom I interact with can now be deeper and more meaningful. I have learned that the true power of education can be found in working to create a positive impact and influence on our relationships with the world and with the individuals whom we share it with. There is no greater symbiotic sharing than the time that we have with each other. As a life long learner my educational transformation from a coach into an educator is certainly not complete. Aristotle thought that it is in our nature to desire knowledge. My pursuit of knowledge will continue and for me its treasure and its truth is represented in each new beginning it can

create in each of us both student and teacher alike. Is there any greater gift and adventure that a teacher can lay before their student than a new beginning?