

Soccer Field, Mission Field

100 Coaches Reveal How They
Play For Something More

MICHAEL ZIGARELLI

SAMPLE

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PREFACE

There are at least three ways to read this book.

From one vantage point, this is a book about coaching, specifically soccer coaching, but the principles apply to almost any sport. I've been a soccer coach at the high school and college level, so I researched the question that has perplexed me for a dozen seasons: *What should it look like when a follower of Jesus leads a team?*

From a broader vantage point, this is a book about leadership, specifically how to lead *any* organization—a business, a school, a church, a family, a team—as a Christian. Tapping the expertise of 100 leaders who are committed Christians, I've drawn these connections throughout the book. The question from this angle is: *What does it mean to lead like Jesus?*

And from a third vantage point, and frankly the one that interests me the most, this is a book about discipleship and evangelism, specifically how athletics can grow young men and women into authentic, consistent disciples of Jesus Christ. Few activities transform the inner life the way competitive sports does, because it's an immersion experience replete with emotion, and few activities have such potential to introduce people to God around the globe. The question here is: *How can athletics be a pathway to spiritual formation and even salvation?*

That may be a lot to ask from one study, but the rich, multi-layered responses of these faithful leaders have perhaps made it possible. Select whatever lens you'd like. As you'll see, these men and women, listed on the next few pages, offer wisdom from all three perspectives. I've been privileged to learn from them; I hope you'll be blessed by their insight as well.

Michael Zigarelli
January 2017

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COACHES INTERVIEWED FOR THIS PROJECT

Men's Team Coaches, College and Professional

Ben Andrews, Asbury University, Kentucky
Aron Bassoff, Shorter University, Georgia
Dave Brandt, Pittsburgh Riverhounds, Pennsylvania
Ryan Bush, Oral Roberts University, Oklahoma
Brian Davidson, Charlotte Eagles, North Carolina
Mike Dreves, Grove City College, Pennsylvania
Ryan Edwards, Grove City College, Pennsylvania
Todd Elkins, Biola University, California
Aaron Faro, Messiah College, Pennsylvania
Brett Faro, Cedarville University, Ohio
Kelly Findley, North Carolina State University, North Carolina
Brad Heethuis, Waynesburg University, Pennsylvania
Dave Irby, Southern California Seahorses, California and Surge
International
Ryan Jorden, University of the Pacific, California
Russ Lawson, Huntington College, Indiana
Scott Marksberry, John Brown University, Arkansas
Brad McCarty, Messiah College, Pennsylvania
Jesse McCormick, Bob Jones University, South Carolina
Rick McKinley, Chicago Eagles, Illinois
Brian McMahon, Palm Beach Atlantic University, Florida
John Miglarese, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, North
Carolina
Nate Miller, Spring Arbor University, Michigan
Derek Potteiger, Gordon College, Massachusetts
Gary Ross, Taylor University, Indiana
Jeff Pill, Maranatha Baptist University, Wisconsin
Thiago Pinto, Bethel College, Indiana
Brandon Ponchak, Sterling College, Kansas
Luke Sanford, Indiana Wesleyan University, Indiana
Mitch Sanford, Charlotte Lady Eagles, North Carolina
Layton Shoemaker, Messiah College, Pennsylvania
Mike Smith, Marian University, Indiana
Steven Smith, Hope College, Michigan

Ryan Souders, Calvin College, Michigan
Rich Sparling, Buxmont Torch FC, Pennsylvania
Mark Steffens, Pittsburgh Riverhounds, Pennsylvania
Brian Stock, Malone University, Ohio
Daniel Swier, Northwestern College, Iowa
Chris Swift, Greenville College, Illinois
Jorge Vallejo, Georgia Gwinnett College, Georgia
Matt Webb, Houghton College, New York
James Whitaker, Columbia International University, South Carolina
Phil Wolf, Point Loma Nazarene University, California
Dan Wood, Indiana Wesleyan University, Indiana and NCCAA
Executive Director
Sam Woodworth, Messiah College, Pennsylvania
Sandy Zensen, Bryan College, Tennessee
Anonymous coach, southeast USA
Anonymous coach, northeast USA

Women's Team Coaches, College and Professional

Zach Bice (also the men's coach), Mid-America Christian
University, Oklahoma
Isaac Brooks, Union University, Tennessee
Lisa Buckley, Milligan College, Tennessee
Kara Farnsworth, Columbia International University, South
Carolina
Kelsey Fenix, Lipscomb University, Tennessee
Scott Frey, Messiah College, Pennsylvania
Mike Friesen, San Diego State University, California
Patrick Gilliam (also the men's coach), Trinity International
University, Illinois
Jessica Hain, Liberty University, Virginia
Kelsey Heisey, Messiah College, Pennsylvania
Peter Huber, Maranatha Baptist University, Wisconsin
Josh Jones, Malone University, Ohio
Thomas Jones, Campbellsville University, Kentucky
Chris Klotz, Lipscomb University, Tennessee
Michelle Lenard, Dallas Baptist University, Texas
Joshua Lenarz, Trinity Christian College, Illinois
Curtis Lewis, The Master's College, California

David Lewis, Houghton College, New York
Michael Lynch, Belmont Abbey College, North Carolina
Sara Meyer, Carthage College, Wisconsin
Abby Minihan, University of South Carolina Upstate, South Carolina
Jennifer Myhre, Anderson University, Indiana
Kevin O'Brien, Lipscomb University, Tennessee
Kathleen Paulsen, John Brown University, Arkansas
Leigh Sears, Hope College, Michigan
Michael Voss, Grace College, Indiana
Marcus Wood, Hardin-Simmons University, Texas

High School Boys' Coaches

Mark Ashley, Hempfield High School, Pennsylvania
Robert Atkins, Delaware County Christian School, Pennsylvania
Matt Billman, Cumberland Valley High School, Pennsylvania
Jeff Brooke, Wheaton Academy, Illinois
Chris Cushenbery, McCallie School, Tennessee
Dan Egeler (also the girls' coach), Colorado Springs Christian School, Colorado and ACSI President
Angelo Finelli, Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy, Ohio
Mike Freace, Westminster Schools of Augusta, Georgia
Danny Harvey, Lexington Christian Academy, Kentucky
Jeff Johnson, Orangewood Christian School, Florida
Ric Nelson, Friendship Christian School, North Carolina
Scott Reitnour, Wesleyan Academy, North Carolina
David Sanford, Wesleyan Academy, North Carolina and Missionary Athletes International
Jason Spodnik, Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy, Ohio
John Vermilya, Buckley High School, Michigan
James Zeldenrust, Plumstead Christian School, Pennsylvania

High School Girls' Coaches

Austin Beck (also the boys' coach), High Point Christian Academy, North Carolina
John Egan, Christian Heritage School, Connecticut
Tom Gerlach (also the boys' coach), Christ Presbyterian Academy, Tennessee

Mike Giuliano, Greater Atlanta Christian School, Georgia
Lee Horton (also the boys' coach), Charlotte Latin School, North Carolina
Ryan Leib, Briarwood Christian School, Alabama
Amanda Nacher, Charlotte Christian School, North Carolina
Ed Pinon (also the boys' coach), North Raleigh Christian Academy, North Carolina
Dave Smith, Our Lady of Providence High School, Indiana
Graham West (also the boys' coach), Covenant Day School, North Carolina and Missionary Athletes International

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INTRODUCTION

PLAYING FOR SOMETHING MORE

Soccer has long been a force for social change. It's been leveraged to address intractable problems from racism to AIDS to homelessness to international strife.

That's not exclusive to soccer, of course. Everywhere we turn now there's an athlete with a cause and a team wearing cause-related colors. But soccer, being the leading global game, may be uniquely influential. Simply roll out a ball on almost any dirt road on the planet and you bring together a community. You make friends. You lay the relational foundation for whatever your message is.

As we'll see throughout this book, sometimes that message is not about social change, but spiritual change—in particular, discipleship and evangelism. From a Christian perspective, a soccer ball can be a ministry tool. That piece of polyvinyl, stitched together a world away, can stitch together people in your sphere of influence—both within your team and outside of it—and eventually stitch them to God, some of them for the first time.

Were you aware of that? Did the title of this book suggest a new approach to you? Or perhaps it's been your approach for a long time, having reframed your coaching role years ago.

For both types of readers, my intention is to share the many practical ways that soccer coaches are using the game for larger,

godlier purposes, without compromising competitiveness. They're making a lasting difference in the lives of those around them, far more than their many trophies ever could.

As a high school and college coach, I looked for a book like this. I needed straightforward advice and some inspiration from experts—coaches who had been experimenting with this approach for years. I couldn't find that book. So as a leadership professor, I did the research to write it.

It's come together as a diverse set of insights, philosophies and best practices. But most of these coaches seem to have a common starting point: As a Christian coach, I'm not just the leader of a sports team. I'm a missionary with a purpose that supersedes wins and losses.

The unanswered questions I had thirty years ago as a coach are the same questions being asked today. And number one is “how do I connect my faith to my coaching?”

Dan Wood, Executive Director,
National Christian College
Athletic Association

For them, the soccer field is a mission field. They didn't all say it that way, and few of them are in fact ordained clergy, but they see themselves as no less called and commissioned by God. These coaches indeed play to win—and they have the hardware to prove it—but ultimately, they play for something more.

This is a book about what that “something more” looks like.

Learning from the Best

To uncover that, my approach was to gather information from 100 Christians who coach soccer at the high school, college or professional level. I handpicked the initial interviewees, based on their widespread reputation for being leaders and even pioneers in

sports ministry. As part of those first interviews, I asked each respondent who else should be interviewed, based on soccer and ministry success. They gave me several names—best practice coaches in both contexts. I then reached out to this second set of coaches, asking similar questions and the project grew from there.

The final dataset includes coaches from 26 states, 88 percent of whom coach in Christian schools. Three-quarters are from the college or pro ranks; the others lead high school programs. Some coaches submitted their insights digitally, but two-thirds agreed to in-depth, personal interviews. What they shared represents deep experience: In this study we're learning from leaders whose combined coaching experience at the high school, college and professional levels is 1,566 years.

Collectively, they offered another way to think about their sport—soccer as a platform for both internal and external ministry. And for the Christian coach seeking how-to advice, they also shared a treasure trove of practical suggestions, many of which are transferrable to any team at any level in almost any sport.

A Roadmap of this Resource

Part 1 of the book describes their philosophy of coaching, the three missions that many Christian coaches pursue simultaneously. It's more complex and more rewarding than the traditional, single-mission approach of just striving to win more games.

Parts 2, 3 and 4 delve into their how-to manual. In their own words, how do they do what they do? Their candid and free-flowing interviews are a firehose of illustrations and recommendations and cautionary tales and secrets of success—and even some dissimilarities and disagreements. These sections, as you'll see, read a bit like a coaching convention in book form.

But admittedly, that can become messy, leaving us with a patchwork of loosely-connected ideas. So to avoid that, I've organized their advice as the established research organizes it, with sections on how leaders *invent* their culture (Part 2), how they *instill* their culture (Part 3), and how they *reinforce* their culture (Part 4). It's my hope that in presenting it this way, you'll gain not just an assortment of good ideas, but also an understanding of how they fit together into a leadership system. I've also included some appendices where these coaches reveal their greatest obstacles, their best 30-second advice, and their approach to coaching for Christ in a secular environment.

In this study we're learning from leaders whose combined coaching experience at the high school, college and professional levels is 1,566 years

So grab a coffee and a clipboard and get ready to be mentored by some of the wisest, most experienced believers in the game. The book is designed so that if you read it straight through, you'll get guidance from 100 coaches sharing more than a millennium of experience, in about three or four hours.

Some of the lessons, though, may benefit you, and those entrusted to you, for a lifetime.

PART 1
THEIR PHILOSOPHY OF COACHING

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THE MISSION

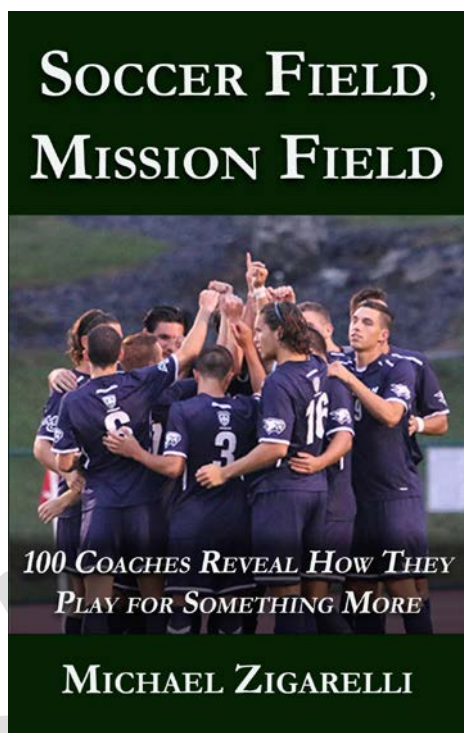
What does it look like when a follower of Jesus leads a team?

The diagram below summarizes how the coaches I interviewed, as well as many others I've known throughout the years, answer that question. In simplest terms, Christian soccer coaches pursue three goals: “soccer excellence” (striving to build the best possible team), “inreach” to players (helping them to grow as people, as leaders, and as believers) and “outreach” to others (activities like community service and introducing people to God).



But not every coach pursues every goal. The numbers on the diagram represent the various approaches they take—essentially, their different philosophies or coaching models. This chapter provides an overview, with the next three chapters offering an in-depth look at each of their goals.

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www.amazon.com/gp/product/1539590569/



Michael Zigarelli is Professor of Leadership and Strategy at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. He is the author of eleven books, including *Influencing Like Jesus*, *Management by Proverbs*, and *The Messiah Method*. You can reach him through his website, www.Christianity9to5.org