



Getting to Us: How Great Coaches Make Great Teams

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What makes a coach great? How do great coaches turn a collection of individuals into a coherent “us”?

Seth Davis, one of the keenest minds in sports journalism, has been thinking about that question for twenty-five years. It’s one of the things that drove him to write the definitive biography of college basketball’s greatest coach, John Wooden, *Wooden: A Coach’s Life*. But John Wooden coached a long time ago. The world has changed, and coaching has too, tremendously. Seth Davis decided to embark on a proper investigation to get to the root of the matter.

In *Getting to Us*, Davis probes and prods the best of the best from the landscape of active coaches of football and basketball, college and pro—from Urban Meyer, Dabo Swinney, and Jim Harbaugh to Mike Krzyzewski, Tom Izzo, Jim Boeheim, Brad Stevens, Geno Auriemma, and Doc Rivers—to get at the fundamental ingredients of greatness in the coaching sphere. There’s no single right way, of course—part of the great value of this book is Davis’s distillation of what he has learned about different types of greatness in coaching, and what sort of leadership thrives in one kind of environment but not in others. Some coaches have thrived at the college level but not in the pros. Why? What’s the difference? Some coaches are stern taskmasters, others are warm and cuddly; some are brilliant strategists but less emotionally involved with their players, and with others it’s vice versa. In *Getting to Us*, we come to feel a deep connection with the most successful and iconic coaches in all of sports—big winners and big characters, whose stories offer much of enduring interest and value.

Getting to Us: How Great Coaches Make Great Teams Details

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From Reader Review Getting to Us: How Great Coaches Make Great Teams for online ebook

Steve Heston says

A decent look into success drivers...

Pandering to some degree but thorough and compelling in content and delivery. Good insight for leaders committed to being the best.

Brian Wetters says

One of the best sports leadership books I've ever read.

Pete Wung says

I am not sure where to put this book. Seth Davis is a nationally known sports reporter and he is a very good sports writer. The prose that he commits to paper reflects his sports reporting background, and to be clear, he is a very good sportswriter. He tells his stories well and he has a fine sense of the internal stories of his subject. The stories are taut and always gives perspective on the person being featured.

But there is a problem with this book, many problems actually.

It is a collection of nine profiles of successful coaches; almost all of them have succeeded in their profession and are recognized as the leader of athletes. Some have well defined personalities and known reputations, others are relatively new to the limelight and benefits from not being ubiquitous in the media spotlight. One problem is that the chapters are relatively short, which makes for easy reading but it also make the profiles seem rushed and incomplete. Davis is seemingly trying to make his points and then rushing to demonstrate the challenges and obstacles they have faced in their inner life through anecdotes and personal histories without really examining how those headwinds affected their coaching philosophies and execution of their philosophies. What we get is a laundry list of what they do and examples. Davis lays out the facts as a reporter and then he links the professional practices of these coaches with the facts, but he never drills in deeply into the why's of the relationship between the fact and practices. It isn't a fatal flaw but it left me wondering. To be fair, he states in the introduction that this was not the intent of the book, it still leaves a void, a road not taken which could potentially be productive.

Another problem is that Davis uses a unifying theme to tie the coaches' profiles. The theme is the title of the book: Getting To Us. He explains the theme thus: "A team begins as a collection of me's, him's and you's. It is the job of the coach to figure out a way to get to Us." A noble yet unoriginal theme, as our sports culture has always revolved around teams and teamwork. Davis uses the acronym PEAK to describe the desired characteristics of a coach to enable this ability to see the big picture and get the team to Us. PEAK is: Perseverance, Empathy, Authenticity, and Knowledge. Davis tries to apply these four characteristics to the story of each of the nine men and tries mightily to squeeze details about their experience and make up into these four niches. The effort seems forced and at times are inspired and at times clichéd. Davis stated that he only intended to highlight PEAK and try to connect those characteristics to Getting To Us. The results are uneven at best, mostly disappointing.

The coaches that came through with their reputations enhanced are Geno Auriemma, Doc Rivers, Brad Stevens, and Dabo Swinney. Stevens and Swinney are relative new to the national spotlight so the portraits are excellent at revealing their stories to us, through the Davis filter. Auriemma and Rivers were revelations to me, their stories were fascinating even though a little short. Rizzo came through unscathed yet also unenhanced.

One thing that Davis did was to give a portrait of these men that are unadorned, he reaffirms the portrait of coaches like Meyer, Krzyzewski, Harbaugh, and Boeheim as they have been portrayed previously in the press. He does however, go into explaining why they are the way they are, he was not very successful. Urban Meyer came off as somewhat reasonable until the recent troubles at Ohio State with Zach Smith. Ironically, Davis also featured Meyer's wife Shelley, in this profile. Davis never fully explained Krzyzewski's decision to deal with Grayson Allen's transgressions the way he did, other than repeating his defense. Harbough came off like a petulant child at times, albeit a very successful one. Boeheim reaffirmed his public persona as prickly personality, even though he seems more sympathetic.

If you came to this book as a means to get any insight on Getting to Us, don't waste your money. If you can to read some quickie portraits of nine successful coaches, I would say go ahead and read this book, although I would also advise you to temper your expectations.

Jeri Rowe says

I found "Getting To Us" on the new non-fiction shelf of our local library, and I picked it up because I've had to read various leadership books for a day job as a senior writer for a local university. But I had never read one that revolved around coaches. Plus, I had read Seth Davis for years in Sports Illustrated, and as a sports journalist, I knew he stretched his stories beyond the Xs and Os of basketball and football.

So, what did I think? Yeah, I liked it. I'd give it 3 1/2 stars. But I came to that. I didn't get there right off the bat. Let me explain.

At first, I was bothered by a writing trope I see so often in leadership books. It's how writers use a word, phrase or acronym throughout a book as a way to connect it together to what they want to read to glean on how they think. In Davis' case, throughout the book, he used the word "Us." As in the chapter about Clemson coach Dabo Swinney, he wrote: "He uses words to get to Us." Then, there is the whole PEAK acronym -- as in Persistence, Empathy, Authenticity and Knowledge. He used that acronym as a way to show readers what he found that connected coaches like Jim Boeheim to Brad Stevens to Jim Harbaugh.

Then, there was Davis' writing style. At first, it bugged me. It was too formulaic, too reminiscent of reading these sports biographies that I dog-eared as a kid. It was the same narrative arc with each chapter, and in some places, the writing felt rushed. But the more I dove into chapters about nine different coaches, the more I realized, "Aah, let it go. Look at the information you're finding, Rowe."

So, I did. I found narrative nuggets that I didn't expect. So, I got over the whole idea of "Us" and PEAK. It bound the book together. I also had to tell myself the book is not some gold mine of narrative non-fiction. But what Davis gives readers -- and he does this incredibly well -- is use telling details and scenes to how human, how flawed these coaches are. He used his incredible access to draw back the curtain of sports pop culture to show these household names in sports are just like us. They struggle, they fail, they bounce back, they fail again. Life, as Urban Meyer has found out, is full of gray areas.

The two surprises in this book are what I found out about UConn's Geno Auriemma, the Clippers' Doc Rivers and Ohio State's Urban Meyer. I really didn't know anything about Auriemma and Rivers, and quite honestly, I didn't like Meyer. Now, I know Geno and Doc, and Urban, well, I like. Who knew? I might even pull for Ohio State.

So, "Getting To Us" does what a good book does. It reveals information you didn't know existed, and you learn something you didn't expect.

Lane says

An interesting book about successful coaches but you are left with a feeling there should be more. Maybe that is a strength of the book as it attempts to define what makes these coaches successful. For some of them, the material has been presented several times in different forms. The most interesting chapter was the view of Urban Meyer with his recent Zach Smith incident and the leaving of his Florida job that was not well covered.

Probably not enough emphasis was put on having the best players. Only Brad Stevens gets much attention for making his players at Butler better than they were rated going in to their college years.

Brandon says

Awesome read for any coach! Learn the stories and strategies of some of the best coaches ever!

Peter Carey says

Great book

I really enjoyed this book, great writing, terrific personalities that Seth Davis highlighted. Lots and lots of great takeaways! Highly recommend it!

Doc McGarey says

Imagine yourself an elite athlete deciding which coach you will sign with -- letter of intent or contract-- to develop you and put you in the position of winning a championship. That's a lot riding on your decision. Seth Davis gives us an inside view of 9 of our best known U.S. sports coaches and how they get their teams to work together and win championships. Jim Harbaugh is the worst chapter and an odd inclusion. Anyone that Mike Ditka asks "how long have you been crazy?" too sets an all-time new standard for an odd duck. Dabo Sweeney, Brad Stevens, Urban Meyer, Tom Izzo, Coach K, Jim Boeheim, Geno Auriemma and Doc Rivers are the others. I found the chapters on Urban and Dabo the most insightful to the man. However, as a leadership book, I got the most out of the Geno, Coach K and Doc chapters. Brad Stevens chapter is especially interesting right now given the Celtics run and his style is quite useful.

Dave Bolton says

Previously I'd read Seth Davis' book on Coach Wooden and really enjoyed it, so ordered this as soon as it was available. In contrast to the deep detail of the Wooden book, this books is a superficial look at the lives and careers of nine coaches of major American sports. It had a contrived "framework" for these coaches success called PEAK, which was so loose that it's not useful in any way and feels like a bit of an afterthought.

So, nowhere near as insightful as the Wooden book, but an easy and enjoyable read if you like coaching anecdotes.
