



# To Win the Gold

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This is something I wrote and sent to all my USA Olympic Team Hopefuls for Sydney back in 2000 when I was Team Leader for the Olympic Beach Teams. Most players in the pipeline wanting to reach this level would benefit from following this same information..

**THE COACH WHO CARES, WINS** - Reflections on what the team, and the team around the team, need to do to win the gold...We just ended a long 5 days in the gym and classrooms of the Olympic Training Center. This session was a national seminar on Critical Thinking on Athleticism and Athlete Development. As always, it was not the actual lectures that help me think the most, but the sharing with all those caring, passionate fellow teachers who call themselves coaches, in the dining hall or lodging site hallways. I want to share some of my thoughts with you, as I believe they will help you succeed on the court in preparation towards your Olympics/Paralympics whether it be in Sydney, or just your personal best.

**TRUST IS NUMBER ONE** - I have total trust in you and your passion towards victory. Think and be responsible. I believe you never make a mistake on purpose, but know that many mistakes will be made. I see your errors GOOD things, that show me you are doing things you have not done before, pushing your limits, and understand that errors will be made along that journey.

**THERE IS ONLY ONE GOLD MEDAL** - This is our holy grail, and every team in our championships is seeking that same medal. Now, I must define what I believe winning is. In this team sport of volleyball, beach included, one person cannot win the game by his or herself. It is a team sport, so the winning is out of just one player's control. So, winning is always, ALWAYS going to be defined by me as doing all you can to be the best you can be. John Wooden's classic Pyramid of Success has at its peak, the statement. "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." If you do this...the winning on the court will be more likely. Should you play your best, and lose in the point column, what more can we ask for of you? Nothing...for you won. By the way, I am asking you to catch Monty Python and the Holy Grail in the next few months, and be like the black knight, who, sans arms or legs, wants to fight his opponent by biting him...

**CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS** - As Team leader of the Sydney Olympic Beach team, I am coaching in a part of the sport that allows no coaching by the current rules. I also am staff liaison to our Paralympic teams, working hard to help them succeed, even though I will not be there for the competition. For all eight teams headed to Sydney, the Olympic Motto guides our efforts as staff and players. Swifter, Higher, Stronger. So to win, we must push ourselves, giving all we can for as long as we can, and extending ourselves.

**COMPETE WITH YOURSELF** - Demand more from yourself than from your teammate. This is the sign of a serious and true competitor. This is how you will become the best you can be, and thus help USA win a gold. To excel, focus on yourself first. No matter how small or unimportant it may seem, look for ways to be better when you leave training than when you walked in, whether it be the weight room, training room, physical testing, or the court. By competing as hard as you personally can, you will also help those around you be better. "If it is meant to be, it is up to me."

**MAKE SURE TO GET REST** - One of the key items I learned from the Prep for Sydney meetings for head coaches was realization that there is no such word as "Overtraining." To be great you must train very hard sometimes. What you also must make sure you get is enough rest and recovery, for you are training hard. Everything you are doing en route to a gold medal is important, significant, and meaningful. As the distractions of the Olympics mount, it is vital to get enough good rest.

**BE A TRUE TEAMMATE** - One who is responsible for yourself, to your team's obligations and to your personal and team goals. You, no one else, are accountable for ALL your actions. Be honest and trustworthy to yourself, your teammates and the entire team staff. Ask when you have questions.

**TEACH ME HOW TO HELP YOU LEARN BETTER** - In the art of coaching, I have many colors and different paintbrushes on my pallet that I can use to help you learn to be your best. It is just that each of you are unique, and for us to excel, I should not treat, nor teach each of you the same. I will be consistent with each of you, but not the same. I am there for you in every practice not for hammering you with constant feedback, but letting you learn. I will summarize my feedback at times, but anytime you want to ask a technique or tactic question, I will always listen. Day or night, on the court, by phone, or even email! It is what you learn, not what I know, that matters. It is our role to help you become a player who is all you can be -- without us -- for you are the athlete on the court of competition, and we cannot think for you as you play. You will always be your best coach, for you are with yourself 24 hours a day...

**COMMUNICATE** - Talk and listen with your teammate and any staff helping you become your best. Share information you think will help us be our best. Silence equals acceptance, so speak out if you do not accept it. When off the court, read books and watch movies that can give you a new idea or inspiration to be great. I will share my personal list with you at a later time. If you have a problem, all energies will go towards the solution.

**KNOW YOUR ROLE** - In beach this is much clearer. In the indoor game, it is more complex. In all cases, you need to understand and perform your role, just as much as you need to perform technical skills. We have a GREAT staff assembled to help you be your best...so use us. Who is on the court will be determined by on the court competition when the points are tallied.

**SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION** - You get better one play at a time. Certainly touching the ball yourself helps you learn the most, but each contact, by your teammates as well, can be a joy and a learning experience. We all can see Scott Fortune kill the overpass for the Seoul Gold Medal match point...and should be able to see Eric Sato's jump serve that set it up. We have such a great sport to celebrate in, rally by rally. Enjoy this time as an elite athlete. It is exciting to be playing volleyball, especially at this level. Have fun, heck see if you can tell me a new joke, for after many years online, I think I have received them all. Smile, it takes fewer muscles, and it makes you stronger.

**BE A POWERFUL PRESENCE** - Be yourself, and be proud. If you gripe at calls, turn your back on teammate errors, hang your head or kick a ball, get frustrated outwardly, it gives energy to your opponents and weakens you and the team. Forget your mistakes and focus on what you can control...the upcoming play. Focus on what to do, not your errors, and always and only let them see that you are powerful and confident.

**BETTER WHAT WAS GIVEN TO YOU** - I remember Marv Dunphy summing up why he thought we won the gold medal in the Seoul Olympics. He felt at that time, just hours after the success, that it was due to playing better team defense and bettering the ball. It is your duty and focus as a teammate to make the ball you got better, no matter how difficult the incoming ball is. Every ball can and must be played! In our three contacts, we can improve the bad pass, if we are setting, kill the ball off of a wayward set. Bettering the ball happens not just on the court, but off. If you have ideas that might work in other areas of your development, share them, in order to make that also better for the next person.

**RELENTLESS PURSUIT** - For those of you who know my far side, you will understand then my two rules in this key area of pushing yourself on the court.

*Rule #1, Go for EVERY ball.*

*Rule #2, If the ball is too far away to reach, see Rule #1.*

And a corollary to this high effort is: Winners never fear risking to lose.

**SHARE YOUR SECRETS** - The best thing about our Prep for Sydney meetings in Chicago and Sydney, was the chance to share our ideas with other Olympic bound coaches and support staff. I will be passing these along to others, starting with the Paralympic and Olympic staffs, as part of the team around the team we have here. If you have an idea that you think might help you or the team programming be better, share it, for unlike items, when you share ideas, you still have yours, while adding new ones to our tools to be our best. Pass them along to me at [john.kessel@usav.org](mailto:john.kessel@usav.org). I will be sharing more with you later, but for now, it is back to learning, er, I mean work.