

REVERSE YOUR MINDSET

By Michele Smith

Two-time USA Softball Olympic gold medalist Michele Smith gives us a piece of her own mind in approaching the season and building a championship team.

How much better would your team perform this upcoming season with a championship right out of the gate? What if you started the season with just that: a championship banquet to usher in the season rather than to put it to pasture? Amid the team-colored banners and balloons, you acknowledge the players for their hard work and diligence by presenting them with individual, pre-season awards, which will specify each player's contributions in helping the team clinch the "title." Radiating excitement and confidence, teammates will see that sense of accomplishment and ownership of the team's success as an inspirational torch of victory over their upcoming competitions rather than a fading sunset on postseason memories. Instilling a sense of knowing that they are victorious before they've even stepped upon the field is your battle as a coach. Challenge your mindset by reversing your season, and give your team the recognition they deserve that they will strive to defend rather than merely hope to attain.

Your players have to believe in their abilities as well as the team's before a ball even hits the dirt. I know so many coaches who focus on team or individual goals at the beginning of the season. They start with short term goals, and then move onto long term goals and team goals. How does a player write her goals if she has no idea where she'll want to be, or where she is even capable of being, when she finishes? The goal-writing process is only effective if you know where you are, where you want to be, and what has to happen in between—the middle gets hazy to the novice, and that's where a coach's experience can help demonstrate what so often gets lost in a future that few can visualize—decide where you want to be by the end of the season, work backwards in order to make clear the long and short term goals that will be necessary to achieve, continuing to decipher the incremental steps that your individual players will need to take from where they are now.

Not only does reversing your mindset work on the field, but you can also talk to your players about their efforts and goals in the classroom—the process is the same. When I talked to a group of high school students a few years ago, one shared his future as he wanted to be a Navy Seal when he grew up. Most of the other students laughed, knowing his history of being cut from the basketball team or barely being able to run a mile in gym. Although he may have a long journey ahead, he was not completely out of his mind. His thought process in order to make his dreams a reality was actually well thought through.

He explained it like this: Navy Seal --> Top of class @ Naval Academy --> Top ranks in high school in GPA --> set goals each semester to obtain desirable grades --> high test scores --> doing my homework today.

He recognized how simply doing his homework that day propelled him closer to becoming a Navy Seal. He got it. This past spring, he finished his first year at the Naval Academy, another milestone, in pursuit of his dreams. This is also applicable on the field by teaching your players to understand the importance of each day and how it can impact their final result.

In life—whether on the field or in the classroom—if your intention is to achieve the big dream, then your purpose is to intentionally make that dream happen by reversing your mindset. Nothing is out of reach. Dream Big.