



## THE MENTUS GAME *Defining* **Success**

with Ron Mentus, RLM Athletics

**S**uccess in the athletic world usually equals victories, championships and awards. But are those accomplishments an accurate barometer of the definition of success?

It is probable that success—as it applies to sports—cannot be defined with any measurable degree of accuracy. More likely, the meanings of success are largely dependent upon the viewpoints of those who proffer such definitions.

Just what is success? One definition found in *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Second College Edition) is: “The achievement of something desired, planned or attempted.” That’s simple enough as it applies to sports, so let’s stick with it.

In reality, baseball coaches at all levels have their own definitions of success. Is it championships or titles won? Is it the number of games won versus those lost? Is it qualifying for the playoffs on an annual basis? Or is it batting .300, .400, or higher?

Depending upon separate viewpoints and individual or team goals, success can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Set a goal of reaching the playoffs after a sub-par year; if you reach it, that’s success. If a batter goes from .250 to .300 from one season to the next, that can be termed successful. A sub-.500 team that goes 15-5 the next season has every reason to believe it has been successful. But the team which wins a championship, but then fails to qualify for next year’s playoffs obviously won’t see it the same way. In essence, success often becomes a matter of perspective.

So how do coaches define success? BTM asked several coaches—from high school to college levels—about their personal definitions and thoughts on the subject. While some opinions varied, collectively they agreed that wins or losses were not the bottom line. Let’s examine what these well-experienced coaches have to say about the matter of success.

Jerry Kindall coached at the University of Arizona for 24 years, racking up 860 triumphs and three NCAA National Championships, and has been elected to the College Baseball Hall of Fame. A former major leaguer with the American League champion Minnesota Twins in 1965, he is now retired and living in Tucson.

Despite his success at the collegiate coaching level, Kindall does not equate success by virtue of the Wildcats’ three national titles. Rather, he ardently believes that his five core values of coaching have been the instruments towards success. Those were:

**Integrity:** With recruits, parents, players, staff, administration, pro scouts.

**Quality:** In performance and fundamentals! In standards of behavior (for) coaches and players.

**Honor:** One another; do the right thing!

**Unity:** In cases of conflict; may not always agree, but seek understanding.

**Leadership:** Challenge players to this virtue; mentor program.

“I distinctly kept those five in mind when planning a season, a game, a practice or coaches meetings, (even) in group and/or individual player’s meetings,” Kindall says. “Whatever success I had was guided by those five core values.”

And while in the traditional sense of wins and championships Kindall was highly successful, they were not true definitions of success as he saw them. “I found more success when I formed my ‘core values’ of coaching,” he states. “(One) is more likely to achieve success in coaching if we define what the building blocks are to reach that level.”

Jamie Shevchik just completed his ninth season as head coach of the NCAA Division III Keystone College (Penn.) Giants. After guiding the club to a 30-9 mark and a berth in the Mid-Atlantic Regionals, he was named Coach of the Year for the second time. In the summer, he coaches the Danbury Westerners of the New England Collegiate Baseball League. While athletic success has been his companion for several seasons, he doesn’t necessarily equate such achievements based on wins or titles.

“Success has nothing to do with wins, losses, trophies or championships,” he says. “If I can look at myself in the mirror at the end of the day or at the end of each baseball season, and honestly tell myself that I gave everything to this team and my players, then I had a very successful season.”

Shevchik had four of his players named to the All-Colonial States Athletic Conference team this past season. Yes, they all helped his team to be successful on the field, but that wasn’t the ultimate satisfaction.

“The most rewarding experience to me is to have any player come up to me and say, ‘Coach, thank you for helping me mature and grow as a person.’” And perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Shevchik admitted that even losing contributes to success.

“Success also means learning from my failures and to motivate myself to work harder,” he stated. “I have had a lot of success in baseball, and I think that one of those reasons for my success is that I have failed quite a bit throughout my career.”

The emphasis on success need not be confined to scoring more runs than your opponent or stashing piles of awards on the trophy case. Scoreboard results are not always a reflection of true success.

After 19 years as a high school coach and three more as a pitching coach at the college level, Tom Grimm of Riverhead, New York has had more than his share of on-field success. He was at the helm of league champions at both Smithtown West High School (1982) and Stony Brook School (1996, 1999), both located on Long Island. He was named Coach of the Year three times during his stellar career.

A Christian coach with deeply-held values and standards, Grimm has been influenced greatly by the late UCLA basketball coach

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John Wooden's definition of success: "Success is a 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."

When Grimm was coaching, he was insistent that players strive to do their best. His bottom line did not focus only on winning, but in the effort expended to reach a player's maximum potential.

"Coach Wooden's definition doesn't mention winning or losing," Grimm said. "His concern is for a self satisfaction in your effort to reach your potential. Winning seems to reflect only the score, while trying to reach your potential would include pre-season preparation, sportsmanship, consideration for your teammates, opponents, officials and all the off-field obligations a student-athlete has."

He concluded with this thoughtful comment: "I'm of the opinion that men want to know the score, while our Lord is interested in our success."

Jeff Brown coached three sports at Joel Barlow High School in Redding, Conn. for over a decade. He had the privilege of coaching freshman pitcher Charlie Morton, who was later signed by the Atlanta Braves before being traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates last year.

While Brown's teams didn't always achieve success in the traditional sense, his varsity baseball team was once the recipient of the South-West Conference team sports-

manship award. A special education teacher for 14 years, Brown appreciates values which are not always evident in box scores or game results.

"My view of success is based on daily progress," Brown explained. "On the field it means getting better every day, while setbacks allow us to reevaluate and put our energies forth in a structured way. Position and hitting skills, strategy and knowledge of the game, the ability to become a positive part of team chemistry, they all have their part."

And yet, competing with the desired goal of winning is also important—but not the ultimate—in his estimation.

"Successful teams focus on details and make every pitch count," he summarized. "They make it a point to debrief each practice and game in order to set a plan to be better. Wins are intrinsic to these types of organizations."

So how do you view success? As seen from the above comments by the quartet of coaches, it may simply depend upon a particular viewpoint.

Perhaps success, after all—like beauty—is in the eyes of the beholder.



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**RLM Athletics is located in Brookfield, CT.**