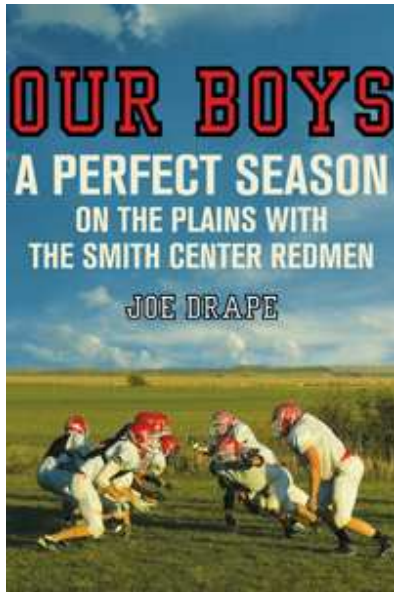


A New Year's Resolution for Double-Goal Coaches by Jim Thompson

I am a skeptic about New Year's Resolutions, having been influenced by *Good to Great* author Jim Collins' idea of a don't-do list. Jim, who will keynote PCA's National Youth Sports Awards dinner at Stanford on April 17, wrote a memorable [USA Today column on December 30, 2003](#), suggesting we would be better off if we stopped doing things that prevent us from doing the more-important things that get shoved aside in our busyness.



But I am rethinking my skepticism about New Year's Resolutions after reading *Our Boys*, a wonderful book about Kansas high school football by Joe Drape, a reporter for *The New York Times*. Drape uprooted his family to Smith Center, Kansas, to follow a season of the Smith Center Redmen, a high school team that had won four state 2A championships in a row with a winning streak of 67 games.

As Drape profiles him, Coach Roger Barta is a prototypical Double-Goal Coach whether or not he is familiar with the term. His mantra is "Let's get a little better every day." One of the few times he gets upset is when a player comments to the media about the winning streak. Redmen don't talk about wins and losses. They -- remember this phrase -- talk about getting a little better every day.

The focus of Barta and his amazing staff on raising good people reminds me of John Wooden's response when asked one season to assess the quality of his team: "Ask me in 30 years." Like Wooden, Barta and associates take the long

view: "None of this is really about football. We're going to get scored on eventually, and lose a game, and that doesn't mean anything. What I hope we're doing is sending kids into life who know that every day means something."



Which is not to say Barta doesn't value winning. The book's coverage of the Redmen's potential fifth unbeaten season contains real drama -- even though Drape gives away the ending in his subtitle -- and I felt as though I was experiencing the Redmen's season with them. Reading about the preparation the coaches and players went through to be able to give their best effort every game was inspiring, and more typical of what a great Division 1 college team might do than a small high school program.

Those who wrongly think Double-Goal Coaching is soft will note that Barta looks for ways to demoralize the Redmen's opponents

in the hopes they will emotionally quit in the face of the Redmen's relentless toughness. When his players seem affected by a rival team engaging in some pre-game psychological warfare involving their school banner, Barta counters with: "Guys, I didn't know it was Flag Day. We didn't bring one so let's go get theirs," which brings his players howling to their feet.

In the book's Acknowledgements Drape writes, "Not long ago, I heard Doris Kearns Goodwin say that when she was writing her recent book about President Abraham Lincoln she woke up every day wanting to be a better person." Drape says he felt the same way being around Coach Barta and his team.

Now that is a New Year's resolution I can get behind: get up every morning and try to be a better person. And in the spirit of Roger Barta, I know I don't have to be perfect, I just need to get a little better every day.

Double-Goal Coaches everywhere should read this book and emulate Coach Barta. Let's all just get a little better every day at positively motivating our athletes to be successful in sports, and in life.