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The Twin Thieves

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Jones, S., & Jadin, L. (2021). *The Twin Thieves: How Great Leaders Build Great Teams*.

This story explores the journey that Coach Mike Frost and the Westlake Aviators embarked on in order to shift the culture of their football program. They would dominate in the regular season but then the moment seemed to always become too big for them when they played in the playoffs. With the help of Coach Cooper Williams, Frost began to take the necessary steps to create change in his program. However, Frost was not the lone catalyst for the shift that took place. His players, although it was not instant, began to buy in and take an entirely different approach to how they played the game of football. Frost and Cooper helped these players recognize their potential for impact on their teammates and taught them the importance of servant leadership. Rather than being crippled by the twin thieves, the fear of failure and fear of judgement, they learned to control what they could control and surrender the outcomes.

There were quite a few topics covered in this particular book. The 36 chapters each had some sort of story to tell or lesson to teach. After introducing Coach Frost and the struggles his team faced when they reached the playoffs, they introduced Cooper when he spoke about “The Winning Formula” in chapter two. One of the first sentences out of Cooper’s mouth stunned Frost because he began to explain that while he experienced great success as a coach, winning games was not the sole focus. Cooper further explained that, “Outcomes matter. Winning matters. Profits matter. But we understood early on that those things were not entirely in our control,” (Jadin & Jones, 2021).

After meeting Cooper after this speech, Frost asked him if he would be willing to join his coaching staff and help change the culture of his program. Cooper agreed and

showed up to help the next day. The lesson Frost learned that day was that he had failed to ever get any honest feedback from his players. After recognizing this, Cooper recommended they conduct a listening session with a handful of the players that were in the weight room at the time. This was the first action taken by Frost to begin to shift the culture of his program.

The players also had to learn that change could only be made if they understood that their role was just as great if not greater than the head coach. Many if not all of the players were under the impression that their coach owned the culture of the team and they were just there to follow orders. Cooper then explained to the players that they must take ownership over their team because at the end of the day, they are the ones that take the field each week. He also touched on the fact that taking the easy way out and putting the blame on anyone but themselves will not do them any good.

Eventually, the team held their first leadership council meeting where they addressed the twin thieves. Each of the players were asked to answer the question, "What holds you back from being the best leader you can be?" (Jadin & Jones, 2021). After each of their anonymous answers were read aloud, Cooper pointed out that each one of their fears were related to the fear of failure and/or the fear of judgement. He reassured them that the rest of the country was dealing with the same struggle but that they had to respond differently. Rather than allowing fear to continue to drive the program, they had to learn to allow love and people to get behind the wheel.

Although these initial changes were important and necessary for growth, another topic that was covered was the importance of constant evolution. Frost and his team had taken great steps and already experienced improvement in their culture. But in

order for that improvement to last, Cooper emphasized that complacency is not an option. Getting comfortable and not experiencing any kind of adversity will only inhibit a culture from improving.

The coolest part about reading this book is that I have been a member of teams that have been on different levels of the spectrum in terms of culture. My experience in high school was far different than my experience in college. My freshman year of high school football was not the most fun I have ever had. Some of my teammates were stealing from each other and we had countless suspensions just among our freshman class. The seniors were intimidating and did their best to try and scare some of us off.

Sophomore year was a different story. I began to develop deeper relationships with some of the upperclassman and a couple of our coaches who I began to realize were trying to invest in me on a personal level. Isaac Smith, who was a senior that year, started taking me to and from practice and Young Life events since we lived in the same neighborhood and he and I are friends to this day. If I had to guess, Coach Johnson, who led Young Life as well, probably challenged Isaac to foster a friendship with me because I was given the same challenges later down the line.

Junior year was my first year starting varsity. I was the left offensive tackle and did not play very well that season. The second half of the season went better than the first half, but I still was disappointed in myself. It did not help that every chance they got, my offensive line coaches were cracking jokes to me about how bad the first five games were for me. Their intent was not to break me down, it was to motivate me to play better. And it did, but that motivation came from a fear that I might lose my starting spot or that I would let them down.

Senior year was all-around bad. The senior class before us had set a solid example of how to play together as a team without pointing fingers and we did the total opposite. Anytime anything went wrong, which was pretty much all the time, someone was blaming a coach for his play call, a teammate for missing a block, etc. It was such a toxic culture, and I was able to recognize that the underclassman did not enjoy being around us as a whole. My best friend, who was one of our captains, always felt the need to tell guys what they were doing wrong, and I was typically following that conversation up by trying to reassure the kid he just ripped into.

I was so excited to come to Taylor because of the heavy emphasis on community. It was clear from the beginning that the relationships that would develop during my time would in fact last a lifetime. The previous coaching staff understood the importance of the people that were a part of the program and coached through love rather than fear. The only problem was that they did not seem to care at all about results.

Coach Mingo and the new staff came in and implemented a lot of the lessons and principles that this book talked about. After completing this season, Mingo met with each of the seniors one-on-one to discuss what we liked and disliked about our experience and we all felt comfortable sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly. He helped us learn how to play football with a sense of freedom because we finally understood that the outcomes of our games did not define us. Even though our record was just below .500 at 5-6, it was the most fun I have ever had playing football because we made it about having fun and loving on each other even when the final score did not go in our favor.

In terms of critical thinking skills, open-mindedness is the main skill I used when I first heard about these ideas and lessons from Coach Mingo. It was difficult to adapt because we had such a strong desire to win football games and winning was not his main focus at all. The program is founded on four pillars: God Glorifying, Competitive Excellence, Holistic Development, and Kingdom Impact. Those were ingrained into our minds from the beginning and he also made it clear from the beginning that it was our program and our experience.

Because I had first-hand experience with a lot of what was discussed in the book, analysis is another skill I used because I've seen these lessons and principles at work. When the majority of our team bought into what Mingo was trying to get across to us, we began to experience a shift. Our conversations were less about winning and more about finding ways to control the things that were in our control like effort and attitude. If I were to ever become a coach, I would do my best to implement these things into my program.