



## Winning the Athletic Mental Game Book Excerpt 2

### From Chapter 22 - Coach Mike Bellotti: A to Z Program Building

*Which do you prefer - the favorite or underdog role?*

It's harder to handle the favorite role than the underdog role. As an underdog, you can use that as a motivational tool. When you are the favorite, you have to prepare your team to understand that the other team uses you as a goal, and they have something to prove by beating you. So we're going to get their A game, and as such, we have to prepare for that target growing on our back. We need to respond with our best game, because we are going to get our opponent's best game.

We learned a lot this year from having that favorite role. Just talking about being defending champion is not enough. There's a lot to knowing the psychology of what your opponent is thinking. If you know yourself and you know your opponent, you have a chance to win. If you don't, you are probably going to lose.

*How do you create rapport with your players?*

Meeting with each player on a one to one basis, where their own particular viewpoint can be listened to by the head coach, is extremely important. During those meetings, they talk and I listen.

I have questions if need be; but I ask them what they want to talk about. Questions like, "*How's your family; are you meeting your goals; what do you think about the people that coach you; who are our leaders; who do you trust; who's the toughest player on the team?*" I want to know what they think and I want them to tell me. 10% of the kids will say something. If they say, "no, coach, there's nothing I have to talk about;" then I say, "*Tell me about who you are living with; how is your roommate situation? How's your family; academics; athletics, etc?*"

It usually takes me about two weeks to talk with them all. I only meet with every kid about 15 minutes. With 110 players, it takes a while. If we don't get it done in 15 minutes, they have an opportunity to sign up for more time. I want them to know that I know more about them than just their name and their number. I know where they came from and what they want to accomplish. Then, I think that enhances that trust factor, that belief factor.

Players want unconditional love from the coach. They would like to know that we hold them of value. Whether we win or lose, whether they make the big play that won, or the play that lost the game for us, they need to know we still care about them. High school coaches do a great job of that.

At the college level, kids say, "I know you have to win; I know this is a business." Yes, but if I tell them to go out, have fun, play fast, and play hard and we play our best, I'm okay with that. The only time that I have a problem with that is if we don't play up to our potential, or we don't play as well as I think we are capable of, then the first person I look at is myself and my coaches.

*Describe a quality practice session.*

Some players want to be yelled at - they don't feel like they are getting any attention unless they are being yelled at. But if a coach is spending too much time yelling, I say, "Time out; you're not doing as good a job of coaching or teaching as you need to; if you were, you wouldn't need to yell as much on the field. There

is a certain amount of yelling that is indigenous to the situation; sometimes players will think you're not fired up if you don't yell. I'm okay with that too.

Bottom line: I'm looking for performance on the practice field. There's an old adage, "Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes you perfect."

My favorite adage is "Don't get by; get better." We know we can all put in a minimum amount of energy and just get by. Nobody will yell at me, and I'll just be one of the guys. I can also energize myself and help energize the people around me by putting a little bit more into it and the results might be great and I'll get a chance to do something good and impact people around me." We talk about that a lot. We also tell them...

*(Note: This excerpt contains less than one-fourth of the full interview with Coach Bellotti found in the book.)*