

Psychological Aspects of Competition: An Interview with Anson Dorrance Head Women's Soccer Coach at The University of North Carolina

John M. Silva III, USA

Dr. Silva is a Professor of Sport Psychology in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He received his Ph.D. from The University of Maryland, and the MS and BS from The University of Connecticut. Dr. Silva has served as a sport psychology consultant for athletes and teams for over 25 years. He has provided consultation and on-site services to professional athletes and athlete's competing at National, International and World competitions. Dr. Silva is the founding president of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP), currently the largest sport psychology association in the world and was the inaugural editor of the "Journal of Applied Sport Psychology." He has coached over a dozen Carolina students who have become USA Team Handball National Team players including two members of the 1996 USA Team Handball Olympic team. In 2004, 2005 and 2006 he coached Carolina Team Handball to consecutive USA Team Handball Collegiate National Championships.

Email: silva@unc.edu

Abstract

Coaching is a mixture of science and art with a good measure of psychology woven into the presentation of both elements. In a rare interview, Anson Dorrance, one of the most successful soccer coaches in history, provides his insights into what motivates him as a coach and how he visualizes the role of psychological factors in the preparation of athletes in general and female soccer players in particular. This interview examines a broad range of topics including why Dorrance coaches, the "core principles" his teams must commit to in order to pursue excellence, managing performance anxiety, developing team cohesion and self confidence. Dorrance also addresses concerns an athlete might avoid discussing with a coach, differences in coaching female and male athletes, and why a healthy "competitive fire" is essential to success in any endeavor. Fortright, controversial, uncompromised in his convictions, Anson Dorrance provides a provocative and insightful interview that will stimulate a response from any professional interested in performance excellence.

Anson Dorrance is considered one of the most successful coaches in all of sport. His success with the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill women's soccer program is unmatched in collegiate soccer. He has won 18 collegiate national championships in the 24 years of collegiate championship competition and he coached the USA

Women's National team to its first world title in 1991.

Recently, I had the honor to interview Coach Dorrance and ask him specific questions on the importance of psychological aspects in the training of athletes for high level competition. Coach Dorrance has trained both

men and women athletes at the highest levels of competition. We discussed the similarities and differences involved when coaching men and women and how these differences impact both the athlete and the coach. Coach Dorrance's responses are unedited and provide a rare window into how a highly successful coach applies psychology on a daily basis in the training of athletes for competition. Some of his perspectives have been labeled controversial and I imagine his responses will stimulate dialogue, conversation, and controversy. The questions and answers appear in the exact order they were presented during the interview and there is no editorializing on the part of the author.

John Silva: A widely accepted principle in psychology states that people are motivated to fulfill their needs. What three or four personal needs does coaching soccer fulfill in your life?

Coach Anson Dorrance: Well, I guess I love associating with people, and the nice thing about the coaching profession is that's basically what you do. You spend your life associating with people, recruiting them certainly in a collegiate environment. Hanging out with them, because you're training them, trying to motivate them to perform at a higher and higher level. And so it fulfills a very personal need, because it's very connected. And certainly coaching is wonderfully connected. I started out as a men's coach, and one of the many reasons I jumped to coaching women is the unbelievably powerful personal connections with the women. With the men, you have some of that, but not to the same extent. So a lot of my reasons for actually coaching both for ten years, but for jumping to women's soccer is that it's incredibly rewarding to connect with these young people. Part of the reward lies in this period between the ages of 18-22, when there's tremendous maturation

in all kinds of ways. So that's certainly one. I have always enjoyed playing games. Board games, even things outside sports, futsal. I love playing any kind of game, sports, games of all kinds. I've always enjoyed the competition and the challenge of that. That's always been a part of my personality, and so to be able to jump into a profession where obviously that's clearly a part of the mix has been wonderfully rewarding as well, because it's part of my nature to want to compete with someone in something. And then I am a citizen of the world. I was born in Bombay, India and lived in Bombay and Calcutta as a young boy and then moved to Nairobi and from there to [some city in], Ethiopia from there to Singapore, Malaysia, and then to Brussels, Belgium. I was educated at a Swiss boarding school in Fribourg before coming to college in the United States. So I have a wonderful sort of understanding of the politics of soccer. And so my involvement in this game also involves trying to get the United States to a level where it has an impact in this sport, which is not our sport. I know the huge respect the world has for people that can play this sport well. I had a great platform in 1991 when we won the World Championship in women's soccer for the first time. And of course the U.S. team has been filled with either players of mine that are coaches or people who have coached with me, from a leadership perspective, and then certainly the roster to this day is dotted with Tar Heels. I have a wonderful kind of personal connection to the world and the world game. So that for me is also wonderfully fulfilling and rewarding. So I think those three elements are probably the most overpowering of my fascination and sort of enrichment from pursuing this.

John: What would you say would be some secondary level needs that are met?

Coach Dorrance: I guess I've never really had a real job in my life! So to do something that I would actually do for free is pretty bloody good. I hate paperwork. And so fortunately, a large percentage of what I get to do, doesn't deal with paper. So there's a sort of secondary positive element to what I do. I get to be paid for something that, for me is fun. So that's probably one secondary thing. Remarkable freedom. I don't conform to a clock, I don't check in with anyone. My schedule is my own, if I want to go golfing, no one would stop me. And I really love the kind of freedom I have in this job. So I think that's also an extraordinary positive aspect of the coaching profession. And then another thing that's kind of neat about coaching women's soccer is we have a wonderful kind of, B, C or D level celebrity without the pressure of being an A celebrity. No one stops me on the street, and I can eat a restaurant meal, and yet there's the satisfaction of having some recognition without any of the responsibilities of it. No paparazzi taking photos of me or my family. And yet there's a positive kind of exposure from having some success in there. But it's not enough of a media magnet to make it repressive. And so it's a wonderful kind of, as I said, C or D level celebrity. It gives you a kind of personal satisfaction and yet requires no responsibility, which is also wonderfully enjoyable.

John: Briefly discuss a few “psychological principles” that you believe create the fabric of Carolina women's soccer.

Coach Dorrance: I guess I believe that superior athletes develop in competition. Part of what we try to structure here is extraordinarily competitive. We believe in holding everyone accountable in numerical ways that for most of my colleagues is mind-boggling. Every time they compete, whether or not they win in 26 different categories, it's

all recorded. And it's a matter of public record. So we generally believe that the way someone develops psychological hardness and develops competitive fire is through an environment where winning and losing is basically critical. So that's a principle that I think is vital to the development of the players I'm training.

I'm also extraordinarily high on doing everything I can to develop leadership. I'm not one of these people that actually thinks you can develop it to a great extent. I think we all land somewhere on the leadership continuum, and I think we can move someone along the continuum to a degree, but I don't think you can transform someone, the way leadership institutes feel they can. I do think you can move them, so I think this kind of training is vital if we're going to be a successful team. So leadership is critical for a championship team. I've had very talented teams that have lost because of a lack of leadership and some very average teams that have won because the leadership was so extraordinarily powerful. So this is something that we consider part of our fabric.

I also think that conscious character development is a vital ingredient in developing a culture that creates and endorses and produces champions. So a lot of what we do with our time outside in the training environment is address these core values, which we actually have the players memorize. It is interesting; the way kids have been raised right now, and sent into college to play sports. At least for me in my experience, many players have a remarkable sort of softness about what's expected of them in areas beyond the game. It's something that actually William Damon addresses in his book “Greater Expectations”. He talks about the culture of indulgence in our homes and in our schools. And I am subjected to this indulgence. Because so many kids that come

in, it's all about them and playing time and it's all about issues that are extraordinarily selfish. And you can't have a successful team with a collection of selfish individuals. A lot of what has to happen when a player comes into our culture is you almost have to reshape their character. We do it by asking them to memorize eleven different quotations that are attached to core values. We started doing this when I read an article in the New York Times about this woman who had attended Columbia, I believe, to study for her PhD in literature. Columbia had just hired a Russian poet that had left the Soviet Union to come to the USA. A poet by the name of Brodsky. Brodsky's first assignment to the graduate students at Columbia was for them to memorize reams of Russian poetry. And this woman was remembering back to her time there as a student and said that initially there was a huge rebellion among all the graduate students there that had Brodsky as an instructor. They felt like memorizing reams of poetry was something they did in elementary school and of course these were sophisticated American graduate students, and you know, they weren't going to descend to doing something as mundane as memorizing reams of poetry. So there was sort of a mini rebellion. Then for some reason she said they all decided to humor this Soviet goat and memorize what he wanted them to learn. Then all of a sudden within three or four months the fabric of their discussion and the fabric of their writing all started to have these threads of the poetry they had memorized. She felt this had transformed her. So this exercise that initially they thought was an absolute waste of time, ended up becoming one of the rocks of her development as a student of literature. I saw this article, and I decided we're going to introduce this for our character development. Sure enough, I genuinely feel now that memorizing the way you have to behave, you know, simple things like George

Bernard Shaw quote about being a whiner, you know, be a "force of fortune instead a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy." And we have eleven of these statements that address the core values. We have all the elements that we think are most critical for developing a championship environment. These are called the **Core Values** of our team:

Let's begin with this:

- I. We don't whine.
*("The true joy in life is to be a force of fortune instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy." **George Bernard Shaw**).*
- II. We work hard.
*("The difference between one person and another, between the weak and the powerful, the great and the insignificant, is energy – invisible determination . . . This quality will do anything that has to be done in the world, and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunities will make you a great person without it." **Thomas Buxton – Philanthropist**).*
- III. The truly extraordinary do something every day.
*("Roosevelt, more than any other man living within the range of notoriety showed the singular primitive quality that belongs to ultimate matter, the quality that medieval theology assigned to God: 'he was pure act'." **Henry Adams Theodore Rex – Desmond Morris**).*

IV. We choose to be positive.

“ . . . everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way. And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance . . . in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person (you are is) the result of an inner decision . . . therefore, any man can . . . decide . . . that (this) last inner freedom cannot be lost.” Viktor E. Frankl Man’s Search for Meaning).

V. When we don’t play as much as we would like we are noble and still support the team and its mission

“If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete. The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity – even under the most difficult circumstances – to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for a man either to make use of or to forgo the opportunities of attaining the

moral values that a difficult situation may afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not.” Viktor E. Frankl Man’s Search for Meaning).

VI. We don’t freak out over ridiculous issues or live in fragile states of emotional catharsis or create crises where none should exist.

“What an extraordinary place of liberties the West really is . . . exempt from many of the relentless physical and social obligations necessary for a traditional life for survival, they become spoiled and fragile like over bred dogs; neurotic and prone to a host of emotional crises elsewhere.” Jason Elliot An Unexpected Light: Travels in Afghanistan).

VII. We are well led

“Not long ago, to ‘believe in yourself’ meant taking a principled, and often lonely, stand when it appeared difficult or dangerous to do so. Now it means accepting one’s own desires and inclinations, whatever they may be, and taking whatever steps that may be necessary to advance them.” William Damon Greater Expectations).

VIII. We care about each other as teammates and as human beings

“No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main . . . any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” John Donne For Whom the Bell Tolls).

IX. We play for each other.

(“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Note given to me by Rakel Karvelsson (UNC ’98))

X. We want our lives (and not just in soccer) to be never ending ascensions but for that to happen properly our fundamental attitude about life and our appreciation for it is critical

(“Finally there is the question of whether we have a duty to feel grateful. Hundreds of generations who came before us lived dire, short lives, in deprivation or hunger, in ignorance or under oppression or during war, and did so partly motivated by the dream that someday there would be men and women who lived long lives in liberty with plenty to eat and without fear of an approaching storm.

Suffering through privation, those who came before us accumulated the knowledge that makes our lives favored; fought the battles that made our lives free; physically built much of what we rely on for our prosperity; and, most important, shaped the ideals of liberty. For all the myriad problems of modern society, we now live in the world our forebears would have wished for us—in many ways, a better place than they dared imagine. For us not to feel grateful is treacherous

selfishness.

Failing to feel grateful to those who came before is such a corrosive notion, it must account at some level for part of our bad feelings about the present. The solution—a rebirth of thankfulness—is in our self-interest”.
Gregg Easterbrook, The Progress Paradox.)

XI. And we want these four years of college to be rich, valuable and deep.

(“College is about books. And by the word books, the proposition means this: College is about the best available tools—books, computers, lab equipment—for broadening your mastery of one or more important subjects that will go on deepening your understanding of the world, yourself and the people around you.

This will almost certainly be the last time in your life when other people bear the expense of awarding you four years of financially unburdened time. If you use the years primarily for mastering the skills of social life—as though those skills shouldn’t already have been acquired by the end of middle school—or if you use these years for testing the degree to which your vulnerable brain and body can bear the strains of the alcoholism with which a number of students depart campus, or the sexual excess that can seem so rewarding (to name only two of the lurking maelstroms), then you may ultimately leave this vast table of nutriment as the one more prematurely burnt-out case.” Reynolds Price).

I consider these core values another cornerstone of why we’re successful. We insist on a certain kind of behavior among the players and the team and we consciously try to make sure that they understand what acceptable behavior is, what our mission statements are, and what we tolerate as acceptable behavior. I think that’s been critical for our success. Then the other thing is, I’m very big on playing for each other. And so the psychology is, the players support one another and obviously it’s a huge challenge for a reserve to support a starter. But then for a starter to

appreciate a reserve....one of the huge conflicts on constructing team chemistry is this dichotomy between a player that plays every minute and one that never plays a minute. And the exchange between those two, does the one sitting respect the one that's playing? Does the one playing respect the one that's sitting? And do they have a relationship of respect that basically creates an atmosphere of support, where everyone understands their role and supports the team on its mission. I think those are probably the critical elements vital to our success.

John: The player sitting on the bench can often end up playing a crucial role in creating the competitive environment a coach wants especially in the practice environment.

Coach Dorrance: In training. Absolutely.

John: Playing time is often a difficult subject for a player to discuss with a coach. Often, many players have concerns that they do not like to discuss with the coaching staff. What issues would you identify as the most difficult issues for a player to discuss with the head coach?

Coach Dorrance: I think the most challenging thing for a player is to sort out why they're not playing. And that's probably the most difficult topic for them to bring up to their coach. Obviously if the coach isn't playing them, the impression the athlete has is that the coach either doesn't like, and usually, certainly in coaching women, if a woman doesn't play, unless you have a remarkable rapport, they immediately conclude – it has nothing to do with their playing ability, it has entirely to do with whether or not you like them. So what they do to protect themselves against the prospect of being terrible players is they sort of burden the coach with the mantle of not liking them.

And this is a wonderful kind of excuse because it separates them from the responsibility of doing anything. And then of course what ends up happening is the player, if this is the climate that her psychology is based in, doesn't feel like she can do anything to escape it. So then this motivates her to do nothing in practice to change her status, which of course exacerbates her ability to get playing time. So part of my responsibility as a coach is to ensure every player that they're in full control of whether or not they play. And it's an incredibly heavy burden for a player to accept that responsibility. They'd much rather have the reason for them not playing is that the coach doesn't like them. They would hate to have that the reason for them not being able to play is that they're lazy or they don't play with intensity or they have no self-discipline or they don't compete or they don't have any self-belief. They would hate to have the reason for them not getting on the field to be those reasons. And a part of what I was sharing earlier, a part of the culture that surrounds this player protects her from being responsible. Because of course the mother or dad on the phone with them, or maybe the high school coach or the youth coach, or the best friend even within the team structure are obviously trying to say things to make this individual feel better. So there's a support structure around the player that prevents her from taking responsibility. The mom and dad obviously are getting information from the player about why she's not playing, and that information rarely strikes on the fact that everyone's kicking her butt in practice. Usually it's about her not being given a chance or whatever the current moaning and groaning of her particular personality is. And then of course when the parents are given the wrong information they're on to protect the kid against the chaos of the universe, that she sucks, and so then what ends up happening is that the player feels fully protected, the

mother and father and everyone else are telling her “well, I can’t believe you’re not playing” but of course they’re being fed information that doesn’t have any basis in reality. And so that’s part of a construct that’s obviously extraordinarily negative. So the huge challenge for the player is, well, do they have the guts to come in and find out why they’re not playing, and that confrontation is a very challenging one for the player. It’s not as challenging for the coach, because the coach is dying to let this player know why she’s not playing. But the reality is something that may separate the player and the coach. So then what the coach has to do to not be completely separated from the player is to find something the player does well. So in this conference, when the player finally comes in to address playing time, the coach is dying to find something to connect them. And especially with a female player, it can’t be an entirely critical session. So you struggle to find something. So, here’s the irony of finding something: when the coach finally throws this player some kind of bone, that’s the bone the player uses to re-leverage her parents and supporters into the fray of the fact that that it’s unfair she’s not playing, even though 95% of the discussion was about lack of fitness, no competitive fire, lack of self-belief, lack of discipline in the off-season. ‘But your talent is extraordinary, I’ve rarely seen a player with your ability, if we could just correct these areas’. So of course the player leaves the meeting thinking that the coach just said she’s an unbelievable player, ‘oh Mom, the coach thinks I’m an unbelievable player, I can’t believe he’s not giving me a chance.’ And the other stuff of course is thrown to the wind, it’s very hard for a player to take responsibility for the fact that she doesn’t play.

That’s one issue that is difficult to discuss with a head coach. Another one is why there is a chemistry problem on the team. If

there’s a chemistry issue and they’re struggling with some other people on the team, that’s a very difficult dynamic to sort of unfold before the coach. Those two issues in particular: playing time and personal issues of chemistry are tough ones to discuss with the head coach. Players are very good at discussing team issues, but they have a very hard time discussing their own issues or when the team has issues with them.

John: How about areas often discussed by coaches and sport psychologists such as self-confidence and performance anxiety?

Coach Dorrance: Actually, they are pretty good at discussing that, because it’s so clear to the coach, it’s actually something that is volunteered by the coach, in practice and walking off the field, or walking on the field. That probably isn’t as major as some of those others, although confidence is such a huge force, I mean, it takes a player from being poor to average, average to great...it’s such an accelerator in player performance. I see it so often, I initiate that conversation. The players don’t have to. But, you know, John, you might be right, it might be something that’s also impossible for them to admit, because if they’re trying to play, or trying to become great, maybe one of the toughest things to admit is that confidence is an issue. Because what that almost does, is that it undermines their case. They’re trying to play, and they admit they have a confidence issue. Maybe that’s something they don’t want to share because it might undermine their mission, which is to either play more or to ascend to another level.

John: Confidence does come up often in discussions between sport psychologists and athletes. Do you feel like an athlete might be reluctant to bring up the confidence issue with a coach because the athlete believes that while the coach may be aware of the

confidence issue on some level, it's never been agreed to, or openly admitted to, and if the athlete acknowledges confidence is an issue and does so at an open level it is no longer an unvalidated idea but a fully exposed concern?

Coach Dorrance: Yes. And I think that's an excellent point. I think that might be a factor in why they wouldn't volunteer it. It's interesting, because I am very assertive in that aspect of coaching, I address it regularly.

John: I think you touched on this a little bit, but I'm going to ask you to put it into crystal clear terms! If you could describe the ideal psychological makeup of a competitor, what characteristics would you give this person? What would the psychologically ideal athlete look like to you?

Coach Dorrance: The most critical thing is to have a competitive fire. The great ones I've seen have the most extraordinary competitive fire, it's an issue in their lives, and it can be a problem. I mean, this is a very hard thing, and I'm talking about the ones with that hell-bent "I'm going to carve you up" mentality. It's actually very hard to corral and leave on the field. It almost becomes a chip on their shoulders, and the way they conduct their lives. Or it becomes such a stress, it's not an easy horse to ride. But this competitive fire is absolutely vital among the truly great ones. And a part of the foundation for this competitive fire are things like, they have to have a relentless personality that has absolutely no remorse, I mean they have to have the shark mentality - blood in the water. And to some extent lack compassion, I mean, to have this quality you eliminate some very positive human qualities along the way.

I pick up the newspaper and read about all the different sports events, and I'm reading

about this thing that happened between Chris Paul and the N.C. State basketball star Julius Hodge. Paul apparently just racked him during the game. According to the newspaper reports it was deliberate. This is a competitive fire, it verges on being bankrupt morally. Because it has to be such a driving force. I know that personality. I am that personality. All the truly great ones have this competitive fire and it is not easily manageable in a in a moral sense, but it's absolutely critical. And then a part of it is sort of relentlessness. But for it to exist, the foundation has to be built on a platform of remarkable physical discipline. So you can't express your competitive fire unless you've got the juice to feed it. And so this discipline aspect, being fit enough, has to exist in order for you to exhibit it. The cliché "fatigue makes cowards of us all" is an appropriate one. So part of having this extraordinary drive and competitive fire is having a base to express yourself with, because if you don't have any fitness all the competitive fire looks like without fitness is frustration. Because you can't get anything done. So those two things are intermixed.

The score is irrelevant, and your competition is not just with the opponent. It's with your teammates. You not only want to beat the opponent, you also want to be the best on the floor, the court or the field or the pool. In other words, it's aimed in all directions, it's not focused on just winning the game or against an opponent. It is going after everything, it also goes after history. Your place in history. It goes after absolutely everything. And if you have that, that's what separates you. It's incredibly rare. I mean, everyone thinks they're competitive. They have no idea. Some of my kids tell me they're competitive and I'm incredulous, I'm incredulous that they actually think they're competitive. Well, they're probably competitive compared to the girls they went to

kindergarten with, or the girls they played high school soccer with, or maybe the ones they played on their club team with, but they have no idea what a competitive personality looks like.

John: I see that relentless pursuit in top professional athletes. They are extremely competitive even with their teammates. In the locker room and on the field the types of exchanges that they have with their own teammates are often intense. The general public and others who have not been on the inside of high level athletics – especially professional athletics- do not fully understand the hardness of some professional athletes. The intense exchanges they have and the way they challenge each other is very direct.

However, I have found many professional athletes have come through a culture of challenge so they do not take the confrontation as a personal attack and they get past it one way or another. It is a subculture not found in many work places. There is often a stripped down clarity because in actual competition there is no room for distortion – you can see who is getting the job done and who is not.

If this hardness was brought to most work places colleagues would be forever wounded. It is part of the hard psychology found in direct competition but it is not the norm in most work cultures. In high level athletics you know when somebody's not getting the job done in practice or when somebody is not getting the job done in actual competition. Players will confront each other because the drive to excel has brought them this far and they do not want someone else who lacks passion or commitment to fail the team. In high level performance team sports the achievement of the team is dependent on all players competing and

maximizing their ability and contribution to the team. The margin of error is very small between success and failure at the highest levels.

Coach Dorrance: Correct. Because they want to win. And if a teammate is compromising the team's capacity to win, they will hear it from you. That's correct.

John: What would you identify as some of the more common psychological concerns that female soccer players have.

Coach Dorrance: The biggest concern with the females is they don't naturally compete. And so I think a part of what we do here exceptionally well that separates us from other programs is we train them to compete. We've done this for a long time and I think we have trained the United States in this and it's becoming a lot better in this country. Women can more successfully compete against another woman if they don't like them. What they end up doing is creating a hatred for an opponent or opponent's coach in order to commit themselves to be rabidly competitive. This is not a natural instinct. With the males, it's more natural to compete. They don't have to be rabidly angry or hate someone else to go after them. So I think the male athletes have a little more natural competitive platform. And maybe it's the sociology of women, or maybe it's something genetic, but they really struggle to compete with their friends. And part of the reason is, if you compete with a friend, they consider you “nasty” and that separates you from them. So it becomes a personal issue if you crank up the competitive level. So a huge challenge in women's athletics is to get them to compete against their teammates and friends in practice with the same intensity they compete with their bitter rivals. And it is extraordinary to me how some players

need to hate the opponent in order to compete with them.

I tell this story all the time; we were driving to the University of Connecticut one year back in the days when we would travel up there in vans to play them. I had a girl that the night before she committed to us was flipping coins between us and the University of Connecticut, which meant obviously she really loved Connecticut and the girls that were there, because she could easily have gone there. She ended up with us. Just, you know, maybe with a coin toss, ended up heads and it was Carolina Tar Heels. So she could've gone to Connecticut, she obviously liked the kids there, liked the coach there, liked the campus but she ended up coming to us. It is now her junior year at Carolina. We are driving up to Connecticut and I'm driving the van, she's sitting behind me and the whole discussion was about how she couldn't wait to beat the cows at UConn. And I'm just incredulous; because I don't have any animosity to anyone we compete against. And finally, at a rest stop I said "how can you say these things about Connecticut, you almost went there?" "Oh, I never would've gone there!" And she started denying that she virtually ended up a Husky at Connecticut. Well, what I've learned over time was that helped her compete with them because UConn at the time was our rival. "Hating" them helped her compete against them. Part of what she had to generate within herself without foundation, I'm sure, is there was something wrong with UConn. And it seems to me that in women's athletics they need that psychological gasoline in order to compete. And men don't need it to the same extent. Men I think are more natural competitors, predators, than the women are. So that's a huge challenge for me, to get the women in practice to go after each other the way you would a rival.

That would be the main one. And then the second one, right after that, actually is leadership. It's very tough to get women to lead each other, because they would rather be led by a consensus. They would rather have a committee meeting and through the committee decide what to do, but of course you know in athletics, when things are going wrong you can't have a committee meeting to sort out why Mary isn't trying that hard. What has to happen in the game is that somebody's got to scream at Mary and have her get in gear. Otherwise all of us are going to have our butts kicked, and now you're the weak link, and you've got to get it together or we're going down. So, you can't have a... "gentle chat" about where a player's brain is on a given day.

It's very tough. So when you get one, like Carla Overbeck, the captain in 1996, and the captain in 1999 at the world championships, and a gold medal in Athens, they're unbelievably rare. Carla was so extraordinary. She would actually scream on the field, during the game, "get so-and-so out of the game, she's killing us." The girl could obviously hear it, you know what I mean? And she didn't care what the girl thought about her. If she wasn't going to compete to Carla's satisfaction, she wanted the girl subbed out of the game immediately. And trust me, when Carla made a recommendation, on the bench we didn't hesitate. We wanted the players to know we respected that kind of leadership, and I would never fight her. Even if I disagreed with her, I would never fight it, because I wanted women like that on the field, holding each other accountable verbally. So verbal leadership is a huge issue as is a competitive fire against friends and teammates in practice.

John: Could you elaborate a little bit more on the obvious differences you see in coaching males and females?

Coach Dorrance: Well, it would take me forever because there are so many it'd be hard for me to recount them all. But they're motivated differently. You can't lead women with the intensity of your own personality. A part of what motivates a man is for the coach to actually scream at him during the game to get him going, and that does get him going. And a lot of the times, obviously being a male I understand this, half the time the reason you start playing is you're so irritated at the criticism. And that feeds your adrenaline. So that almost is the priming of your adrenaline pump, to have someone criticize you verbally, and embarrass you in that fashion. You refuse to be embarrassed and now your adrenaline is going, and because you want to kill or strangle the coach right then you pour that in, you sublimate that into a 50-50 ball.

That's totally ineffective with women. What happens when you are that way with a woman, unless you have a very good and close personal relationship with her is that you are going to actually shatter her confidence. And it's a totally ineffective way to lead women athletes. And I know that what's common in sport psychology is we all want to believe the way to motivate everyone is the same way. But I'm here to testify, John, it's not. I mean, even though men would love to be coddled and complimented and stroked and hugged, there are moments when that's not going to work. Sometimes their egos are so huge, that's what they believe anyway, so it doesn't impact on them. The only thing that ends up driving a huge male ego is to let them know it's not good enough and that gets his attention.

No better example than watching how Duke basketball is coached, how Mike drives his troops. Nothing coddling and, I mean, obviously they know that he cares about them, but the way the message is delivered isn't

through "I just want you to know, Peter, that I think you're a wonderful human being, but would you please get your butt in gear in the next five minutes." No, it comes out very quickly because something has to happen immediately. And I think that is a difference between men and women. I think with women it totally doesn't work, it totally shatters their confidence. Not that we don't all live on a continuum, we do, and there are some women that can be coached like men, and there are some men that have to be coached like women, but generalizing, I think with women you've got to be overwhelmingly positive. You can't afford to criticize any of them until they trust you. And then a part of the criticism has to be constructed in a way where they have to feel like you care about them at the end of it some way, otherwise they're not going to be listening to it.

No better example than when one day a player comes into my office and leaves this note on my desk. "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." And what she was telling me was "you know, I'm not listening to you because you don't care about me." And that was a great message, so I, until this day it's been on my desk, and it's somewhere out there, and because it's the truth and I needed to be reminded of that. Leading women for me is a construct. It's not easy for me. I've had to learn how to lead women, because I certainly didn't do it naturally.

Videotape is totally ineffective with the women. Men need videotape. I mean, a male's got to know that he can play better than what he's playing. Of course, every male thinks that with general criticism you're speaking about someone else. Videotape crystallizes that they're the one that needs to change their performance. General criticism with women, every

woman thinks you're talking about her. They don't need videotape. You can make a general criticism and even the women that aren't committing this mistake will feel like "oh my gosh, he's talking about me," even though that's the last one you're talking about, you know, the woman who probably feels that you're talking about the most. So videotape has a different function for men and women. We use videotape to show women they can play. With men, we show them they can't. Men's videotape sessions are about mistakes. Not always, because obviously every now and again you're going to build their confidence with a positive tape. With women the overwhelming majority of tape has to be positive, otherwise it's going to shatter their confidence. They're not going to look at it and try to correct it, they're going to look at it and say "oh my gosh, I suck." And that's going to impact negatively on their construction of confidence. Praise has to be different. Men love public praises. Women hate it. Women hate to be singled out in front of their peers, because they know every woman in the room hates them with a passion, that they're being singled out by someone for something personally glorious and they aren't, the woman you're praising also hates it. I mean, everyone hates it.

You've got to pick the way you compliment them. And the best way, I've discovered, is with a personal note. I mean, one of the greatest gifts I've ever been given was by Mia Hamm. I'm driving to work one day, and I decide to go through Umstead Park. All of a sudden - this was in the second semester of Mia's senior year and early in the morning- I see this sprinter in the park. I actually pulled over because it looked like Mia, and damn if it wasn't. I couldn't believe it. She's out there by herself, 5 and back, 10 and back, 15 and back, 20 and back, 25 and back and it was unbelievable. I mean, this is

the final measure in athletic greatness. For her to train on her own. I couldn't wait to get back to work, scribbled her a note, dropped it in the mail, forgot about it and then years later in her book is the note I wrote her. "A vision of a champion is someone who bends over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion, when no one else is watching." And I didn't know she'd even gotten it, and all of the sudden it's in her book? Obviously it meant something to her, well *that's* what you do with women. At every opportunity.

I was just in Dallas yesterday. Stacy takes me over to her house and she shows me - she played for me for four years and was one of the great success stories in our program - her scrapbook. And in the scrapbook is every note I wrote her. And I'm reading these notes and I'm going "oh my gosh, oh my gosh." And so the way you lead women is with your humanity. At every opportunity in very personal ways, you let them know you care about them, and also you let them know that they are remarkable...the best way to share with them they are remarkable, actually, if you can find a reason outside the game that's more powerful.

Women aren't as driven by their athletic success as their personal success. So if you think they're a great human being, that's what you highlight even more than an athletic achievement. "The way you treat your teammates, I came out one day and there you were, you're helping the managers set up practice. I mean, that's class. You are obviously a classy human being." Any chance you can to let them know you think they are great people, that's going to have an even more immeasurable connection with them, more powerful than anything that you can find about them athletically.

John Silva – End Note

With the infusion of young women and adult women into not only athletics, but into every facet of competition in society it appears that the gap between how men and women

process competitive and achievement oriented situations continues to evolve. I envision that it will continue to change and the socialization of men and women will provide both genders with the opportunity to compete in any environment.

Reference:

Damon, W. (1996). *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*. New York: The Free Press.

“Anson Dorrance, Head Women’s Varsity Soccer Coach at the University of North Carolina, 22-Time National Champions; former U.S. Women’s National Soccer Coach (1986-1994), 1991 Women’s World Champions - “Dr. Wang provided effective psychological and technical consultations to me and helped me eliminate competitive anxiety. and keep concentrated for achieving the Olympic gold medal at the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Italy. I am truly thankful for Dr. Wang’s consultations. Dr. Wang’s new applied motor learning book will help coaches and athletes understand the important scientific principles rel