

Touch the Future interview with

## John Douliard

And Michael Mendizza

When we test children on what all of them may or may not be able to do, there's a humiliation factor. Some kids, when you can't climb the ropes that's a public event and that can humiliate you for the rest of your life so some kids get what I call the Wednesday morning disease where they just don't want to go to gym class. I used to think they all had dental appointments, or whatever. In reality, they were just scared to death of going to that class. So I think we need to understand who the individual is and test kids on what their strengths are versus what, one testing program that's generic for everyone. And that's pretty much what the president's counsel still has today is this testing that runs everybody through the same mill and they all don't fit.

There was that one study, it wasn't actually a study it was just an experiment that was done at the Playing Field Middle School in the mid-west, in Indiana, and these kids, they weren't getting enough funding for their fitness and sports programs so they didn't know what to do. Instead of cut the whole thing what they decided to do is they tried a completely different system which was a no cut system. Nobody got cut. Everybody who came out for the team got on the team and they had all kinds of criticism with all the critics that these kids, they're not going to do well, they're not going to compete well, they're not going to perform well, you're gonna sugarcoat their lives for these kids and it's going to be terrible, all this kind of stuff, and it turned out that overnight the interest in the sports doubled and tripled.

Their swim team had like 25 kids which went up to 75 kids. The track team which had like 13 went up to like 85 kids overnight. The interest was there. Why? The kids weren't gonna get humiliated because they weren't gonna make the team. And then they said oh you're never gonna do any good in performance. Well they won more county and state championships. We did better that year than they ever had done prior. And then the real critics say well how are these kids going to make it through life if nobody really tells them hey, you've got to cut the mustard here and you've got to make the cut, otherwise you don't make it in life? Well, some studies have shown that the relationship between criticisms from parents to kids and teachers to kids is phenomenal.

Teachers dole out 17 criticisms to one compliment in school. Parents dole out 11 or 12 criticisms to one compliment. I would say that kids get their fair share of humiliation and if we can make it a little bit easier and give them a way to enjoy exercise and being active in whatever suits them best, than we're talking about a

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motivating factor that will keep them involved and active, hopefully for the rest of their lives.

If you talk to elite athletics, and I've coached many of them, and you read the reports when they're at their very best, they always say the same thing. They say things like my best race was my easiest race. You know Roger Bannister, when he broke the four minute mile he said, "The world seemed to stand still. I felt like I was running slow. I felt no pain and no strain." And he was running faster than any man alive. Billy Jean King said that when she was at her best she would transport herself beyond the turmoil of the court to a place of total peace and calm.

All the reports of the best you would think that we would have figured out that when you're at your best there's two things happening, you're incredibly dynamic, competitively dynamic, but there's a calm. There's euphoria, a comfort, an easiness about it. So then to get that we have this kind of beat yourself up, break yourself down and build yourself up attitude towards being competitive. The whole no pain no gain thing.

And people say oh that's passé. Well you know what, it's passé maybe in the mainstream and we can talk about that too, but in reality in competitive athletics, whether we're talking about kids, collegiate, high school, college, anything, it is by no means passé. These kids are still pushing themselves right to the limit of exhaustion, coming home and recovering and going out the next day and pushing themselves to the limit of exhaustion. Then they add just growing up stress, then you've got sometimes collegiate stress and man that is more stress than anyone could possibly handle.

So the key I believe is to reproduce the experience that the athletes who have had, who have said over all these years, when they're at their best, this is what I experience. Why not reproduce that experience up front, which isn't pain, strain, exhaustion, it's a place of composure and calm in the midst of incredible activity. I call it the eye of the hurricane. If we can teach these kids how to create that experience and exposure and calm, which is really just fun, in the middle of incredible dynamic stress, than you're a fully mature hurricane with the ability to be incredibly dynamically active in your sport but that rolls out naturally into your life and internally composed in the midst of all kinds of mental, emotional, physical stress, and that's what physical exercise activity was really designed for.

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If you trace sport back, you're going to go way back to the original martial arts which came from China and the Shouin temples where Kung-Fu was developed. But they were not fighting break boards type techniques, those were techniques, were to access one's full human potential. That's really what sports should be now.

I believe competition was an exhibition of your ability to maintain integration of your mind and body and the opposition was a distraction. If you were distracted by the opposition you began to play their game, then you lost your composure. You've lost your eye of the hurricane. You've lost that calm which means you're probably not going to enjoy it, you're probably not performing as well, and you're going to lose the race, which means you really lost the big game, the big competition which is how composed you could stay under how much stress. That is really the key. How composed you can stay. The bigger the eye of the hurricane, the more powerful the winds. The more composed you can stay under the biggest stress, is the essence of competition if you can handle that.

There was a time when Carl Lewis couldn't beat Leroy Borrell, just couldn't beat him. And when he finally did, do you know what he said? "I just didn't look at him." I totally focused on me, pushed and hit the tape first." When he focused on himself, then he won. That is competition.

There's a big controversy right here in Boulder about little league and how much pressure the kids are under and how almost corrupt it is. Teams are recruiting the best, it's just unbelievable what's happening and it's all about winning. Parents are just living their childhood over again through their children and it's a tough. Even though we know it's bad, it's still absolutely the reality.

Just think how much pressure the kids are under by their parents and their own peers to perform. The problem is that if you do well, you feel great. But if you don't, oh God I'm terrible. I'm no good. You throw the helmet, you throw the bat, you walk in the dugout and you feel terrible.

Philologically what happens when they're under stress is that they tighten up. The more stress you're under, the worse you perform. I used to work with Billy Jean King and coaching Martina Navitalova, we were just constantly telling her to breathe because when she would lose her focus, she would stop breathing. And Billy Jean would be on the side saying, "Breathe, breathe, breathe,"

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The nerves that produce emergency fight or flight stress are up here and the ones that produce calm composed relaxation are down here. If you humiliate a kid they're going to be completely walled off protecting and they're not going to breathe. It's almost like you just can't climb out of that spiral and it just goes on and on in life until you're forced to just breathe upper chest your whole life and producing these little minor emergencies.

I had one little girl who came to me. She was a bigger framed, heavier set gal, and had just tried to run the mile under 10 minutes. She did it in 11 minutes and 30 seconds in front of all of her friends and was totally humiliated; She came to me in tears asking me to give her a note so she could get out of gym class. I spoke to her coach and we talked about finding a sport or activity that would be more suited to her body type so she would excel. We moved her in the direction of race walking and she came back to see me a year and a half later with a huge smile on her face, telling me that she had just came back from the regional championships as a race-walker and that gym class was now her favorite class. It was an amazing experience. She had so much confidence from actually performing well in something. But she was probably never going to run that track four times under 10 minutes.

One study showed that 50% of kids, girls in particular, can not run a mile in 10 minutes. So if 50% of the kids are not gonna pass that test. Most of the kids feel humiliated by that experience and they bail and they often times never come back. So understanding who the children are and directing them to things they can do well in and giving them positive reinforcement for that - that is a crucial.

Coaches need to understand that there are different types, different constitutions, different strengths, talents, weaknesses, likes and dislikes. They have to help direct young people towards activities that they're going to enjoy so they don't end up being humiliated and can feel that deep experience of composure and calm, that comes when you're really doing well.

Remember Herb Brooks? He was the coach of the 1980 Olympic hockey team. He won the gold medal. That was a total miracle. They never, ever, ever should have won. He had obviously quite a range of selecting kids to be on his team. But he selected no super stars, no individuals, no leaders, hot heads, he selected all team players and he looked for those qualities. He wanted a team. Everyone loved each other and did well because they had to pull their own weight. They weren't hoping that the super star would carry the ball for them. As a result they pulled it by the skin of their teeth.

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This was one of the highlights of the sports in our history. We need coaches that are willing to sacrifice the score for the experience. Sooner or later the score always comes around.

I coached a soccer team one year and we started introducing some of these principals. It was a small private school in the mid-west, and they were probably the worst soccer team in the league. They played the very best team in the league and got beaten, slam-dunked 8-0. They were just absolutely bowled over. At the end of the game, our kids got together and were so happy about the way that they played that they came together and they started cheering. Yeah, we had a great game!

They were having this really great time and the other team came over wondering what the heck they were doing? How can they be happy? They just got beaten 8-0. We destroyed them. The more our kids got excited about playing well in the process of losing, the angrier the other team got, and the God's honest truth is that the winning team actually challenged our guys to a re-match which was phenomenal because they had beat them 8-0. Our kids were happy but they wanted them to feel bad. The other team wasn't going to be happy until they made our kids feel terrible. The whole thing was twisted. I've never seen anything quite like that.

The basic concept is fun. It's like the runners in Kenyan. Their basic principal in life is to run every day so you want to run the next day. It's fun, so they look forward to the next day of running. That's why they do so well.

Look at the Tarahamara Indians who run 75 to 150 miles a day, and kick a little ball the whole way, it's a game. After running a 26 mile run, which was a piece of cake for them, they finished with blood pressures lower when than when they started. Their breath rate was what we would consider normal at rest. They finished with a heart rate of about 130 beats per minute, very calm, effortless, and they were running an 8 minute mile pace the whole way, at a high level altitude. It's fun for these traditional runners. It is a way of life. When we are having fun the physiological experience is calm and composure and not stress. 150 miles in a day is a lot of activity but their experience internally is one of calm. That's that eye of the hurricane and why a lot of athletes have peak experiences. Billy Jean King said that her best game was her easiest game. It's because they love it so much that they get to a place to where peak performance is automatically flowing. It's not stressful. It's not work anymore. It's total fun.

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Brent Manor, a good friend and a catcher for the Mets now uses these principals. There was a time in his life where he was playing terrible and someone came up to him and just said, are you having fun? He said, no way am I having fun, I'm bad and terrible, and the guy said, "well, why you doing it? Brent said, I don't know. This guy said why don't you just have fun this year and if you don't do well, quit. And he said alright, I'll do that. So he started having fun. He played really well and the next year he was signed by the Kansas City Royals and now he's been traded to the Mets and he's been playing incredibly well every since. Whenever his performance goes down it's because he's not having fun. It becomes stressful. It's a job. When you talk to these athletes you always sense an incredible composure. It's so palpable. And the best ones are just unaffected and there is a way to reproduce that, neurologically.

The problem with that is that most of our life, in the nineties, is an emergency and science documents that, absolutely we compete at a fight or flight emergency levels of stress. In competitive situations we're forced to drive ourselves into an emergency state and recover from that every day. Work out, recover, work out, recover, and it's degenerative.

My guess is that most good coaches are already good parents. It's what they love to do. They love to coach. They love to interact. They love to play and they don't ever want to stop playing. A good coach and a good parent has to be a shining example of happiness and fun. When they go out to the team, they're just having so much fun being a coach or being a parent that the kids just hug them and love them and squeeze them and just can't get enough of them because they love them so much. We've all seen teachers like that, or coaches like that where kids just can't get enough of them. And it's not because the coach is like a nice guy, or a nice gal or coach, it's because the coach is having a blast and truly has passion about what he or she is doing in their life.

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