

Preface

Steve Jamison

An Uncommon Man

Does any sports figure in the twentieth century stand astride the record books with more authenticity and authority than Coach John Wooden, the legendary teacher of basketball at the University of California at Los Angeles? He is the architect of perhaps the greatest championship record in all of sports.

1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969,
1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975

Each of those years, he produced another National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship for the UCLA team he coached—altogether ten of them in twelve years, including seven national championships in a row. In a row!

Think for a moment about how that compares to what came before and what has followed. John Wooden shattered all notions of what constitutes supremacy in college basketball and, some would argue, supremacy in any sport. Quite simply, he went where no one had ever gone before or since.

But there is more: 88 consecutive victories (previous record, 60), 38 straight NCAA tournament wins (previous record, 13), and eight undefeated Pac-8 (Pacific conference) crowns. Undefeated season after undefeated season bringing coach of the year award after coach of the year award, including selection as *Sports Illustrated's* sportsman of the year in 1972. A lifetime winning percentage of over 80 percent.

But there is more. John Wooden was a three-time All-American while playing basketball at Purdue University and is the only man ever elected to college basketball's hall of fame as *both* player and coach. For many, the magnitude of his achievements in basketball is nearly beyond comprehension.

So let me tell how this book came to be written, because it had little to do with tips on the technique of shooting a jump shot or specific details of Wooden's extraordinary life.

In 1996 I interviewed Coach Wooden in conjunction with a book I was writing called *In the Zone*. When I reviewed the transcripts of what he had said, it became very clear that Coach Wooden's personal philosophy of

achievement, success, and excellence has much greater application to living one's life than to playing or coaching basketball. Ultimately what John Wooden addresses is how to achieve peace of mind.

His is a message, and he himself a living example, that goes to the very core of old-fashioned American ideals, principles, and virtues. Much more than basketball titles, championships, or records, this is what Coach John Wooden is all about.

This truth became even more evident as I got to know him. Coach Wooden is pure of heart, modest, trusting, humble, understated, serene, without pretense or hidden agenda, sincere, straightforward, intelligent, quick, confident, and filled with such a profound decency and tremendous inner strength that it is humbling.

Only later did some other qualities also become evident. Coach is ferociously dedicated, meticulously detailed, and as principled as a saint. (This Preface is the only part of the book I have not presented for his review. He would have crossed out most of what I have just written. "Too much," he would say with a gentle smile on his face. "Don't write all of this about me.")

In July I called him and suggested we work on this book idea together. Coach Wooden responded, "I really can't take on another project at this time."

It hadn't occurred to me that this man, now in the middle of his eighth decade, is busy much of the time with personal appearances and seminars around the country,

interviews, coaching clinics, and family responsibilities with his seven grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.

I sent him a letter explaining that the book would be neither a conventional narrative, a biography, nor a how-to book on basketball. It would simply be a presentation in the most direct manner of his philosophy and lessons of life as told in his own special style, a philosophy that started on the little family farm back in Indiana.

It is a philosophy that resulted in a life that has been full and rich in every way and has direct application to each of us.

Most of all, I suggested that *Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court* would allow him yet another opportunity to teach. And I reminded him that first and foremost he considers his profession to be teaching.

While Coach Wooden has never explained to me why he changed his mind about doing this book, I suspect this goes to the heart of it. It allows him another opportunity to do what he loves doing most—namely, teaching life's lessons.

Coach, I'm glad you changed your mind. Your message, your example, and your philosophy are greatly needed in today's America.

Reader, I believe you will share my sentiments as you absorb the words of a very wise, very strong man.

A True North

Our ships are tossed
Across the night,
Our compass cracked,
For wrong or right.
True North is there,
Or over here?
Confusion rules
Our sea is fear.
Then suddenly a beacon bright
Is shining through
This stormy night.
It's pure and straight
To his true course.
The coach is seen.
He is True North.

—*Steve Jamison*