



October 23, 2009

This week in continuing to focus on Coach Wooden's "Pyramid of Success" I'll introduce Building Block #15 – Competitive greatness. For review, the previous Building Blocks were:

1. Industriousness and Planning
2. Enthusiasm
3. Friendship
4. Cooperation
5. Loyalty
6. Self-control
7. Alertness
8. Initiative
9. Intentness
10. Condition
11. Speed
12. Team Spirit
13. Poise
14. Confidence

Competitive greatness as defined by Coach Wooden includes three qualities. The most basic quality is the ability to be your best when your best is needed. It is the ability to raise your level of performance in the most demanding situations. According to Coach Wooden, some people are born with the ability to elevate their game in stressful situations. Others develop this trait through life experiences and an intense desire to deliver quality performance under pressure.

Magic Johnson and Joe Montana are examples of athletes endowed with the ability to thrive in demanding circumstances. Michael Jordan on the other hand developed his skills by learning from failure. As a freshman, Jordan was cut from his high school team. Later at North Carolina, Jordan was a good player but was not considered the caliber that portended his Hall of Fame career in professional basketball. He developed competitive greatness by continuing to accept challenges rather than avoiding difficult situations. As he encountered and succeeded in each situation, Jordan developed greater confidence in his abilities to perform at a higher level in pressing circumstances. In doing so, Jordan developed the second quality of competitive greatness: the drive and desire to be the go to person in tense situations. By encountering stressful situation rather than avoiding these circumstances, Jordan developed a confidence in his abilities that he maintained even when he failed. His self confidence allowed him to relax under pressure and to know that he was capable of responding the next time such a situation arose. He measured his success by understanding that he gave his best effort in each situation and that his best was good enough to win.

But competitive greatness doesn't always mean that you score the most points or hit the winning shot. The third quality of competitive greatness is the ability to elevate the play of others. Bill Russell wasn't

considered a gifted athlete in the NBA but his competitive spirit and intense desire to win was a catalyst which drove the performance of his teammates to a higher level. The competitive spirit of Bill Russell is credited by many people as a primary reason that the Boston Celtics won 13 championships during his career.

In the end, we don't have to be superstars to reach competitive greatness. Competitive greatness is the ability to rise to every occasion, to perform at our best and to raise the performance of our teammates. It's about learning to give all we have to give in every situation and having the ability to influence and motivate others to do the same.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Russell". The signature is stylized with a prominent horizontal line above the first few letters.