

COACHING NOTES FROM COACHING CULTURE



EPISODE 106: WHEN TO DO WHEN A PLAYER WANTS TO QUIT

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When a Player Wants to Quit

When a player wants to quit it can feel personal. We've invested time and energy into their development, and it can feel like rejection. Our second inclination is to dwell on how the team is affected by them leaving.

See the Person, Not the Player

Are we seeing the person or the player? Do we bother trying to understand the person, or are we consumed with replacing the player?

When that conversation occurs, do we value the person over the player?

Much of the criticism of Andrew Luck centered on the *player* and the impact on the team, with little compassion for the *person* making the decision.

Initiate a Dialogue

Encouraging players to dialogue about their decision can be a challenge. Two things that have helped us start those conversations include:

- Having consistent 1v1 or small group conversations with each player throughout the season during which we ask
 - *What's most challenging for you in your current role?*
 - *Are there any frustrations you are dealing with right now?*
 - *Has this season been going the way you expected?*
- Asking players during their exit interviews, "Is there any reason why you wouldn't play basketball next year, or that you wouldn't play here next season?"

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Facilitating a Conversation

It's important to create a safe environment for players to share freely when asked these questions. We try to ask with curiosity because we are legitimately trying to better understand the person who plays basketball. It provides space for players to express doubt without judgement.

Using case studies, or stories of famous or familiar athletes who chose to retire, can be another constructive way to create conversation around the subject of quitting.

Normalizing the struggle is imperative because there is such a negative stigma around the subject of quitting.

When You Hear a Player Is Thinking About Quitting - Engage the PERSON!

Great conversation starters include:

- *How are you feeling about the up-coming season?*
- *What are your biggest challenges going to be this year?*
- *If you are asking open-ended questions about the players academic life, you can parlay any school-related stress into a question about your season. How do you think your classload will affect you during basketball?*
- *What is the cost of leaving, and what is the cost of staying?*

Ultimately, we want to know how they are thinking about playing basketball. We aren't trying to convince them to stay, rather we ask questions to better understand the person.

Often we tell our own stories of wanting to quit - but does that always serve the person? Instead, we should make them feel safe and allow them to verbalize what they are thinking and feeling.

The best outcome isn't always for them to stay out for the sport.

Our goal has shifted from trying to convince every player they should stay out for the sport, to trying to help them determine what's best for them. Our greatest gift may be to walk with them through the decision-making process, to help them learn to think about these kind of decisions.

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When a Player Chooses to Stay

Ask players questions such as

- What do you control that can create a more positive experience?
- What can I do to help you through that experience?

When a Player Chooses to Leave

If you love the person, then you should help them leave with dignity. If you want to leave, how do you want to leave? Find a way to honor the person without shaming or blaming them.

Does it have to be labeled as quitting? Could we refer to a junior who leaves as “early retirement”?

It can be easy to react to a player leaving by treating them as though they are dead to us. Avoid that at all costs. This type of vengeful behavior communicates to the rest of the team that it's not okay to talk to you about quitting.

If you care about the person when they played the game, you should care about the person after they are done in your sport.

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