

WHY WE PLAY



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WHY DO WE PLAY? For many in our sports culture there is only one answer to this question—we play to WIN. I am going to suggest that there is some value in this answer.

- Do we play so a high school student can develop physical skills, score 1000 points, and get a college scholarship—YES.
- Do we play so a team can win a conference title—YES.
- Do we play so high school students can have the experience of getting to and winning a state championship—YES.

But these reasons are not enough. The students participating in our programs need and deserve more. As important as our culture makes winning, scholarships and awards, these types of achievements don't sustain a student's life and they don't develop their human potential.

WHY DO WE PLAY—we play to give students MORE.

When we are intentional, the MORE leads to the development of important life skills like:

- being responsible;
- striving for excellence;
- learning from mistakes and failure;
- helping others succeed;
- overcoming adversity; and
- being a contributing member of a team.

MORE—how do we intentionally provide students with more than physical development and become intentional about their growth as human beings? In the book *InSideOut Coaching*, Joe Ehrmann poses four questions that provide us with a pathway to become an intentional coach.

Why do I coach?

As a coach, our role in education-based athletics is to establish a clear coaching purpose. The purpose of the high school sports experience—WHY WE PLAY, is often only defined by the outcome. Many of us sit with our team at the beginning of the season to set goals. Most often these goals are only skill and performance based with absolutely no discussion or time spent on the students' growth as human beings. They include reaching certain physical benchmarks within an aspect of a sport; winning a conference title; or getting to and ultimately winning a state championship. Goals are important because they give us direction—they give us a destination. They also can get in the way of our purpose.

When we don't clearly define and understand our purpose, our highest goal—winning—becomes our purpose and we will do anything to achieve it. It is our responsibility to understand the difference between a GOAL and a PURPOSE. In education-based athletics the coach's purpose is the human growth and development of every student on their team.

Why do I coach the way I do?

To understand why we coach the way we do, we have to look at our coaching philosophy. Are we transactional or transformational? Joe Ehrmann defines a transactional coach as one

who uses players as a tool to meet personal needs for validation, status, and identity. He defines a transformational coach as a person who is other-centered, who uses their power and platform to nurture and transform players.

Our coaching philosophy was born from our personal experiences with those who coached us and from those whom we have coached with. Good or bad, transformational or transactional, it is what we know. To understand why we coach the way we do, we must journey inside of ourselves and examine who we are emulating and why. We must ask the question are we damaging our students or promoting their human growth and development. We must look at our own narrative and then clearly define our coaching purpose.

How does it feel to be coached by me?

Our role as coaches in education-based athletics is to understand how it feels to be coached by us. Do we provide a safe place for students to really show up as themselves—a place of belonging? Do our actions promote growth or limit it? One of the most important things a coach can do for their students is to create a safe place where connection and belonging occurs and mistakes and failure are welcomed and expected.

Failure is a significant part of what we want students to experience in our program. We want students to fail as that is the only way they will experience something new. When a student fails or makes a mistake and the coach screams, yells and belittles the student, they will respond by staying tucked safely inside their comfort zone and do only what they know, they will not take risks, and will not put themselves in a place where growth can occur. If we want students to stretch themselves, we must create a safe and trust-filled environment.

How do I define success?

Our role as coaches in education-based athletics is to define success by more than the outcome on the scoreboard. We plan, we prepare, and we play to win but it is not our purpose. We provide students with the opportunity to be challenged, to develop and to grow through their participation on a team. This involvement is the place where the potential for growth lives, but only if we are aware of our purpose and are intentional and only if we define success by more than the outcome on the scoreboard.

Becoming Intentional

We have to define our purpose. We have to focus on more than surface level outcomes. We have to shine the light brightly on the real reasons WHY WE PLAY—to grow the students who participate. We have to become coaches who are intentionally developing the student's potential and providing them with skills that will sustain them for a lifetime.

WHY WE PLAY—we play to give students MORE. We play to develop the human potential of the students who participate. Begin your journey by reading *InSideOut Coaching* by Joe Ehrmann and then join the WHY WE PLAY conversation on [twitter@mshsl_coaches](https://twitter.com/mshsl_coaches).