

Team Notebooks

Writing to the Next Level: Part 3

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Parts I and II of this series on Team Notebooks introduced the five sections of a basic notebook. Those sections included the following:

- *Pre-Season Thoughts...* guides players in thinking about the previous season and the upcoming season.
- *Match Analysis I...* guides players in reflecting on a match in which they have played.
- *Match Analysis II...* guides players in writing about a match that their team watched together.
- *Post-Season Thoughts...* guides players in thinking about the past season while making plans for the future.
- *Player's Notes...* a place for taking notes and sketching plays as well as storing information from the coach.

This final article provides ways to expand your Team Notebooks, highlights the educational theories and research that support the use of notebooks, and offers answers to frequently asked questions.

Additional Sections of Team Notebooks

The basic five sections of Team Notebooks may be all that is needed to augment player and team development. However, the following sections may help capture the spirit and personality of a team or create even more learning opportunities:

Quotable Quotes – Players record gaffes and crazy comments during the season. On long bus trips, at the end of classroom sessions or on flights back from Europe, these quotations always trigger comical exchanges.

Team History – A summary of the previous season or a one-page, year-by-year summary of team performances. Seniors might write a year-end summary or create a collage from newspaper clippings for the following year's notebook.

Laws of the Game – Pass out a different law each week and, after a short team discussion, ask players to put the handouts in their notebooks.

Journal Prompts – “Quick writes” of three to five minutes may shed light on team issues, assist players in thinking about their roles or offer opportunities for players to think as coaches in designing a free kick or a complete training session. Here are several examples of prompts:

- What or who brings out the best in you as an athlete?
- You're a referee: You watch a play, see a foul and call it. The offending player's coach goes ballistic. Write from the referee's perspective what you might say to try to defuse the situation.
- What's the most frustrating experience you've had as an athlete? What do you do now to prevent such a recurrence?
- Write to a player who will be joining our team next season. What would you tell the player about our team?
- You're the coach of our team. Who would you play on the first 11 and why?

Research Supporting the Use of Team Notebooks

Everything we do in life is rooted in theory.

– Bell Hooks

Educational research supports the use of these notebooks. Writing helps us make sense of things. The following short summary highlights selected theories and resources for further reading.

Expressive Writing

The writing in Team Notebooks centers on “the expressive.” Language, learning and composition theorists explain that this mode of writing assists writers in discovering, identifying or clarifying ideas or experiences for themselves or for others (Britton, 1982; Lightfoot & Martin, 1988; Strong 2001). Fulwiler &

Young (1982) offer insight into expressive writing and its role in learning:

[T]he primary function of this “expressive” language is not to communicate, but to order and represent experience to our own understanding. In this sense language provides us with a unique way of knowing and becomes a tool for discovering, for shaping meaning and for reaching understanding. (p. x)

Because it is a different way of learning, expressive writing has the potential to deepen player knowledge and create unique

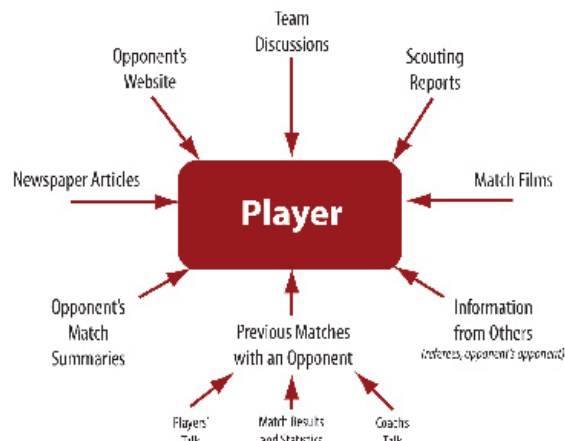


Figure 1 – Ways players learn about an opponent

opportunities to imagine that next level of performance. This writing doesn't take the place of coach talk, player modeling, or training sessions. But certainly it adds to a player's knowledge by complementing, ordering, and representing other learning experiences (e.g., a match, a film). And isn't that what we strive for as coaches?

Learning Styles

Think about your team and how your players are different. Take music, for example: Some love reggae, others the “oldies.” Once in a while, you may have a player who listens to Bach. In terms of learning, our players are different, too. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 1993) is as true for the playing field as it is for the classroom. Of the eight intelligences Gardner identifies,

the predominant ones used on soccer teams are “bodily-kinesthetic,” “spatial” and “linguistic intelligence” (i.e., spoken language). “Linguistic intelligence” in terms of written language (Team Notebooks) may add to an athlete’s experience.

Consider how college players learn about an opponent. Figure 1 (page 24) presents various information sources available to players and coaches. Think of the ways the writing in Team Notebooks could enhance learning by:

- Using the MAI from a previous match with an opponent as a study guide;
- Filling out the MAII after viewing the match film of an opponent and
- Using the Notes page to sketch the opponent’s system of play.

Theory of Team Development

Consider the “Three Realms of Consciousness in Team Development” expressed by Pruden (1987, 102) and further clarified by Cheville (2001, 30) as shown in Figure 2. Writing has the potential to support players as they move from level to level. For example, the Match Analysis I assists players in thinking about their team’s system of play (SOP). Discussions surrounding the Match Analysis II heighten player understanding and raise consciousness about a team’s SOP. Writing is a unique complement to the day-to-day work of the team and has the potential to intensify, recast and broaden experience in ways that support team development. Essentially, “Writing is a tool for thinking” (NCTE, 2004) and the result: deeper learning and better performances.

Therapeutic Value of Writing

Every so often a player will ask to keep the Match Analysis I overnight. When returned, the MAI often contains writing that extends to the back page as the player worked through an issue. For the past three decades, researchers have looked closely at the wide-ranging benefits of expressive writing. While composition theorists, cognitive scientists and linguists discuss how writing helps people process their thinking, counselors and therapists suggest that writing also has a therapeutic value in physical and emotional health.

In their meta-analysis of the research, Baikie and Wilhelm (2005) listed long-term health and social/behavioral benefits as the result of using expressive writing. For health, they include “fewer

stress-related visits to the doctor,” “improved immune-system functioning” and a “feeling of greater psychological well-being.” For social and behavioral benefits, they include “improved sporting performance” and higher grades in the classroom.

Sport Psychology

Centerpieces in the field of sport psychology include team cohesion, imagery, confidence, motivation and focus. Empirical evidence from my own teams suggests that Team Notebooks, when used as an integral part of a coach’s system of team development, enhance team togetherness (cohesion), provide mental pictures of proper play (imagery), instill self-assurance (confidence) and inspire next-level play through thorough preparation for competition (motivation).

FAQ

I like the idea of Team Notebooks, but I’m maxed out as a coach and not sure I want to add one more thing to my life.

Keep it simple. Try using one section of the notebooks for a season. Keep in mind that athletics is about learning and the act of writing has benefits. You may not see those benefits immediately, but for some players Team Notebooks will make a profound difference.

What about the nitty-gritty organization of the notebooks?

I bought three-ring binders from a discount office store and photocopied the sections on different colored paper in the school’s office. Our copy machine automatically punched 3 holes in the paper! The toughest section to keep up with was the Match Analysis I. I asked players to fill out the MAI right after a match (occasionally a player wanted to spend more time and asked to take it home). Sometimes an assistant coach or a manager photocopied the MAI. One year, the school’s secretary did it as a favor. After a while, the procedure became insti-

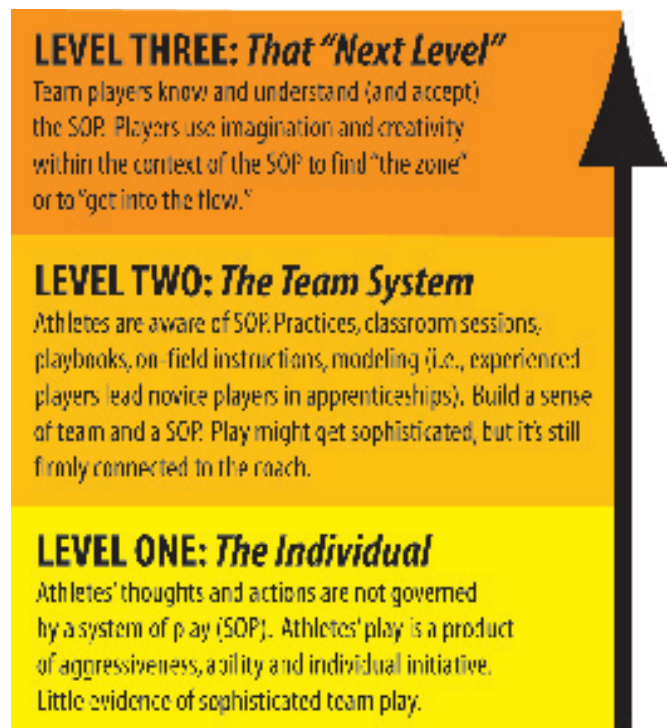


Figure 2 – The Three Realms of Consciousness

tutionalized and it just happened. I never copied players’ Notes sections. I did ask kids to pass along their best Quotable Quote so I could use it during the end of the year banquet and the slide show. I didn’t copy travel teams’ Notebooks – I had enough happening.

What was the biggest problem you encountered?

Sometimes a player was upset about not playing in a match or playing too little. Their frustration came out in their MAI in ways they regretted later on. That could be hard to take. I had to learn to allow that kind of writing and to follow up with a discussion. Most times those discussions went very well. Every once in a while a player complained about another player. But, honestly, that created greater awareness for me and, if necessary, led to a discussion.

Did you ever write back to players or comment in some way about their notebook entries?

I never wrote back. But if a player wrote something that needed a discussion, I had the discussion.

Did you do anything unique with travel team notebooks?

On my travel teams, players fill out pre-tour questionnaires not unlike the Pre-Season Thoughts. I select sentences from their responses, create a collection of player quotations and place copies near the

front of their Team Notebooks. This writing seems to reassure athletes that they're not alone in their anxieties and, quite important, begins to create the idea of "team." Here's an example of the collection:

"One thing that makes me nervous about this trip is how tough English soccer is"

"I'm pumped to see the professional games."

"To tell you the truth, I wonder how I'll match up to the English kids."

"I'm a little nervous about flying on a plane because I never have before."

"Selfish players make me angry."

"I heard you, Coach Kent, are a soccer god." [My personal favorite! ck]

"I'm psyched to represent the state."

What was the No. 1 benefit for you as a coach?

Better communication. I got to hear a bit more of players' perspectives.

Do coaches keep Team Notebooks?

That's your choice. Figure 3 is an example of an MAI written by coach Mike Keller of USM.

Is there anything else?

I am picturing my high school team after a night match. It's 9 p.m. and we're stretching in the middle of the field. As the players finish their cool-downs, they pull out their notebooks and begin writing. Some kids scribble quickly and finish in a minute; others spend a bit more time, perhaps three minutes, maybe five. Something is happening during those few minutes, and I think it helps the players and our team.

Conclusion

The notion of writing to learn in athletics is not new. Speak with Olympians about their training programs: Most programs have a narrative component in which an athlete writes about issues of health and performance, technique and reflection. Watch a Boston Red Sox game when pitcher Curt Schilling is on the mound. Between innings and after a game? He's writing. Speak about team journals with 2006 National Coach of the Year Gail Goestenkers of Duke University's women's basketball team. She calls the books more a "keepsake" than an integrated learning tool, but nonetheless the Duke players are writing.

In terms of player development, writing has the potential to offer a pow-

erful difference. Ultimately, the meaning of our work as coaches is in the games it prepares our athletes to play. Writing is one more way to advance that work.

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USM Men's Soccer

Team 2006

Match Analysis

Player: Keller

USM v. *Skidmore* Date: *9/1/06* Place: *RUN*
USM Records to Date: *0 W 1 L* Opponent: *1 W 0 L*

- ✓ My strengths as a ~~player~~^{coach} in today's match: *Composure - substitutes - remaining positive*
- ✓ My weaknesses as a ~~player~~^{coach} in today's match: *Pre-game preparation of team. Ability to adjust team to 4-3-3. Warm-up players earlier.*
- ✓ Team 06's strengths in today's match: *Heart - not giving up - freshmen/first-year players came up big*
- ✓ Team 06's weaknesses in today's match: *Midfield shape, defending holding space. Nervousness. Readiness to play, communication, leadership.*
- ✓ Opponent's strengths: *The did what had to be done. Preparation, readiness to play. Played simple.*
- ✓ Opponent's weaknesses: *Did not put us away. GK.*
- ✓ What was the "difference in today's match: *Bazic, Hamill, Slagle*
- ✓ What team adjustment would you suggest for the next match against this opponent? *Better warm-up, better halftime and pregame talk. Player substitutions and starters.*
- ✓ Other comments about team strategy, attitude, preparation... *Get players to believe in each other and system.*

Figure 3 – Coach Mike Keller's MAI

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