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Common themes emerge among winningest coaches

By Lauren Reynolds
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Editor's note: This week, ESPN.com is profiling a few of the NCAA's winningest coaches in their respective sports.

Bob Knight may have received the most attention when he surpassed Dean Smith on the all-time men's basketball career wins list earlier this year, but Knight is not the only active coach to reach that milestone in his respective sport. In fact, he's not even the only one who did so this year. Brown coach Digit Murphy scored her 293rd career win in December to put her at the top of the women's hockey coaching list.

In fact, of the 12 Division I team sports that the NCAA tracks coaching records in, active coaches have set the all-time wins record in eight of them: Bobby Bowden, football; Anson Dorrance, women's soccer; Augie Garrido, baseball; Pat Summitt, women's basketball; Cindy Timchal, women's lacrosse; and Margie Wright, softball.

How did these coaches get to be so successful? In talking with a number of active wins leaders, it's clear that across sports, there are a few common denominators: passion for the job; endurance; patience; and a focus on the players' well-being, both on and off the playing field. Nearly all of the coaches have been in the profession for at least two decades, some more than five. To have that type of longevity in any career -- but especially one as grueling as coaching -- you have to be successful, not only in the wins column, but also with your players.

When asked what advice they'd give to new coaches, the record-breakers had a similar response: focus on the players. Whether it was Dorrance cultivating a family atmosphere in Chapel Hill, N.C., or Timchal encouraging her players to strive to beat their personal best, each of these coaches found a unique and profound way to communicate with their team.

"Looking back, I don't remember the score of every game," Murphy said. "But I remember the notes that former players have written to me, telling me how much Brown hockey meant to them. That's why I coach. My advice to new coaches is simple: be a sponge. Learn from everyone you can. Work your butt off. In this field, if you don't love it, you can't do it."

Although these coaches are known for winning, Murphy argues that it's losing that teaches teams the most. "As you get older, winning get put into perspective," she said. "Yes, you want to win. But when you start a season 0-9, that's when you learn about yourself and what you can do."

Of course, staying in a sport for a lifetime presents its own obstacles. Most of these coaches have witnessed huge changes in rules, technology and support -- even in the players' attitudes. Part of being successful is adapting to whatever is thrown your way.

"Boise State won [the Fiesta Bowl] because of the Statue of Liberty play," Timchal explained. "As a coach, you always have to have a trick play up your sleeve, something that gives your team confidence. You have to find



Bob Knight got his record-breaking 880th win on New Year's Day.

new and creative ways to win games."

"The toughest thing is getting kids to buy in, to believe in the struggle," Murphy said. "There has been a change in our society, and kids today have a sense of entitlement that wasn't always there. They're more focused on stuff and less about the experience. I'm old school. I'm about loyalty, commitment, work ethic. Kids are less attracted to that today, and that's disappointing. But when you find the kids that fit in your program, it's really special."

During an age in which teams often have increased access to revenue and more media coverage, thanks to the Internet, the most successful coaches are keeping things simple.

"I'd like my legacy to be that I did the best for my student-athletes, that I made them No. 1, that I championed their cause," Murphy said. "You can't fake being genuine; kids know when you're not. [Being successful is] an easy formula really; it's the coaches that complicate it."

Who's next?

For many of the record-breaking coaches, competition is just around the corner. For others, it could be a while - if ever -- that their records are broken. Take a look at the current record holders, the active leaders and those most likely to set records of their own:

Baseball

Record holder/Active leader: Texas' Augie Garrido, 39 years, 1,629-755-8

Who's next: Wichita State's Gene Stephenson, 30 years 1,605-533-3

Men's basketball

Record holder/Active leader: Texas Tech's Bob Knight, 40 years, 890-363

Who's next: Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, 32 years, 771-256

Women's basketball

Record holder/Active leader: Tennessee's Pat Summitt, 32 years, 947-180

Who's next: UConn's Geno Auriemma, 22 years, 621-120

Division I-A Football

Record holder/Active leader: Florida State's Bobby Bowden, 41 years, 366-113-4

Who's next: Penn State's Joe Paterno, 41 years, 363-121-3

Ohio State's Jim Tressel, 21 years, 197-71-2

Division I-AA Football

Record holder: Grambling State's Eddie Robinson, 55 years, 408-165-15

Active leader/Who's next: Dayton's Mike Kelly, 25 years, 235-53-1

Men's hockey

Record holder: Michigan State's Ron Mason, 36 years, 924-380-83

Active leader: BC's Jerry York, 35 years, 767-503-76

Who's next: BU's Jack Parker, 34 years, 759-392-93

Michigan's Red Berenson, 23 years, 601-292-64

Women's hockey

Record holder/Active leader: Brown's Digit Murphy, 18 years, 301-150-43

Who's next: Harvard's Katey Stone, 12 years, 266-122-18

Men's lacrosse

Record holder: Army's Jack Emmer, 36 years, 326-184

Active leader/Who's next: Georgetown's David Urick, 28 years, 304-99

Women's lacrosse

Record holder/Active leader: Navy's Cindy Timchal, 25 years, 336-86

Who's next: Princeton's Chris Sailer, 21 years, 269-91

Men's soccer

Record holder: Indiana's Jerry Yeagley -- 31 years, 544-101-45

Active leader: UNC Greensboro's Michael Parker -- 31 years, 467-163-25

Who's next: UConn's Ray Reid -- 18 years, 292-73-32

Women's soccer

Record holder/Active leader: North Carolina's Anson Dorrance -- 28 years, 629-28-18

Who's next: Texas' Chris Petrucelli, 17 years, 280-99-19

Softball

Record holder/Active leader: Fresno State's Margie Wright, 28 years, 1,253-446-3

Who's next: Florida State's JoAnne Graf, 24 years, 1,180-397-6

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