

How to Tie Our Shoes

John Wooden, the great UCLA basketball coach who produced 10 NCAA championship teams in 12 years during the 1960s and 1970s, perfectly exemplified the power of consistency. In the fascinating film documentary *The UCLA Dynasty*, one player recalled, "There was a way to do everything. You could have taken UCLA people who played in '55, '65, '70, and '75; put them on the same team; and they would have been able to play with each other, instantly."

Wooden ran his drills from the same set of 3x5 cards, with rare modifications, over the course of three decades. Drills would start and end like clockwork, the same drills performed before the national championship as at the beginning of the season so that, in the words of a star player, "By the time the games came along, they just became memorized exhibitions of brilliance."

Wooden translated his "Pyramid of Success" (a philosophy of life and competition) into a detailed recipe, right down to how players should tie their shoes. Picture yourself as a star basketball player recruited to UCLA. You show up at the first practice session, ready to show your skills; to earn your spot; to run up and down the court; to slam the ball through the hoop; to leap, and jump, and spin. You sidle up next to a senior who'd earned All-American honors and wait for the coach to get the drills going.

The coach comes out and opens the first moments of practice in a quiet voice, "We will begin by learning how to tie our shoes." You look over to a couple of famous seniors, All-Americans who've already won national championships, thinking this must be some kind of freshman initiation. But no, the seniors calmly begin taking off their shoes and preparing for the shoe-tying lesson.

"First, put your socks, slowly with care, over your toes," says the coach. The seniors diligently follow instructions. "Now, move your socks up here...and here...smooth out all the wrinkles...nice and tight...take your time," the coach intones his lesson, like some sort of far-out Zen master teaching you how to make tea as a path to higher enlightenment. "Then lace your shoes from the bottom, carefully, slowly, getting each pass nice and tight...snug! snug! snug! snug!"

After the lesson, you ask one of the All-American seniors what that was all about, and he says, "Get a blister in a big game, and you're gonna suffer. Shoes come untied in a close game...well, that just never happens here." One year later, you come to practice, having helped create yet another national championship, noting the surprised looks on the freshmen's faces when the coach announces, "We will begin by learning how to tie our shoes."

Collins, Jim; Hansen, Morten T. (2011-10-11). [Great by Choice](#): Uncertainty, Chaos, and Luck--Why Some Thrive Despite Them All (Kindle Locations 2304-2325). Harper Collins, Inc. Kindle Edition.

<http://www.amazon.com/Great-Choice-Uncertainty-Luck-Why-Despite/dp/0062120999>