“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

"So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

FROM “THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING”
BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN

Everyone has struggled in their crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic and wished it had not happened in our time. When the virus hit, the situation evolved rapidly, and it was hard to know what was coming next, much less prepare for it. When the shutdown orders came, coaches had less than a week to shift to a remote program from the in-person program they had been developing all their lives.
Teams at all levels were affected. The NBA placed its season on hold and other professional sports quickly followed. Colleges and universities went virtual over a weekend, volleyball clubs were shut down, and schools closed and went online. Besides having to figure out how to lead and manage a program virtually, the financial toll was tremendous. At every level, costs have continued even as revenue have dried up.

The pain intensified, with little help in sight. No one who is a coach today has ever lived through a pandemic, so there were no best practices, lessons learned, or storehouses of knowledge to provide guidance on how to lead and manage your way out of the situation that had been thrust upon you. People scrambled and did their best, but there were so many things that needed to be done; it was overwhelming. And it was easy to lose sight of the progress you were making because there was always more to do. As Tara VanDerveer told us, “COVID-19 puts things in perspective. Highly accomplished people celebrate finding a pack of toilet paper.”

While coaching during a pandemic was an entirely new experience, some lessons can be taken from leading during other crises. Jay Lund, the CEO of Andersen Corporation highlights the unique aspects of the pandemic, while incorporating tried and true lessons in his approach to leading during it:

“If I have learned one thing from this crisis, it is when there is so much uncertainty and so little we control, we as leaders must be clear, decisive, agile and humble—we are going to make mistakes, but we must keep moving forward and get smarter and better each day. And of course, we must communicate often and with honesty, confidence, and hope.”

These insights from the world of business also apply to coaches as they work to lead their teams the best they can in challenging times.

FORMAL VS. INFORMAL INTERACTIONS

The COVID-19 crisis forced virtually all communication to go from informal to formal. In normal times, Beth stays connected with her staff through Management by Walking Around (MBWA). She likes to hold frequent informal meetings and few structured ones. But the COVID-19 crisis greatly reduced the opportunity for informal connection. Now, everything had to be structured and scheduled.

Beth’s normal approach was to go into the office in the morning and stop by the desk of each staff member to ask how things were going and what she could do to help them out. This informal communication enabled anyone to raise an issue without needing to prepare and wait for a formal meeting. This ensured that issues were raised as soon as they came up rather than letting them grow as they would have if Beth had not made herself available.

But with nobody in the office, there is no one to drop in on. Instead, everything now needed to be scheduled.
Whether it was Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, or Facebook Video Chat, everything had a scheduled start and end time. Soon it became routine—click a link, chat, click the link for the next meeting. Hour after hour of scheduled meetings piled up one on top of another. Though this is the norm in the business world, it felt much too restrictive and exhausting in the coaching world in which everyone is used to moving around all day.

Dan Corotan, University of Utah volleyball assistant coach, noted the absence of informal conversations when he said:

“The informal drop-ins created organic conversations you didn’t know you were going to have. They lead to useful tangents and made it easy to bounce ideas off of each other.”

The online video technology services worked surprisingly well given the enormous increase in usage they experienced when in-person contact was shut down. For example, Zoom experienced a 728% increase in first-time installations in the five weeks starting March 2, 2020. But, although their traffic exploded, the platforms remained stable.

For those in athletics, though, clicking one link after the other and staring into a computer screen all day was a huge shift. “My Eyes Glaze Over” (MEGO) became standard operating procedure, and people began longing for the days when you could just drop by the office next door and informally chat rather than having to schedule a meeting for even a potentially small topic.

CRISES ARE OVER-MANAGED AND UNDER-LED

It is tempting to try to manage a crisis and impose order on it. But by their very nature, crises are not business as usual, and simply applying normal organizing principles won’t work. Instead, leadership is needed to provide direction and hope, even when the leader isn’t sure exactly how things will play out. In a crisis, you will never be right, but you must always project calm and confidence that things will work out.

Crisis management requires the following from leaders, not all of which may come naturally to you:

- Listen with empathy. In times of crises people need the opportunity to express their fears and concerns. They need to be heard, and so, you need to listen.
- Unleash your creativity. Since there are no standard operating procedures to handle a crisis, you will need to free up everyone’s creativity to meet the new and unexpected challenges.
- Be humble and transparent. You do not know how the crisis will eventually be solved. Nobody does. Spend more time listening, testing, and learning and less time trying to prove you were right.
• Address multiple stakeholders. Your athletic director, staff, players, and their parents will all have different issues and concerns. You need to talk to each group about the things they find most important.

• Communicate excessively. The need for communication goes up during a crisis, and it will be highly unlikely that you will err by communicating too much.

• Accept uncertainty. The rate of change in a crisis is much faster than the rate of change in normal times. The world is more uncertain, and fighting the uncertainty won’t make it go away.

• Be agile and flexible. People typically think of agility as making changes to your system, while flexibility means working within your current system. Because the world changes so quickly during a crisis, you must be prepared to accelerate your decision-making and action. This is especially difficult since you are dealing with more uncertainty than you normally experience.

• Celebrate small wins. It is easy for people’s spirits to get down during a crisis. Look for small wins that can remind people that there is always something to appreciate, even if it seems like a small thing.

• Identify opportunities. It is tempting to see only the downside of a crisis since that is what is directly in your face. But crises provide lessons (such as maintaining your program while reducing travel) that can pay off once the crisis has passed.

THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER CRISSES BEFORE COVID-19

As everyone is struggling to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, it is helpful to remember that crises have struck programs before the epidemic. The difference with COVID-19 is that it came on almost overnight and happened for all programs at the same time.

In 2007, the Utah program faced a crisis on its own. Utah was returning all of its players after going 16-0 in the Mountain West Conference (MWC) the previous year, and there was a consensus amongst most coaches that the Utes were set to make a run to the Final Four. But it was not to be. The two best players went to the USA tryout that summer, and when they came back, they announced they wanted to transfer. This was before the transfer portal existed and when transferring was not popular. Someone from somewhere had told them they needed to play in a bigger conference.

There were plenty of theories in the volleyball world at the time as to exactly what had led to this. Since Utah had experienced almost no transfers before or since, this was a big topic of concern for many coaches.
More importantly, it was a crushing blow to our returning players. They were devastated and felt betrayed. Beth’s concern about the transfers quickly turned to concern about the players that did not transfer. She circled the wagons to protect the returning players from the rumors that were flying around and to provide them with space to mourn. It felt tragic at the time and was a big hit to the program.

That summer, Utah’s other top player tore her ACL and was out for the year. The Utes entered the 2007 season down its three top players with a schedule that was the second toughest in the country. The Utes had put together a strong schedule to prepare the team for a deep NCAA tournament run.

It was not an easy year, but Beth has never been prouder of a team for persevering and coming out of the season better than they started. Utah ended up three points from getting into the NCAA tournament, having lost 15-12 in the 5th set of the MWC Championship, costing them the automatic bid. Utah also needed that win to get over 500 in order to qualify for the tournament. Had the Utes been even one match over 500, they would have gotten an at-large bid due to the strength of their schedule.

So, while the COVID-19 crisis is new, teams have faced crises in the past.

COVID-19’S IMPACT ON THE 2020 SEASON

No one knows how the COVID-19 crisis will play out. But, you must continue moving forward the best you can in the face of that uncertainty. The 2020 volleyball season may be shortened. The schedule may be changed to reduce travel, particularly by plane. Fans may or may not be allowed in the arenas. Uncertainty is all around.

But what is certain is that the teams and players who were diligent with physical training during the quarantine will rise to the top. There will be only a small cushion to get back in shape if an athlete struggled to work out on their own without the supervision of their strength coach. And, if the entire program is disorganized, the season will finish quickly. In a normal year, there is time to play your team into shape. In a COVID-19 year, it may be that the winning is done in the off-season for the teams designed to win.

COMMUNICATING PROGRESS DURING A CRISIS

Four weeks into the crisis, Beth composed a long note to her athletic director to update him on the progress the volleyball program had made in learning how to lead and manage their program remotely. The initial purpose of this note was to inform her boss, but by compiling all of the progress into one place it gave the staff confidence that they were actually making progress. One additional
benefit from Beth updating her boss was that her example was picked up by a member of the staff who began doing a much better job of updating Beth than had been their habit previously. Beth was leading by example.

Some of the subjects to address were one-time-only urgent matters, such as getting the players home to their families when the school shut down. Others, such as developing routine and structure remotely, were ongoing and could be applied to any remote situation, both now and in the future. There were so many subjects to cover, however, it was hard to know what to do first. A tool from psychology—Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs—provided an organizing structure for what should be done immediately and what should follow.

**TOOL: MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS**

One of the key concepts in psychology is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. When you first read about it in Psych 101, it probably sounded pretty theoretical. But in a crisis, it becomes a surprisingly accurate guide as to what needs to be done and in what order.

Here is the pyramid showing the hierarchy of needs:

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](image)

It is a waste of time to try to satisfy needs at the top of the pyramid if the needs at the bottom of the hierarchy are unmet. You must first satisfy the basic needs, then satisfy the psychological needs, and finally, if there is time and money left over, go after self-actualization.

Beth’s email can be mapped onto Maslow’s hierarchy. She addressed the issues by beginning at the bottom and then moving up as she led her staff and players through the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.
Food, shelter, and safety were the first and most urgent issues to be addressed when the university shut down both the school and the dorms. The first week after the shutdown was focused on the physical and mental health of the players. The staff made sure every player had secure housing and access to food. After one week, all of the players had made it home to their families, including getting one of the players back to her home in Hungary.

Once this had been accomplished, it was time to move on to letting everyone know they belonged and were cared about.

MEETING PSYCHOLOGICAL BELONGINGNESS AND LOVE NEEDS

The next level of needs requires reminding everyone that they are connected, they belong, and that you care about them. The COVID-19 period of isolation pushes towards just the opposite and makes people feel like they are on their own with no one to help them out.

Academics. Once the athletes were safe, the program moved on to ensure they stayed on top of their academics. Like the colleges and universities, our athletes had to adapt to going virtual in the span of a long
weekend. It would have been easy, and perhaps natural, for the athletes to feel that everything in their life was out of control and to begin feeling helpless and untethered.

By focusing on their academics early on, the players had one thing that gave continuity to their lives. The staff chose to add very little else to the athletes’ plates so they had one clear target on which to focus. Their classes switched to online, but because they were in the middle of the semester, they were continuing their classes rather than being uprooted and having to start something new. With so much new, it was nice to have at least one thing that just moved ahead pretty much as it had been.

In addition, connecting the players with their academic advisors, mentors, and tutors enabled them to continue the relationships that had supported them before the crisis. This continuity helped the players deal with their emotions during the abrupt transition.

**One-on-one phone calls.** Beth did a round of 30-minute one-on-one phone calls to spend time with each assistant, staff member, and player. These calls hardly mentioned volleyball. Instead the calls were about family, academics, friends, and safety. The calls addressed their concerns and fears and reminded them of the psychology and wellness resources that Jonathan Ravarino and Uma Dorn provided to assist them through this unsettling period.

Beth used the Kübler-Ross model (denial, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance) to help everyone understand the phases of dealing with the changes being forced upon them. Different people were in different stages, and having a framework made it more acceptable to openly discuss the stage each person found themselves in.

The first round of one-on-one calls was to help settle everyone into their changed reality. More rounds of calls would be needed as people moved to different stages of the Kübler-Ross model. It also became clear that some people needed much more time to feel connected than others, so flexibility in scheduling was critical.

**Communication.** Eventually, the time came to start communicating with the entire group. The program used Team Works and Zoom to hold meetings with the staff and players. These were necessary so that everyone heard the same thing and stayed on the same page.

To enhance the sense of routine, the meetings followed a schedule. Initially, the staff met daily and the team met weekly, bringing in additional support staff as needed.

It didn’t take long before the energy started to fade due to the frequency of meetings. Spacing the meetings out a bit meant people looked forward to them and had the energy and bandwidth to be present and focused on the discussion at hand. One of the advantages of using video chats is that you can easily pick up when people fade out and begin looking at their phones. Adjusting in real-time to meeting fatigue is a valuable lesson of the pandemic.

**Connection.** Once the initial crisis had been dealt with, it was time to shift gears to reconnect the group and return to some semblance of a team. Players and staff were communicating daily through the Team Works app.
Staff members were also given Box folders (like Dropbox for business users) to upload videos about nutrition, workouts, volleyball, fun, etc. for the players to access.

**Social media.** It was important to let recruits, fans, and friends know the Utah volleyball program was still functioning during this difficult period. The staff shared great memories in pictures and videos from this past year on Twitter and Facebook. They created a “a day in the life” series highlighting student-athletes and also shared stories about how the support staff were getting along. They also shared the inspiring stories of Utah alumni who are currently working in medical fields and active on the front lines fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Routine and Structure.** Our players needed to be educated quickly on the importance of routine and structure for their physical and mental health. It would have been easy for them to drift aimlessly without the discipline a routine enforced. Our Director of Sports Science, Ernie Rimer, got on a team Zoom and discussed the importance of routine. He also did a fun video routine with his family that we shared with the team as an example of what a healthy routine looked like.

Tom Farden, Utah gymnastics coach, noted:

“Clear communication is the cornerstone to achieving success. I also feel that consistency is somewhat of a lost art. That is why even during this pandemic, we held our staff meeting on Mondays and our recruiting meetings on Tuesdays.”

**Budgeting.** Like virtually every other program, the University of Utah took a financial hit when it closed down in-person activities. This led to across-the-board budget cuts for all sports that needed to be made quickly. Since the bulk of the costs of the program are its people, Beth needed to work the numbers hard to make sure she took care of her staff and the student-athletes. She had to make painful cuts in many areas of her operation but did not make them in areas that would affect members of her program. These cuts enabled her to keep everyone in the program employed and, hopefully, continue to give the players a great student-athlete experience as part of a nationally competitive program.
MEETING PSYCHOLOGICAL ESTEEM NEEDS

Once everyone’s need to feel they were valued and cared for had been taken care of, the focus shifted to giving them opportunities to get back to their athletics.

**Volleyball Performance Team.** This group was critical early on for strategizing the next moves once things settled down. The volleyball performance team meets, without fail, every week. The membership includes the volleyball coaching staff, Henry Ruggiero and Emma Ostermann (sports performance), Ernie Rimer (sports science), Lindsey Adams (athletic trainer), Maria Di Iorio (sports nutritionist), and Uma Dorn (mental health and performance).

The Utah Volleyball Performance Team is arguably one of the most knowledgeable, active, and efficient groups in the country. This team helps guide the program with science, planning, and communication. They use systematic planning known as periodization that incorporates every aspect of the athletes’ training (volleyball training, strength and conditioning, practice and match jump counts, practice planning, injuries, mental health, etc.) The coaches work collaboratively with this group and value their expertise and input. They are a finely tuned group that functions at a very high level, truly cares about the program and players, and works hard to keep the program at the national forefront of research and execution.

At times during COVID-19, this team spent more time with the players than did the coaching staff. In particular, they were in constant communication with players concerning their home workouts. This group is also working on the return-to-play plan and how to apply sports science to keep the players healthy and injury free when the team gets back in gym to train.

**Physical training.** After about two or three weeks, the staff thought the players could emotionally handle working out. The strength coach sent workout plans to the players, and she created her own communication system with them. The staff also sent care packages to each player with strength bands, a volleyball, and a motivational laminated visual of the team’s goals and vision.

![Figure 96: Workout care packages](image-url)
The University of Utah has an impressive performance center on campus with a complete array of equipment and space tailored to the needs of its athletes, but the athletes were home with their families, not at the University. The players sent pictures of their home facilities, which ranged from rather impressive modern facilities to rusty backyard barbells lying in the dirt for pumping iron old-school. The program worked with each player individually to tailor workouts that were possible with the resources they had at hand.

**DISC behavioral style.** The University of Utah volleyball program employs the DISC behavioral style tool, described in Chapter 6, to identify individual behavioral styles for all staff and athletes. The DISC tool helps each individual understand themselves better and improve their communications with others.

To reinforce the importance of DISC to the program, a DISC professional was invited to join numerous Zoom meetings with the team. The staff also held separate small group meetings with the 2019 freshmen who did not have time to be educated on DISC during the busy academic year but who now could go deep to understand this important tool. The staff felt this was a great use of the time during COVID-19 and increased their investment in this important tool.

**MEETING SELF-ACTUALIZATION NEEDS**

After everyone’s self-esteem needs were met to the extent possible during a crisis, the next step was to move on to the topics that will help realize everyone’s full potential.

**Current Players.** We called all of our current players to make sure they had everything they needed to come back when the university allows it. The magnitude of the disruption on the lives of the young adults has been
enormous, and the program is prepared to do all they can to support its players.

**Transfer portal.** Two players with significant potential entered the transfer portal and expressed interest in joining the Utah program. This presented an exciting possibility for the program, but now the challenge was to figure out how to logistically have the players learn as much as possible about the program virtually rather than in-person.

**Inspirational.** At some point, Beth could feel the weight of the situation taking its toll on everyone involved. She wanted to introduce something out of the ordinary to serve as a reminder that there was more to life than just hard slogging and making it through each day.

During one virtual meeting, the team was surprised with a Zoom visit by Justin Su’a, a performance psychologist and motivational speaker who the team loves. They listen to his podcasts in normal times, and they were delighted to have a chance to speak with him (virtual) person. The team’s energy when they saw him on Zoom was palpable. It gave everyone a shot of positivity just when they needed it the most.

Su’a talked to the team about people being either fountains or drains. You want more fountains in your life, and it is up to you to choose who to let in. Here are more of his ideas from his Twitter account:

“Examine the patterns of your day-to-day life and see what you should stop doing, start doing, and keep doing.”

“When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”

**Recruiting.** Recruiting needed to be put on the back burner during the initial crisis when the program was dealing with lower-level needs on the hierarchy. Recruiting is obviously fundamental to any program’s success, but there just wasn’t capacity to give it as much time as usual.

The coaches began the recruiting push by calling the club directors with whom they had the strongest ties. The initial conversations weren’t about individual players. Instead, the calls focused on how they and their families were doing. Though Utah’s program had made it towards the top of the hierarchy of needs, it was clear that many of the clubs were still dealing with basic needs and survival. Club directors are running a business, and the reduction of revenue caused by COVID-19 has been devastating to their livelihoods.

**Other items for the University of Utah**

Though everything felt so different when COVID-19 hit, the world still went on and time still marched by. There were many important and ongoing topics that remained to be dealt with once there was some breathing room.

Many of these have been made more challenging with the uncertainty of what will open when. For example, the staff had to move full speed ahead and plan for summer
camps before knowing whether or not they would be held. And if the camps ended up being virtual, the staff needed to develop a plan on exactly how that would work. Eventually, this year’s summer camps were canceled, but the planning had to happen before that call was made in case the decision went the other way.

Though exactly what will be allowed when the season arrives is unclear, there were several planning items which could not wait. The staff needed to move ahead to schedule and prepare to sign the contracts necessary for making everything happen when the season begins in the fall.

The program has a leadership group made up of four current players that met online regularly. They have formed small groups of teammates to communicate better, offered support and messaging, and taken the lead in setting the season goals for the program. The staff knew this was a key time for leadership development and took the opportunity to mentor, guide, and encourage this group to actively engage with, and provide leadership to, their teammates during the crisis.

The staff reached out to our fans and donor base. They sent links to a highlight and thank you video to the Block U fan club members and held a Zoom chat between coaches, select players, and season ticket holders. No one knows how many fans will be allowed to attend matches in the fall, but we wanted to make sure every fan knows they are valued right now.

In order to stay in touch with the fans, Utah’s communications team stepped up their social media game. Because there were no matches on which to report, the communications team had to get creative and reported on great moments from the past and more details about the players and coaches.

Finally, we made special efforts to contact our donors and potential donors. Though we always appreciate their generosity, in this year they may be particularly critical. The revised budget (as all sports at the University of Utah were required to do) cut out all of the niceties in order to have enough money to retain everyone on staff and keep operating at a nationally competitive level. The resulting budget has none of the special events that serve to brighten players’ spirits and break the tension of the season. If any of these are to be added back in, it will have to be done courtesy of the donations of those who love and support our program.

**OTHER ITEMS FOR COACHES**

Beth is a big believer in giving back to the sport. And in some ways, being under isolation has helped her give back to volleyball. Beth and Leo had talked about writing this book for several years but had never found the time. Because neither of us could travel during this crisis, we finally found the time for writing it.

We have also been doing online presentations on the topics in this book for coaches’ groups such as the AVCA,
WeCoach, and the Art of Coaching. The questions from the coaches in these presentations informed many of the ideas we have addressed here.

**RAMPING UP TRAINING FOR THE FALL SEASON**

Even in the midst of the uncertainty caused by the virus, the players will be returning to campus soon and must prepare to compete. To do so safely, the University of Utah has created a phased approach. Each phase will open things a bit more, and the coaches and administration will monitor progress and respond to setbacks as they happen.

Utah had a centralized training center for all of the athletics teams to work out (except for football, which has its own dedicated facility). The equipment and machines from the training center have been decentralized and moved into different places across campus. For example, one of the three volleyball courts in Utah’s practice facility has become a temporary weight room.

Four athletes will be allowed to work out at a time on fixed schedules. They will be permitted to access their locker room to use the restrooms but will not be allowed to linger as they normally would. Over time, the plan is to allow for small groups to pass volleyballs, and eventually move to six-on-six volleyball later this summer.

The staff will schedule one day a week in the office to work on the things which are best handled in-person. They will continue to work remotely most other days while keeping in mind the need to stay connected while out of the office.

No one wanted to have times like this with the challenges they bring. But since the times have been given to us, the best everyone can do is to safely take things one step at a time and move towards whatever the new normal turns out to be.

**HOW COVID-19 IS CHANGING ATHLETICS**

After the first month of COVID-19, things seemed to settle in a bit. The pandemic had shut down just about everything by mid-March, and by the end of April people had fallen into their new routines of staying at home and working on video calls, and had settled in for the long haul. It seemed we would be running a marathon in which everyone would get into a consistent rhythm, but that is not what happened.

Instead, there were ebbs and flows as the days and weeks lingered on. NCAA legislation, which normally takes years to change, was changing daily. On one day coaches and athletes believed there would be a fall season, and the next, that belief was challenged with news report of the virus numbers escalating. There was widespread exhaustion and frustration, bordering on depression. Player meetings went from good to bad as the reality of what was happening began to sink in and motivation began to wane.
By early June, the NCAA had decided fall sports championships would be carried out as normal with a few possible exceptions such as regionalization of the tournament. Universities were working at a furious pace to create policies and protocols for bringing athletes back to campus. A phase-in program was designed for the return to campus, which allowed local athletes to return first, then those from out of state, and finally incoming freshmen. With each phase came testing, quarantining, and education on lifting weights and conditioning during a pandemic. Masks were mandatory, and it was officially a new era of sport.

During quarantine, television ran classic reruns of great moments in sport. Watching sport coverage from even a year ago is unsettling. Now, seeing athletes high-five, chest bump, and hug brings up an involuntary reaction of “What were they thinking? Where is the distancing?” Watching fans interact with players appears unsafe from the new perspective.

With the fall sport season looming to start in early August, there seems to be a broadly shared uneasiness among coaches, athletes, and administrators. The reality of how to practice, travel, and compete while staying safe is increasing stress levels, and the uncertainty from every direction continues to wear on nerves.

In addition, there is anxiety about returning to in-person jobs after isolating at home for months. Sport requires long hours with immense intensity, and coaches and athletes are not used to being home for so much time.

Existing in a highly competitive world with travel as the norm is a way of life, but after four months at home, it seems daunting. Even the most seasoned professionals are wondering if they have gotten a bit rusty after the time at home.

We have learned a lot about COVID-19 and public health. But there is much less definition around how to play sport safely. Here is a sampling of the outstanding questions about athletic competition:

- Will athletes have to wear masks to practice?
- Will coaches be allowed to touch balls during practices? If not, how will they be able to properly train their athletes?
- Will athletes have to wear masks during games and matches? How will that affect their performance? Will they be allowed to huddle closely, or will they be spread out?
- What will happen when one or more athletes or staff members test positive for COVID-19?
- Will fans be allowed at the competitions? How many fans? How close will they sit to the court? Will they be required to wear masks? What is the social-distancing plan for fans? What will the workers do if fans refuse to abide by these rules?
- Will other groups, such as bands, cheerleaders, and dance groups, be allowed to perform at games and matches?
• Will coaches have to wear masks? Will they be able to remove them for interviews with television commentators? For that matter, will commentators be located at the venue or will they be calling the games from a studio or even from home?

• What will airline travel for the staff and team look like? Will the program pay extra to fly on airlines that take safety more seriously?

• Will programs pay for coaches and staff who are older than 60 to fly first class to provide them with additional protection since they are more at risk?

• How many wipes and disinfectants will the team need to secure to supply the travel party?

• How will the team secure food on the road that is both safe and nutritional?

• What are the protocols teams will enact when they get to a hotel? Will players have their own rooms? If budgetary restrictions preclude single rooms, how will you decide on who to you put together as roommates?

Staff and athletes are good at seeing problems and solving them through creativity and hard work. This makes a situation such as COVID-19 particularly difficult for these highly competitive people. No matter how hard they try, they cannot just find a way to win. COVID-19 is a problem without a lot of short-term answers and with plenty of pain to go around. Beth tells her athletes, “keep your head up and your nose down,” meaning stay positive, but do the work necessary to try to prepare to play and to keep yourself and those around you safe. Time will be the only answer to the many questions, and patience will be necessary.

In any year, everyone would agree that staying healthy matters. But in the COVID-19 years, staying healthy is not just something that would be nice to do. It will be a competitive weapon just as training and raw talent are. At NCAA tournament time, it is conceivable that three or more of the top ten teams in the nation will eliminate themselves from title contention because one or more of their key players tests positive. Other teams will have the same thing happen to take them out of their conference championship. Don’t be one of those teams.

WHAT COVID-19 LESSONS CAN WE CARRY FORWARD?

Eventually, the COVID-19 crisis will lessen and the world will transition to the new normal. But since no one knows exactly what that will look like, programs need to be prepared for a wide variety of possible outcomes. Those could include returns of the virus (or of a new pandemic source), a vaccine that effectively eliminates the virus, or anything in between.
The need for preparedness and making the shift from in-person to virtual may arise again. If so, now there is a template to follow. But even in the new normal, there are ways we can take advantage of what we have learned. Some possibilities might include:

- How could you reduce recruiting trips that require two to three days of travel and instead watch more online video to evaluate players? Without a doubt, there will be times you will want to fly out to lock in a key recruit, but not 100% of the time.

- How could you incorporate Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs into your thinking so you are not trying to satisfy needs higher on the pyramid until low-level needs are fulfilled?

- How could you leverage your budget to engage a specialist for a one-hour video call rather than having to bring them in and paying for a full day of their time?

- How could you apply some of the same technologies and approaches you have been using with your staff and players and use them to connect more closely with your fan base? After all, a head coach could reach hundreds of fans at once and have it feel like a semi-private chat using Zoom or another video meeting technology.

- How could you make constant communication up and down in the organization a norm even when everyone is back in the same location?

- How could you hold the gain on enhanced social media so that it still holds interest above and beyond simply reporting the final scores?

Everyone will be delighted once the COVID-19 crisis is brought under control. Even so, there are lessons we can take from the painful necessity of dealing with the crisis which will help us win in the coming years.