

Game Film

“The man who complains
about the way the ball bounces is likely the one who dropped it.”

by Lou Holtz,
champion college football coach

College football has a long, rich history in America. Each season brings a new opportunity for teams that may have suffered the year before. Throughout the years, there have been some amazing comeback stories, football programs that changed from disgraceful to top-notch, seemingly overnight. Stanford was 1–7–1 in 1939 and 10–0 in 1940. Northwestern had twenty-three straight losing seasons, including a thirty-four-game losing streak, before winning the Big Ten Conference in 1995.

Behind every turnaround is a hidden story, a story of hard work, dedication, and faith. Recently, there have been impressive changes at Boise State and Rutgers Universities. The Pacific-10 Conference (Pac-10) has seen the Oregon Ducks rise from obscurity. It has also seen the awakening of the University of California (Cal) Golden Bears, who now annually challenge the mighty University of Southern California Trojans.

In 2001, the Golden Bears had won just thirteen games in the previous four years. They were easily the worst team in the Pac-10 and one of the worst teams in the country. Although they had talent, the athletes were beaten down. They had stopped performing in the classroom, at practice, and on game day. If the program was going to survive, something dramatic had to be done. The Golden Bears hired a young, new head coach named Jeff Tedford. As a former standout quarterback, Tedford came with an excellent reputation for developing and relating to players.

“I believe Jeff’s one of the finest minds in all of football,” said NFL quarterback Trent Dilfer. “He’s a great leader and a great teacher. He has very high expectations for himself and the people around him. And he will work tirelessly to meet those expectations.”

Coach Tedford's tireless effort was evident as soon as he took over at Cal. He and his staff worked day and night, studying game film. They put in the time and effort necessary to evaluate why the team wasn't successful and what was required to prepare for and play the following week as well as possible. The coach slept in his stadium office many nights each week, every week of the season. "It's my responsibility to make sure my players have the answers to the test," he said.

Coach Tedford's approach paid off; his devotion to the team inspired his players to dedicate themselves to reaching their full potential, Tedford's measure of success. In his system, winning, as such, is not the objective. Rather, it is the natural by-product of a progression of positive elements that build on one another, ultimately resulting in success. The progression looks like this: 100 percent Desire, which gives rise to Hard Work, which gives rise to Results, which give rise to Confidence, which leads to Success.

In 2002, Tedford's first season, the Golden Bears went from 1-11 to 7-5, one of the greatest one-year turnarounds in history. Since then, the team has been to four straight bowl games, tied in 2006 for its conference championship, and has been nationally ranked the past five years.

Now, imagine you are in Coach Tedford's situation. You are the head coach of a team that has suffered several painful seasons in a row. Your program is out of control. It has lost the respect of people whose opinion you value. Although no one ever intended to let things slip this way, one thing is certain—your team as it presently exists cannot be successful. Your recent record proves it. You need a different approach.

What changes should you make to build a successful program? First, you need to determine why you have been unsuccessful. In sports, this determination requires an honest evaluation of your game film. In recovery, we conduct a similar type of assessment known as "taking inventory."

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"It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up."

à Vince Lombardi,
Pro Football Hall of Fame coach

We take inventory by watching our personal game film, replaying events in our memories in order to determine where our lives went astray. By taking inventory, we come to realize that bad luck, such as a genetic predisposition for addiction, does not account for all the damage we have caused to ourselves and to others. There is more. We find it by working backward, first identifying the losses, then determining the causes.

Our losses are the events that have produced our resentments. Resentments make us unhappy because they produce and reinforce a negative outlook. We identify the people, places, and things we resent, then look at the film again, honestly accounting for our own decisions, words, behaviors, or instincts that may have contributed to the situation in any way. In other words, we find our shortcomings that have caused our own unhappiness. These short-comings are often referred to in recovery as “defects of character.”

Finding the things we do that make us unhappy and understanding the reason we do them is essential if we are to rebuild our lives on a strong foundation. The process of evaluating the things in our lives that are valuable and those that aren't gives us a game plan for keeping the good, eliminating the bad, and changing the rest, either by modification or acquisition. After that, success is merely a matter of executing the plan while maintaining a positive state of mind.

In college football, if a team needs a hard-hitting safety, it may be able to recruit one from high school, convert a linebacker or cornerback, or sign a junior college transfer. In recovery, we almost always need confidence and self-esteem. Depending on our situation, we can acquire confidence and self-esteem by working to eliminate our nonvirtuous behavior, continuing the virtuous actions that presently make us feel good about ourselves, adding positive activities, or doing differently some of the things we have always done. We can remain positive by looking for something we're doing right.

This process requires hustle, which, as in Coach Tedford's system, requires 100 percent desire. A half-hearted inventory will yield limited results that may leave us feeling that our efforts didn't work. Our failure to put in the effort required to identify *all* of our character defects is a common cause of many of our relapses into the hell of alcohol and other drug abuse. We check ourselves by looking in the mirror and asking, "Am I giving the right effort?"

To switch sports, a situation in baseball provides a good illustration of the type of effort required when conducting an inventory. It may help if we think of ourselves as a batter trying to get to first base when our team is down by two runs with no one on in the ninth inning. A homer with one swing won't do it. We must get on base. There can be no lapse in concentration, no jogging up the line. Now is the time to dig deep and come forward with everything we have.

Becoming Coachable

"Practice without improvement
is meaningless."

— Chuck Knox,

football coaching great

Tiger Woods may have a rival when it comes to dominating the world of professional golf. She is Sweden's Annika Sorenstam, one of the greatest athletes, male or female, in history. This World Golf Hall of Fame member didn't become the first non-American to win the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) championship as a freshman simply because she has good athletic genes. She hasn't earned more prize money than any woman in history because she's lucky or because she's had a few good days. Instead, Sorenstam's success can be traced back to a bit of advice her father gave her when she was just a girl.

It was a cold, rainy day in Stockholm. Sorenstam called her father, Tom, and asked to be picked up early from the local golf practice range. He came for her. They drove away, past the other kids who were still practicing.

“He didn’t say anything when he picked me up,” Sorenstam said. “But when we drove away, he said, ‘I just want you to know there are no shortcuts to success.’ I knew what he meant. To get better, you have to practice. Just by saying that, it hurt me that I went home. Because I wanted to be good. And I knew he was right.”

From that point on, Sorenstam’s athletic career would be characterized by listening to others in order to improve herself and her game. Being coachable had always been important, but it became necessary when she started playing against professionals. As a pro, she did not find instant success.

Sorenstam twice failed to qualify for the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) Tour, but failure didn’t stop her. She played the European tour and developed thorough, yet balanced, practice, training, and study habits. She was no longer the shy girl who intentionally missed putts so that she wouldn’t have to give an acceptance speech. She was always pushing herself to become better. Her remarkable play would soon make the golf world—the *entire* golf world—sit up and take notice.

With the help of her longtime coach, Henri Reis, Sorenstam won the U.S. Women’s Open back-to-back her first two years on the LPGA tour. But her game still needed work. She needed to become stronger in order to hit the ball farther. So, she hired trainer Kai Fusser and implemented a five-days-per-week workout regimen. Within three years, Sorenstam went from twenty-sixth in driving distance to first. Her improved distance led her to five Player of the Year awards. It also led to perhaps her biggest honor and her biggest challenge, competing professionally with men.

In 2003, Sorenstam accepted an invitation to play in the men’s PGA (Professional Golfers Association) Colonial Open. No woman had played in a PGA event since 1945. Sorenstam brought Reis and Fusser with her. She endured intense media scrutiny and chauvinistic comments, such as male golfing standout Vijay Singh’s famous, “I hope she misses the cut.” Sorenstam did miss the cut, but she played well, showing poise, humility, and dignity. In doing so, she broke barriers and inspired a generation.

Thanks to Sorenstam, people around the world have seen that anything is possible when we become coachable—learning from the right people and putting in the required effort. To honor the people who have helped her and to teach younger golfers, she founded a golf academy and resort. Reis is the head instructor, and Fusser leads the fitness training. Academy students receive excellent coaching on how to shoot lower scores, coaching captured in Sorenstam’s book, *Golf Annika’s Way*.

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“No excuse in the world

counts for squat.”

∩ Mark Schubert,

Olympic swimming coach

In golf, if players don’t count every stroke, they really aren’t playing golf. Rather than working on their game to improve their score, some golfers write down a fictional number on their scorecard that represents what they want their score to be. Others bypass the truth by claiming that everyone else cheats, mulligans (do-overs) don’t count, the course wasn’t fair, and many other excuses. Consequently, they cheat themselves, and the problems with their game remain unchanged.

Golf instructors help players improve their game by quickly identifying problems and making effective suggestions. With an instructor’s help, practice, and learning the game, a golfer can legitimately earn lower scores. Soon enough, the player won’t be ashamed of his score or feel the need to make excuses.

Addicts have just as many excuses for their past actions as golfers have for a bad round. However, with our sponsor’s assistance, we can see our shortcomings accurately and the harm we have caused.

We can determine why we acted the way we did. And most important, we can begin living a life that does not leave us ashamed and consistently disappointed. Bouncing ideas off someone

else in order to gain an accurate assessment is effective because it is more difficult to kid others than it is to kid ourselves. Accuracy (reality) is important because addicts frequently live in a dangerous world of fantasy when left alone, creating a fictional score that no one recognizes.

Our fantasies are unrealistic, self-serving expectations that invariably frustrate us when they don't materialize. We rarely search for the role we played in our own disappointments. Instead, we develop new expectations based on a different fantasy of the way things should be or are going to be. Thus, we set ourselves up for further disappointment by ignoring the need to adjust our thinking to "what is."

While it is sometimes difficult, admitting the truth about our thoughts and behavior to someone and something other than ourselves is important. It helps minimize our frustration because it keeps our expectations in check with reality. It also reminds us of our limited, yet important, place in the larger world and helps define achievable goals. We learn what we need to work on in order to improve our lives.

Our recovery program, like most everything in life, is more fun when we do it well. In order to improve, thoroughly assessing our game film and conferring with our coach are essential steps. Once we have accurately identified all of our character weaknesses, we can then find the power to eliminate them and take the next step toward living well.

The Power to Change

"I'm trying to do the best I can.

I'm not concerned about tomorrow, but with what goes on today."

α Mark Spitz,

nine-time Olympic gold medal swimmer

In 1966, Nolan Ryan, a nineteen-year-old country boy from Texas, was called up to throw fire for the New York Mets. He hadn't gone to college and hadn't spent much time in the minors, but Ryan's fastball (it came to be known as the "Express") was unlike anything baseball had ever

seen. It frequently topped a hundred miles per hour, a record (at the time) in *Guinness World Records*. But throwing a ball hard and being a good pitcher are often two different things.

Flamethrowers like Ryan often don't last because they have problems controlling the ball's location. When he was young, Ryan was no exception. In high