

Wooden's Wisdom

When John Wooden died in June, America lost arguably its greatest coach

and undoubtedly one of its finest individuals. Because of my remote connection to the man — my dad, Lynn, played on three NCAA title teams for Wooden at UCLA — I received condolences of all sorts. And while it's nice that people were saddened by his passing, it's far more productive to celebrate the values he represented — because Coach Wooden was a man of principle, modesty and, in later years, occasional self-deprecation. He was “so square,” the great Los Angeles Times columnist Jim Murray once wrote, “he was divisible by four.”

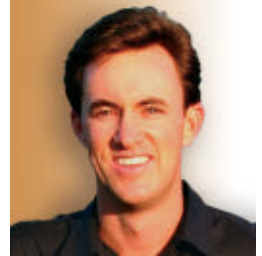
Though Wooden will be remembered by most as a grandfatherly, silver-haired man, he was an extraordinary athlete in his younger days. Wooden was the first to be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach. During his semipro basketball-playing days in the 1930s, he made 134 consecutive free throws. But it was his golf accomplishment that still astounds.

Playing Erskine Park Golf Course in South Bend, Ind., in the late 1930s, Wooden made a hole-in-one and a double eagle in the same round. Golf Digest researched and determined that Wooden was one of only four people to have pulled off the stunning feat, calculating the odds of repeating Wooden's incredible combo at 67 million to 1.

“The par 3 was on the front nine, about 175 yards with a 5-iron,” Wooden recently told Golf Digest's

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BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



Cliff Schrock. “I didn't see the ball go in, but the players standing by the green, I knew it was in from their reaction. On the par 5 on the back nine, I had no idea I could reach the green, but that same group was in front of us.”

Naturally, he offered a humble assessment of the accomplishment.

“I never came close to making either one again. It's pure luck.”

He went into the service and ended up playing golf only sparingly later in life.

“I found golf was too time consuming, but I did enjoy it,” he told Schrock. “I didn't like playing with some people who thought they were pros and would get upset if they didn't hit a good shot. I enjoyed most of the people I played with, some I didn't.”

Few know that Wooden faced hard times, too. When he married his beloved Nell in August 1932 while America was in the throes of the Great Depression, Wooden learned that his life savings of \$909.05 had been wiped out because of a bank closing. His highest salary at UCLA was a meager \$32,500.

Later in life, Wooden would finally cash in on his success by writing books and giving speeches. Yet for every corporate talk he gave, there was a free ap-

pearance for a group that could never afford him.

Which brings us to his writings and sayings, many of which were adapted from his extensive reading. Here's a sample of his wisdom:

“Do not let what you can't do interfere with what you can do.”

“Don't measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but by what you should accomplish with your ability.”

“Respect a man, and he will do all the more.”

“You can't live a perfect day without doing something for someone who will never be able to repay you.”

“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”

I was lucky enough to meet John Wooden, and he always asked about my golf game and one time quizzed me thoroughly about Tiger Woods. He was a sports fan, a regular guy, but mostly a lucid, shrewd and humble individual right to the very end.

That's a life worth celebrating.

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