

They Call Me Coach Study Guide

They Call Me Coach by John Wooden

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Contents

They Call Me Coach Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapters 2 and 3.....	5
Chapters 4 & 5.....	6
Chapters 6 & 7.....	7
Chapters 8 & 9.....	8
Chapters 10-12.....	9
Chapters 13-15.....	10
Chapters 16-18.....	11
Chapters 19-21.....	12
Chapters 22 - 24.....	13
Chapters 25-27.....	14
Characters.....	15
Objects/Places.....	19
Themes.....	21
Style.....	23
Quotes.....	25
Topics for Discussion.....	26

Plot Summary

They Call Me Coach by John Wooden is a recounting of the coach's most memorable coaching moments, the life lessons he learned, and the ones he taught.

Wooden goes into great detail to discuss the foundation of success. He says true success must be built upon a solid foundation of various character traits. He outlines these traits in his "Pyramid of Success." Wooden says that "success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming."

In the book, Wooden talks about the importance of a coach and teacher as a role model. He tailored his role as coach and teacher after his own father, a nurturing man who believed in working hard and the benefits of a good education.

Wooden also talks about stubbornness - his own and some of his past players. He points out that it is important to stand up for what one believes is right, but that one must also be willing to concede when one's opinion is the wrong one. He respects most of the players who have stood up to him over the years because their stubbornness made him step back to look at their side of the issue. They in turn respected him because they saw he was trying to get a glimpse of their point of view.

The reader learns the value of a coach who can bring out the best in a group of individuals to create a unique team that successfully works together. Wooden says a love for all people is a trait needed in order to accomplish results within a team setting.

The coach also talks about faithfulness, patience, loyalty, and work ethic.

It seems as though Coach Wooden could have had a very successful career in the pro leagues. However, he chose to teach. He asked his college coach for help when considering a job on the pro basketball league. The coach reminded him that he'd spent time earning a valuable education. Did he want to give that away to create possible stardom?

Wooden chose the coaching route, knowing this would give him the opportunity to use his education to the fullest while making a great impact on many young lives.

Wooden's love for teaching is obvious in this book. He loves teaching by example. He believes he cannot ask his basketball players to do more than he would expect of himself. He requires a short haircut and a practice uniform to be worn at each practice.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

They Call Me Coach by John Wooden is a recount of the coach's most memorable coaching moments, the life lessons he learned and the ones he taught.

Coach John Wooden talks about his 1964 NCAA championship team. Wooden pulls center Fred Slaughter out of the big game. The player is having an off night despite having been a fantastic player throughout the rest of the season. After winning the championship, Coach Wooden cannot help thinking about Fred's disappointment. That concern overtakes the joy of the victory for Wooden. Fred meets the coach at the locker room door and tells him he understood the need to pull him from the game. He even said he was happy for the other player who had a chance to play such a large role in the championship game. Wooden said that moment was the peak of his career . . . the ultimate. Wooden says coaches get very close to the team members, often thinking of them as family.

Wooden talks about the members of the 1964 UCLA Bruins championship team, discussing Walt Hazzard who is a guard, a senior on the 1964 team, and is an excellent passer and team leader. Walt was spotted while still in high school by former UCLA player Willie Hauls. Coach Wooden pulls Walt from several games during his sophomore year for showing off on the court with bling passing and fancy dribbling. Walt threatens to quit but is encouraged by his father to stay.

Fred Slaughter is a short center but quick, great with setting up other players and rebounding. He is a high school track man, but attended UCLA on half track/half basketball scholarship. Keith Erickson is the team forward and leads the team's defense. Keith's emotions often get the better of him and he gets very upset if he does not get the opportunity to score or if he feels under appreciated.

Jack Hirsch seems like a bully at first, but Coach Wooden uncovers that the team member is actually lacking in confidence. Gail Goodrich is a guard. Coach Wooden spotted Gail during his junior year in high school. Kenny Washington is invited to join the team on a recommendation by Walt Hazzard. The freshman from South Carolina is very homesick and Coach Wooden tells him to shape up or ship out when he catches him crying at practice.

Doug McIntosh replaces Fred Slaughter in the big championship game. He was admitted to UCLA on a make good scholarship, meaning if his performance on the court wasn't good enough, the scholarship would be dropped.



Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

The 1965 championship game puts Coach Wooden in the same predicament. This time he pulls Doug McIntosh from the game. Again, Doug understands the choice and is happy that the team won even though he didn't get to finish the game. This makes Coach Wooden realize how great the relationship is between coach and player. He says it is more like father-son.

Coach Wooden talks about his own relationship with his father and one of the first lessons he recalls learning as a child. While working on the family farm, his brother flipped horse manure on him. Wooden called his brother an s.o.b. and his father heard. Both boys got in trouble. This is why he chose never to swear in his personal and professional life.

He talks about the note his father gave him for his elementary school graduation — something he keeps in his wallet for the rest of his life. The creed said to "1) be true to yourself, 2) make each day your masterpiece, 3) help others, 4) drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible, 5) make friendship a fine art, 6) build a shelter against a rainy day, and 7) pray for guidance, count and give thanks for your blessings every day."

Wooden recounts his introduction to basketball. He played his first game at home with a tomato basket — bottom knocked out — nailed to a wall. The ball was made from old rags stuffed in a pair of his mother's cotton hosiery.

Wooden's family loses their farm and moves to Martinsville. There, his father gets a job in a bath house giving massages. Wooden is attending high school there when he meets Nellie Riley, his future wife, at a summer carnival. She is full of personality and he is terribly shy.

The high school basketball coach doesn't allow players to date during ball season, so Wooden sneaks around to see Nellie but they cannot go out on dates. This causes some trouble for their young relationship and from time to time they break up because Nellie wants to go dancing and have dates. He tells about a signal they developed on the first game he played in high school. He looks to her in the stands and winks at her. She signals him back with an "okay" sign with her hand. During his coaching career, he just waves his rolled up program.

The high school basketball coach is afraid Wooden will marry Nellie right out of high school and not go to college. He talks to Nellie's mother and tells her he will earn more money if he gets a college degree. Nellie encourages Wooden to stay in college to get his degree and he says her inspiration and push have contributed to his success in life.



Chapters 4 & 5

Chapters 4 & 5 Summary and Analysis

Wooden talks of his respect for high school coach Glenn Curtis. He admires the man's teaching ability but does not care for him personally. Wooden feels like Coach Curtis never gave his brother Cat a chance to realize his full potential as a high school team player. He walks off the team but returns after the coach talks with him several times.

Wooden says he was stubborn but knows he stood up for what he believed was right. This incident is why he always tries to understand his own players who have stood up to him and that's why he almost always takes back one who has walked off the team.

Coach Curtis later became principal and superintendent of Martinsville schools, then went on to coach at Indiana State. Wooden replaces him as coach at the university.

One concept Wooden does not share with Coach Curtis is that he believes in firing up the emotions of the team before a game. Wooden does not believe in playing emotionally.

Wooden talks about his various part time jobs while in high school and college and says money was always important to him. He worked hard for it and managed it wisely.

Wooden's first year in college was in 1928 at Purdue. Since athletic scholarships didn't exist back then, Coach Lambert promised Wooden a job waiting tables and washing dishes in a fraternity house and also got him a weekend job in the athletic department. The jobs provide enough money to cover tuition and offer a little spending money. He learns that students who make the dean's list get free tuition the following semester, so he worked hard to make the honor roll.

Between his junior and senior years, he was recruited by the US Military Academy at West Point. Nellie tells him to go if he chooses to do so but she will wait no more. He decides against it so he and Nellie can be married after his graduation from Purdue. He plays pro basketball to save up more than \$900 to pay for their wedding and a new car for them. When he goes to the bank to draw out part of the money to pay for the car, he learns the bank has defaulted, thanks to the country's Depression. He accepts a \$200 loan from Nellie's best friend's father so the small wedding can still take place. They celebrate afterward with dinner and a concert by the Mills Brothers. The next morning after their wedding, Wooden leaves to help Coach Lambert host a week-long basketball clinic. The job pays \$25 for the entire week.



Chapters 6 & 7

Chapters 6 & 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter six begins with this quote: "The true athlete should have character, not be a character." Wooden talks about his respect for Coach Lambert and all he learns from him at Purdue.

Coach Lambert teaches controlled offense with freelance aspects. He builds a platform from which the offense will start. He encourages movement by design without precise repeated patterns. This allows him to coach based on the abilities of each individual team member. Coach Lambert tells his team not to worry about the opponent — just to play their own game and force the opponent to follow it.

Wooden talks of superstitions that many players and coaches develop. Wooden's was actually a practical solution, but when a sports reporter noticed it, he wrote that it was a "good luck piece." Wooden's lucky charm was his locker key tied into the laces on his left shoe. There weren't combination locks back then, nor were there any pockets in the uniform to safely store the key. There is a photo in the book in which one can actually see the key tied into Wooden's shoe laces when he was a player at Purdue.

Wooden begins chapter seven with an inspirational quote: "Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do." He accepts a coaching job at Dayton High School and he and Nellie move. His job duties include athletic director, head football coach, head basketball coach, head baseball coach, head track coach, supervisor of the physical education classes, plus teaching English. His salary for all this is \$1,800 per year. He played pro basketball on weekends to earn \$50 for each game.

In the summer of 1934, the family moves back to Indiana as he takes a job in the South Bend school system. His duties kept him busy but were at least somewhat less than his requirements at Dayton. He was the athletic director, basketball and baseball coach, tennis coach, English teacher, and later became comptroller of the school.

Coach Wooden talks about why he stayed in coaching when he could have had a lucrative career in professional basketball. He says it is his love for young people that keeps him coaching. He ends the chapter with a poem by Glennice L. Harmon called "They Ask Me Why I Teach." The poem was published in the NEA Journal in 1948. The author's answer to "why I teach" is "where else could I find more splendid company?"

The Wooden family loves living in South Bend. Coach Wooden says he would still be coaching there today if World War II hadn't started and taken him away from his home in 1943. He loved teaching and coaching at the high school level.



Chapters 8 & 9

Chapters 8 & 9 Summary and Analysis

Coach Wooden admits that it is possible for coaches to sometimes be subconsciously influenced regarding their players. He tells the story of Eddie, a young man who played on his South Bend baseball and basketball teams. Eddie never looked good on the court, so Coach rarely played him. He was a great baseball player, however. Eddie tells Coach Wooden he's thinking about quitting basketball since he never plays. He tells the coach he knows he could do well if just given the chance, so, without thinking, Coach Wooden promises to start him in the game scheduled for the very next night.

Coach Wooden regrets his words and figures he'll pull the boy out of the game quickly. However, Eddie proves the coach wrong. Eddie never sat on the bench again — except for a short rest, Wooden says.

In chapter nine, Coach Wooden talks about America's entry into World War II. Like so many men of that time, he tried to get into the service immediately once the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. He enlisted in 1942 and was finally called to serve as a lieutenant in 1943. He was inducted in an officer's training school with several other men who were athletes or coaches. After training, reports to Iowa Pre-Flight then is told to report to the U.S.S. Franklin in the South Pacific as a fitness officer.

Because of an emergency appendectomy, Wooden's assignment was changed. Since overseas travel was not allowed for at least thirty days after surgery, he is sent instead to Georgia where his duty is to account for liquor in the officers' wine mess. Just as he is preparing to ship out for his first overseas assignment, Wooden learns that Japan surrendered and his orders are changed to another American training station.

After the war, he is lucky to return to his old coaching spot at South Bend High School. Many of his friends did not have their jobs waiting for them. The cost of home ownership had risen drastically while he was in the service and it is difficult for his family to find affordable housing. So, the spring after his return, he accepts a coaching job at Indiana State University in Terre Haute. Most of the college players are veterans attending school on the G.I. Bill. Many are students he had coached in high school. His first year at ISU, the team wins their conference with an 18 and 7 record. Coach Wooden rejects an invitation to a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) tournament in Kansas City because they will not allow him to bring a black player to the game. Although the young man did not play much, Coach Wooden says that the whole team or no team goes.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary and Analysis

Coach Wooden says he wants to coach in the Big Ten where he had played college ball. ISU attends the NAIA tournament during his second year as coach — the young black man was welcomed this time. The team earns a runner-up spot and several coaching offers are offered to Coach Wooden.

He considers jobs at the University of Minnesota and UCLA. Both schools offer him jobs, but Minnesota must get approval for him to bring one of his assistant coaches along with him. Minnesota will call him at 6:00 one night while UCLA is set to call at 7:00. A snow storm keeps the Minnesota rep from calling on time so when the UCLA call comes at 7, he accepts the job. He knows the facilities at UCLA are poor but is surprised to find that the team is also horrible. He wishes he was in Minnesota or back at ISU. Despite the bad team, Coach Wooden is able to turn things around and win the southern division title with a 10 and 2 record. The second year goes better.

Even though his first two years go well at UCLA, Coach Wooden isn't thrilled about being there. He decides to take a very lucrative job with Purdue if he can get out of the third year of his UCLA contract. They hold him to the contract and since his children love California, he decides to stay even after his contract expires.

In chapter eleven, Coach Wooden talks about the growing interest in basketball and the only thing holding his program back from growing is lack of a good place to play. The team moves into Pauley Pavilion on the UCLA campus in 1966.

In chapter twelve, Coach Wooden talks about success. Everyone has a different definition for success. He began searching for his own definition in high school. He discusses "John Wooden's Pyramid of Success." He defines success as "peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming."

A copy of his detailed "Pyramid of Success" is printed in the front of this book. Chapter twelve discusses the importance of industriousness and enthusiasm, friendship, cooperation and loyalty, self-control and intentness, alertness and initiative and condition to finding success. Other important keys in the pyramid are team spirit, poise and confidence, competitive greatness, fight, faith, and patience. The pyramid applies to all areas of life and career, not just basketball or sports success.

Wooden receives suggestions that he should copyright the pyramid and sell it, but he refuses. He says it is created to be used as a teaching tool in the classroom and on the court.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter thirteen, Coach Wooden discusses his religion as it relates to his work. He says no coach should be trusted with the responsibility of a team unless he is spiritually strong. He discusses his definition of faith and says there are no failures, just disappointments.

He teaches his players that "it isn't what you do, it's how you do it." He also coaches with the belief that approval is a great motivator. When he critiques a player, he always follows with a positive remark or pat on the back. He also teaches his players that basketball is not the most important thing in the world.

Coach Wooden is a deacon at First Christian Church in Santa Monica. The pastor there was one of Wooden's classmates from Martinsville High School.

Chapter fourteen discusses the Wooden family. Sundays are important church days to the family. As the Wooden children, Nancy and Jim, grow up and have children of their own, it is more difficult for them to get together, but they always make time for Sunday afternoon visits.

During a short vacation at a favorite getaway with Nellie, he decides to give up smoking for good. He began smoking during World War II, but never smoked during basketball season and was never a heavy smoker. He never smoked in front of his team members, but wanted to live by setting an example for them not to smoke.

In chapter fifteen, Coach Wooden discusses unselfishness. He insists his teams be units, not individuals or starters, subs, etc. He also mentions the importance of socks, saying that a player is only as good as his feet. Each year, he gives a detailed demonstration of the proper way to put on socks. He gives the same attention to shoes, noting that many college players show up wearing shoes about a size and a half too large for them. Many basketball players are hard on shoes and may go through six pairs a year.

He also discusses the importance of unity during practice. For this reason, he requires his players all wear the same practice uniform instead of coming to work out in their own clothing.

Coach Wooden also explains that his talks with the players generally happen on the court during practice. He is not a believer in meetings. He abandons his playbook when he realizes players don't pay much attention to it. He does all his playbook verbally and through practice. He always pays special attention to ending practice on a happy note. He says he wants his players to believe that the worst punishment he can give them is banning them from practice. If they do not want to practice, he doesn't want them, he says.



Chaters 16-18

Chaters 16-18 Summary and Analysis

Coach Wooden talks about people who influenced his life. He names his father, his high school coach, and his coach at Purdue. Former Notre Dame football coach Frank Leahy influenced Coach Wooden's dedication to organization. He also says he appreciated the managerial skills of Los Angeles Dodgers manager Walter Alston. Coach Wooden says Alston handled his players like doves. If he had squeezed too tight, they would have died; but if he had held too loosely, they would have flown away. Coach Wooden says that's how he handled his team members and each had to be "held" differently.

Coach Wooden says he is asked often to tell who his best player was. He never answers the question. He mentions that Conrad Burke and Dough McIntosh were probably the most successful, not because of their skill, but because of their perseverance and dedication.

Chapter seventeen discusses Coach Wooden's evaluation of his successes and failures. He says that at least six or seven times between 1948 and the school's first NCAA title in 1964, he tried to determine what kept his teams from winning before.

He also discusses the importance of assistant coaches. They are another set of eyes who know what the head coach wants to accomplish. When the 1960 season ended with a 14 and 12 record, Coach Wooden decided to reevaluate his coaching. It was the worst record of his career, except for his first year at Dayton High School. He says that "failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be."

Coach Wooden discovers that maybe he works his team too hard early on so they are tired by tournament time. Plus, he had his starters practicing together a lot. If one of them had to be replaced due to an injury, the team didn't play as well because they were not as familiar with each other.

The solution Coach Wooden finds is to split the team into two units for one-third of their practice time. When each player makes ten free throws, they'll be allowed to play the five on five scrimmage that they like. This allowed more team members to play together and learn to work together as a team. This is the only change Coach Wooden made and his teams' success in the NCAA finals improved.

Coach Wooden disagrees with coaches who expect their players to give 110 percent. He says it just isn't possible. They can, however, give closer to 100 percent if they are composed, self-controlled, and have endurance, he says.



Chapters 19-21

Chapters 19-21 Summary and Analysis

It takes two years for Coach Wooden's practice change to really show an effect. Positive signs in the change started showing in the 1961-62 school year. That year he had a team he thought could successfully run the 2-2-1 zone press defense so he put it into action.

In chapter twenty, Coach Wooden's thoughts turn to whether the team can win a back-to-back championship title. He believed UCLA could. The team did win a second consecutive year.

Coach Wooden says he never wants his team to call the first time out in a game. He says his team will be in better condition than the opponent so they should call a time out for rest. He has, however, called the first time out when he felt it absolutely necessary to reinforce strategy. He also says that ninety percent of the time, a basketball game will be won in the last five seconds. The better conditioned team will win because the other team will tire.

In chapter twenty-one, the UCLA team has dreams of winning a third consecutive NCAA title. The team gets much media attention when in 1965 a New York student named Lewis Alcindor announces he will play basketball at UCLA. The player later changed his name legally to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Coach Wooden says he tries to honor the legal name change but often slips up and calls him by the name he had in college.

Some fellow team members complain that Lewis Alcindor got special treatment. They mention that he got two glasses of juice for breakfast when they each got one. They didn't point out that Alcindor never ate anything else. They also complained that he often roomed alone on road trips. This was true when two kingsize beds were not available in a room. He also suffered from migraine headaches and was allowed to lie down in the training room from time to time during practice. Alcindor was also the subject of autograph seekers. This caused delays for the team sometimes and created jealousy in his teammates. He was bothered by the general public who often made comments about his race and his height. One woman even referred to him as a "big black freak." Alcindor points out to Coach Wooden that if a Mel Counts, a seven foot center who was white, walked into the room, he would not have been referred to as a big white freak. Despite the jealousy and racial comments Alcindor had to endure, Coach Wooden says he personified cooperation and was not very demanding. He says that Alcindor's presence created problems that should not have existed — racial issues from the public and jealousy of other teammates.



Chapters 22 - 24

Chapters 22 - 24 Summary and Analysis

Coach Wooden talks more about Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jaabar) in chapter twenty-two. He says Alcindor was the finest big man to play basketball up to his time. In addition to his skills on the court, Coach Wooden says he was intelligent and showed exceptional control of his emotions. He was instrumental in helping the UCLA team win its third consecutive NCAA title.

He compares Alcindor to other athletes, saying he was like Wilt Chamberlain in all-around ability. He notes that Alcindor shot at least 50 percent in 87 of the 88 games he played for UCLA. The only game that fell below those statistics was when he had vertical double vision in an eye that had been scratched two weeks earlier.

A fourth consecutive title did not follow, but the team did win again the following year. It was important to Coach Wooden that his players be in control of their emotions whether they won or lost. If they won, he told them not to dance around and act like fools and if they lost not to walk out with hung heads.

As Alcindor's senior season arrives in 1968-69, Coach Wooden must see that the infection of success doesn't spoil the team. The team wins three consecutive titles during Alcindor's four years at UCLA.

In chapter twenty-four, Coach Wooden faces building a new team after many of his championship players graduated. With the superstar athletes gone, he could go back to building a more normal college basketball program. In the previous years during "the Alcindor years," Coach Wooden felt like he had been working not to lose instead of working to win.

Coach Wooden also talks about his haircut rule. When three players show up with long sideburns, a goatee, and mutton chops, he tells them they have twenty minutes to decide whether they'll play basketball at UCLA and that the clippers and razors are in the training room. All three young men quickly shave.

The UCLA team won a fourth consecutive NCAA title in 1970, even after the super team led by Alcindor had graduated. Player Sidney Wicks was instrumental in winning the championship title. The coach pulled him from the game and benched him when he kept making errors in the big game. A few minutes later, Wicks tells the coach he is ready to play. The coach finally puts him back in and Wicks plays the best basketball he had ever played. Wicks went from being an erratic, great player to being a "superplayer," the coach says. Coach Wooden says Wicks had finally developed enough self-discipline to get his game under control. This kind of self-discipline, Coach Wooden says, is what allows a team member to gain individual stardom and team success.



Chapters 25-27

Chapters 25-27 Summary and Analysis

Going into the 1970-71 season, Coach Wooden's UCLA teams have won six championship titles. The season finds them without a floor leader, however. Despite several struggles, they lost only one game that year and won a seventh national title.

At the end of the 1971 championship game, Coach Wooden overhears a comment that becomes one of his gratifying moments of his entire career. A reporter asks a player what kind of racial problem he has had on the UCLA team. The player says, "Coach Wooden doesn't see color."

Chapter twenty-six identifies the 1971-72 team as being short on experience but not on talent. Coach Wooden says he would rather work with talent than experience. The team matures quickly and proves to be a delight to work with for a coach. They were not a very emotional group of players, which Coach Wooden appreciates. They take UCLA back to the NCAA tournament and beat Florida State 81 to 76. He begins this chapter with a favorite quote: "Young people need models, not critics." He fashions his entire coaching career on this principle.

Chapter twenty-seven is the final chapter of the book. Coach Wooden says UCLA's committed alumni have an eye for spotting basketball talent and have recruited a number of good players for the university. Coach Wooden takes the recommendations of former players very seriously because they are well-versed in his coaching philosophies. Even former team managers have remained loyal supporters of the team and Coach Wooden over the years. Coach Wooden says that many former team managers from his early days at UCLA still remain loyal to the basketball program and still work to help chart shots, turnovers, and other stats that are not normally provided at the end of every game. He appreciates them because they give so much of their time at their own expense as a labor of love.

Coach Wooden says honors are fleeting and that friendships are more meaningful to him. He says he is honored to have been inducted in the Basketball Hall of Fame as a player in 1960 and as a coach in 1972. He says he did not get there without the work and dedication of many others. His attitude reflects the quote with which he chooses to begin this chapter: "Talent is God-given, be humble; Fame is man-given, be thankful; Conceit is self-given, be careful."

Again, he emphasizes in chapter twenty-seven that he will never pick an all-time team, nor will he ever declare a "best player ever." Wooden coached his last game in 1975, retiring even though he still is head basketball coach emeritus at UCLA. He has never listed a best player, living up to his word.



Characters

John Wooden

John Wooden was born Oct. 14, 1910 and was reared on an Indiana farm as a young boy. He learned his work ethic at an early age and carried that into his college studies and athletic endeavors, then into his career as teacher and coach.

Wooden admired his father, Joshua Hugh Wooden. His father taught Wooden and his brothers to be humble, to refrain from profanity, and to be fair. Wooden still keeps a note given to him by his father upon graduation from his elementary school. The note was advice he suggested the boy learn to live by:

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Make each day your masterpiece.
3. Help others.
4. Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build a shelter against a rainy day.
7. Pray for guidance, count and give thanks for your blessings every day.

Wooden is a spiritual man who professes his love of God and his gratitude to his Savior in this book. He appreciates intelligence and strives toward a good education based on the encouragement of his father. He loves poetry and even incorporates it into his coaching career.

Wooden has had one love in his life — his high school sweetheart and then wife, Nellie. He says her vivacious personality was the perfect compliment to his shyness as a high school boy. He dedicates this book to her, saying that it has been her love, faith, and loyalty that made him what he was.

Family is of utmost importance to Wooden. He chose not to attend West Point's military academy because doing so would prolong the day he and Nellie could marry. When their children were born, he took their well being and wishes into consideration before making career moves. For example, Wooden did not like coaching at UCLA and wanted to leave two years into his three year contract. The university wouldn't let him out of the contract and he also learned that his two children loved living in California. He decided to state at UCLA because the kids did not want to leave.



Wooden was a dedicated coach, whether coaching high school or college. He was determined to help players find the best in themselves to become their very best both on and off the basketball court.

Wooden's skill in the sport of basketball won him honors in the Basketball Hall of Fame. His dedication to building teams and developing players won him a spot in the Hall of Fame as a coach as well. He appreciates both honors but is quick to point out that the work of many people helped him achieve those two honors.

Nellie Riley Wooden

Nellie and John met at a high school carnival during the summer of his freshman year. Her vibrant personality was quite the opposite of the shy boy.

Nellie and John had a few spats during their high school relationship, mostly because as a basketball player, John was forbidden by his coach to date during basketball season. Nellie was a popular girl who liked to dance and go to movies. John would sneak to her house to visit, but they could not actually go on dates during basketball season. From time to time, Nellie would want a real date and they would break up for a short period of time. Even though John himself had a date or two during their break ups, he says he always knew Nellie was the one for him.

Nellie's family and John's family had a lot in common. They attended the same church, shopped the same stores, dined in the same restaurants. Their families became great friends, which built a wonderful foundation for the family they would build together.

Nellie encouraged John to go to college and her loyalty and faithfulness to him made it possible for him to concentrate on academics and basketball. When he wanted to quit college, she encouraged him to see it through. She promised to wait for him the four years it would take him to complete college. When he told her he's been recruited by the US Military Academy at West Point, she expressed her disappointment and pointed out that she had lived up to her end of the commitment, and that she would wait no longer for him if he chose to go. John didn't want to make her wait any longer and decided to pass on the opportunity to attend West Point.

John had one basketball superstition and it involved Nellie. From the first game he played in high school, he would locate Nellie in the stands and wink at her. She would make an "o" with her thumb and forefinger, making the "okay" symbol. Even as a coach, he continued that tradition. As his basketball programs grew, sometimes Nellie would have to stand up and wave her arms in the huge crowd so he could find her. He really does view her as his good luck charm both on and off the court.

Later in his career, Nellie made sure John took time to relax and put coaching and teaching issues aside. He loved spending time with her at their favorite getaway and both valued the precious time they got to spend with their children and grandchildren later in life.



Joshua Hugh Wooden

John says his father was the man who had the greatest influence on his life. He taught John and his other children to be patient, kind, and about the importance of a good education and work ethic.

Coach Glenn Curtis

Glenn Curtis was John Wooden's high school basketball coach. Wooden says Curtis was an excellent teacher and coach and his strength was in handling immature players.

Wooden disagrees with the coach's attempts to "fire up" the team emotionally before a game. He does, however, appreciate the coach's love for poetry. It's one thing they have in common.

Coach Ward

Ward Lambert was Wooden's coach at Purdue University. Wooden respected him as a gifted teacher and liked playing the fast break basketball he stressed on the court.

Lambert, like Wooden's own father, emphasized work ethic. Wooden says Lambert had the biggest influence on his career as a player and as coach from a technician's viewpoint.

Assistant Coach Eddie Powell

Eddie Powell played for Coach Wooden at South Bend Central High School and assisted him at Indiana State University. He joined Wooden at UCLA as assistant, too.

Rev. Frank E. Davidson

Rev. Frank E. Davidson was pastor at the First Christian Church in Santa Monica, California before Wooden left to serve in World War II. He gave Wooden a small cross that he carries with him in his pocket.

Davidson directed a men's Bible study that included men of various faiths. It was a forum on religion and life.

Lewis Alcindor

Lewis Alcindor announced his intent to play at UCLA in 1965. The New York basketball player later changed his name legally to Kareem Abdul-Jaabar. Alcindor brought a lot more attention to the UCLA basketball program. While there, Alcindor dealt with racial



issues from the public and the jealousy of some of his teammates. Wooden is impressed with Alcindor's ability to control his emotions and still operate as a vital member of the team despite the adversities he faced.

Walt Hazzard

Walt Hazzard was a senior on UCLA's first championship team. He was important to the building of Wooden's team. He had a knack for knowing what Wooden wanted to accomplish on the court. He also helped spot other talented ball players for UCLA.

Gail Goodrich

Gail Goodrich was also a guard on the team that won UCLA's first national title. Wooden spotted Goodrich himself when he was playing as a high school junior. Wooden talks about Goodrich's talent and dedication in much of the book.



Objects/Places

Martinsville High School

Martinsville, Indiana, is where John Wooden plays high school basketball and meets his future wife, Nellie.

Purdue University

John Wooden attends college and plays basketball at Purdue University, a Big Ten team.

Dayton High School

Wooden goes to work at Dayton High School (Dayton, Ohio) fresh out of college. He has numerous duties, including coaching and teaching an English class.

South Bend High School

Wooden coached at this South Bend, Indiana school. His family was happy to return to Indiana to live after having lived in Dayton.

Indiana State University

Wooden's first college coaching job was at Indiana State University. He took the job a year after returning from his service in World War II.

University of California at Los Angeles

Wooden accepts the coaching job at UCLA by default, when the representative from the job he really wanted did not phone as scheduled. He thought about leaving his second year into his three year contract, but the school wouldn't let him gracefully leave. Instead, he stayed and built a basketball powerhouse.

John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

The diagram is used by Coach Wooden in his classrooms to help individuals determine their own definition of success.

Pearl Harbor

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Wooden tried to immediately enlist in the armed forces. He enlisted in 1942 and was called into active duty in 1943. He returned to coaching at South Bend upon his return from the military in 1946.

NCAA

The NCAA is the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

NAIA

The NAIA is the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. Wooden refuses Indiana State University's first invitation to the NAIA tournament because they will not allow the team's black player to participate. The second year the university is invited, they welcome that player without any problem.



Themes

Success

Success is the main theme of this book. Everyone wants to know Coach John Wooden's formula for success. He spends much time developing the formula.

In high school, he begins to contemplate his own meaning for success. While he determines that success is very individualized, he develops a formula to help people define their own terms for success. The formula becomes very popular and is called "John Wooden's Pyramid of Success."

Wooden calls success "peace of mind, a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing that you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming, and not just in a physical way."

When it seems as though an individual's definition of success is not being met, Wooden believes it is time to reevaluate the method by which the individual has elected to achieve it. He does this continually throughout his career, realizing it is impossible to make other individuals fit your own definition of success.

Wooden uses his book to encourage others to meet their goals, and explains how he made decisions successfully to achieve so much in his coaching career and in his life personally. He realizes that people want an easy answer when he is asked for the reasons behind his success. The truth is that he spent many hours developing his craft and skills, his work ethic, his intelligence, and relationships with good people that all contributed to his own success.

Faith

Faith is an important theme in the book. According to Coach Wooden's own "Pyramid of Success," faith is an integral key to success. Wooden gives a dictionary definition of the word faith in chapter thirteen, then goes on to explain faith in his own words. He says faith is not just waiting, hoping or wanting things to happen. Instead, faith involves work to make things happen. It also means realizing that there are no failures, just disappointments, as long as you have done your best.

Wooden's faith in God is a strong influence in his coaching and teaching career and in his life as a whole. He surrounds himself with good people and the people around him become even better people because of their association with him. His faith in God has given him the confidence and patience to deal with many issues on many levels.

Having faith builds confidence in oneself, Wooden believes. Wooden always had the confidence he needed in himself to effectively train his players because he had faith in



something bigger than himself. He says that a coach who lives a Christlike life helps young people develop wholeness in body, mind, and spirit that build character.

Failure

Coach Wooden is very clear: there is no such thing as failure if you have done your very best. There can be disappointments, but not failures, he says.

One of his favorite quotes is used to start chapter ten, and says, "Things turn out best for those who make the best of the way things turn out." That is why Coach Wooden contends that there are no failures, just disappointments.

Another quote related to failure that Coach Wooden likes is the one he uses to kick off chapter nineteen: "It is what you learn after you know it all that counts." Wooden believes that what many people think of as a failure is really a valuable learning experience. Some people overlook the learning opportunity because they think they know it all. However, when they realize they don't know it all (and perhaps that's what caused their failed situation to begin with), they can truly learn and truly be successful.

When Coach Wooden saw his own coaching techniques start to fail, he reevaluated his method for achieving success. After reviewing his methods, he realized his team members were not getting accustomed to playing with every member. That meant if someone went in as a sub, the team did not play as well. Instead of getting the mindset of failure, Coach Wooden reevaluated the method he chose to reach his defined success. He found the problem and corrected it. So, there was no failure, just a disappointment until the problem was corrected.



Style

Perspective

They Call Me Coach is written from a first person point of view. The book is written from Coach John Wooden's point of view, although the story was published "as told to" Jack Tobin. Tobin, a journalist with more than forty years of experience, does a great job capturing the coach's tone. The reader forgets another person is even involved in the writing of the book at all.

Coach Wooden's perspective gives readers a chance to learn about what makes him tick. His positive perspective on life and success makes this book enjoyable even for those readers who are not sports fans or have never even seen a basketball game.

While the reader learns that Coach Wooden grew up during segregated times, he always values people for what they do, not who they are. He doesn't see race, and one of his players even points that out to the media. The coach truly loves people for themselves and his goal was to give his team members the tools to make them better, more disciplined people both on and off the court.

As Wooden shares his perspective, one learns that he truly does love to teach. He uses this book to teach many life lessons about faith, success, and failure.

Tone

Coach Wooden's tone in the book is amiable. The reader feels like he/she is hearing advice from his/her own grandfather. The tone is very conversational. The anecdotes included in the book are not wasted as simple stories or space fillers. They all have a purpose in the story - a lesson learned, a revelation made, or they build to make an important point. He tells of many experiences he had with players throughout his career - some that reflected positively on the player and some that reveal a character flaw in the player. He handles both gracefully, always explaining his reasoning in his choice of handling any issues that arose. Through these examples, the reader learns what a patient man the coach is and how he always strives to see both sides of an issue.

This book has a helpful, teaching tone. It is obvious from the book that writing it was a labor of love with the goal of enlightening readers, not just a memoir to sell books. Wooden shares his philosophies about coaching, spirituality, and family life openly and honestly. He truly wants to give readers the knowledge they need to find their own meaning of success and create a plan to achieve it.

Coach Wooden is also a deeply religious man, so the reader will pick up a spiritual tone in the book as well. He uses the book as a tool to tell others about his Savior and his God and it is obvious that basketball is his ministry of sorts.

Structure

The book consists of twenty-seven chapters. The coach's famous "Pyramid of Success" is printed in both the inside front and back covers of the book.

The chapters are fairly small and the book totals 190 pages. There are a few photos in the book, carefully selected to make the reader feel as though he/she is looking through a friend's scrapbook.

Coach Wooden's love for poetry is evident throughout the book. There are poems or verses of poems scattered throughout the book. He chooses to start each chapter with a meaningful quote that relates to that chapter's content.

The book begins with Coach Wooden's first NCAA championship team. From there, he takes the reader back in time to learn more about his own background - his childhood, his high school basketball days, to college, then to his jobs after college. This structure shows one how he ends up coaching at UCLA and the book's final chapters catch the reader up with more recent championship teams.

While the structure of this book seems erratic at first, the reader feels as if he/she is maturing right along with the coach. It seems like a natural story progression.



Quotes

"...Giving all, it seems to me, is not so far from victory." p. 9

"Make each day your masterpiece." p. 24

"Will you sing?" p. 26

"You're not going to get the chance to give me the treatment you gave my brother." p. 35

"Scoop them up and throw them on." p. 40

"To continue to win is the mark of a champion." p. 93

"Never lose faith or patience." p. 100

"Success is never final. Failure is never fatal. It's courage that counts." p. 116

"Look at him, Coach." p.154

"You are white. I am black. You are 5 feet 10 inches tall and I am 7 feet." p. 150

"Look at that big black freak." p.149

"Dare to be a Daniel!" p.143



Topics for Discussion

What is your opinion about Coach Wooden's "Pyramid of Success?"

What is your own definition of success? What steps must you take in order to achieve it?

Which players do you believe are more dedicated to the game — the players who had to work their way through school while they played basketball like Wooden did at Purdue, or today's players who attend college on an athletic scholarship? Explain why.

Does Coach Wooden do anything differently when he goes from teaching high school to college basketball? Why or why not?

Wooden says there's no such thing as failure when you have done your best, only disappointment. Discuss one time you believe you failed. Now reevaluate the situation - was it a complete failure or just a disappointment? Explain your answer.

Some coaches have superstitious acts they perform before each game. Describe the superstitious tradition Wooden did from his high school team days to when he coached. Do you really believe Wooden thought this tradition helped his team win? Explain why or why not.

What does self control mean? Discuss how self control is important to Wooden's "Pyramid of Success."