

**Tim Timmons**

# **COACHING SUCCESS**

**Creating CHAMPIONS  
for the Business World**

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# Chapter

## 1

As the seconds ticked off the scoreboard, the 5,000-plus fans on the home side of the stadium screamed in delight. Their beloved University of Indiana Huskies were about to win another championship. The clock was ticking down from :22 on the scoreboard with the Huskies up by 24. Even though this would mark the sixth time in the past 10 years U of I finished on top, the fans still loved it. In fact, they loved it almost as much as they loved the man who turned a small college from a football doormat into a perennial power.

T.J. Murphy came to Indiana a little over a decade ago and the Huskies haven't looked back since. When Murphy and his family drove into Noblesville, the football field – it couldn't really be called a stadium at that point – was a shambles. The bleachers were wood and looked like they hadn't been painted since Knute Rockne's time. The goalposts were the old "H" style and were probably being held up by rust more than anything resembling metal. The locker room was dark and dingy. It felt more like a dungeon than an athletic facility. There wasn't a single redeeming factor in the whole place, yet Murphy was all smiles as the athletic director showed him around.

"Haven't had a winning season in . . . well, it's been a

while,” the gray-haired A.D. had said. His name was Max Petry, but everyone on campus just called him Coach.

It actually took Max a while to figure out not only why Murphy was here, but why he was smiling. It didn't add up. Murphy was in the prime of a successful career. His teams not only won consistently, but his players went to class and graduated on time. There really wasn't any way that little U of I could attract a coach of his caliber, yet here he was . . . and he was smiling!

### MURPH'S PLAYBOOK

*In order to be successful, the coach has to have a vision. Wayne Gretzky calls it skating to where the puck will be instead of where it is. Coaches who win can “see” the end result long before it occurs. In this case, Murphy could see something others before had not.*

“Coach Petry,”

Murphy had said, “if you and the president want me, I think we might just be able to do something about getting one of those winning seasons.”

And that had been the beginning. Sure, the first year or two were a bit rough around the edges, but there was no question that progress was being made. And it wasn't just measured in wins and losses. Murphy had organized — or

better to say had re-organized — the boosters. Within his first month, they were all out there on a Saturday morning, mowing, trimming, sanding, painting and in general working up a storm. Max couldn't quite figure it out. Normally all the boosters wanted to do was complain, but after just one speech at one of the pigskin dinners Murphy had them lined up and ready to go to work. Murphy hated getting up in front of a crowd, but learned early on that it was a skill he had to master if he was going to be a head coach. So, in Murphy's world that

## COACHING SUCCESS

meant practice. It only made sense to the coach that when he wanted a player to acquire a new set of skills that the coaching staff had to first teach the player the skills and then practice them over and over and over. That's exactly what Murphy did on overcoming his deficiency. He took a course on public speaking and then spent hours in front of the mirror practicing. One of the first things he learned was an old lesson: Utilize what he enjoyed and was good at. He certainly enjoyed teaching and coaching, so that's exactly what he did whenever he had to give a speech.

For example, when speaking to a civic club, there would usually be several of the local high school players in the crowd. A quiet inquiry would give him the name of the one who was the BMOC, or big man on campus. By either getting to the site early, or enlisting a little help, Murphy would set the stage for what was to come later.

"Say, I hear that Scott Landis is in the crowd tonight, is that right?" Murphy would ask the assembled crowd, knowing full well the answer. "Well Mr. Landis, I hear you're a mighty fine football player, is that right?" Murphy would begin as a few chuckles rattled around the room. "Stand up, Mr. Landis, would you please?"

Then, with a nervous, but usually confident young man standing with hands stuffed inside jean pockets, Murphy would point out an empty chair on the side of the room. "Would you do me a favor, Mr. Landis," the coach would continue as curious smiles popped up here and there. "Would you walk over there to that chair?"

It might take a moment and a little encouragement, but the lanky youth would always assume his best swagger and walk to the chair.

"Now Mr. Landis, I want you to pick that chair up and look underneath it."

As the increasingly uncomfortable and now befuddled youngster looked underneath the chair, he always found a plain envelope. Puzzled, they always looked to Murphy.

## Tim Timmons

“Why don’t you open that up and tell everyone what’s inside?”

As the kid opened the envelope the eyes would always widen a bit and then in a voice that could be heard by at least those nearby, he’d say, “It’s a dollar.”

“Hold it up, son,” Murphy would smile. “That’s your dollar now. I want you to put it in your pocket and go sit down. I also want you to remember this lesson: If you want to make a buck in this life, you’ve got to get off your butt to do it.”

The crowd would roar with delight and a young man would have a story to tell from that day forward. Murphy had seen another famous coach / teacher pull this stunt once before and thought it a valuable lesson that he could carry forward.

It was that sort of down-home country wisdom delivered with a bit of a twang that endeared the coach to the fans. Certainly he had the credentials to show that he could produce a winner, but the way he presented himself and the way he represented his school made people *want* to believe in him. Although it never ceased to amaze Murphy, understanding that principle made all the difference in the world.

That’s why attendance in the Huskies Booster Club skyrocketed when Murphy got to town. That’s why he was able to get all sorts of help in turning a rickety, run-down stadium into one of the finest in the country for a small school. Murphy started a fund-raiser and really got it kicked off when he held a “work day” at the stadium in his second month. Even though no one had ever heard of a workday for a stadium, Murphy wanted to send the message that the Lord helped those who helped themselves. After his first speech at a public luncheon, Murphy went to a number of boosters and told them that he’d be at the stadium on a chilly April Saturday with a toolbox, a paintbrush and some paint. If they wanted to come along, he’d grill some of his “world-famous barbecue

## COACHING SUCCESS

cuisine” at the end of the day.

And what a day it turned out to be. More than 50 of the town’s businessmen and businesswomen showed up in blue jeans, painter pants and all sorts of Huskies sweatshirts and jackets. By 11 a.m., most of the jackets had been shed as everyone worked up a good sweat.

Around noon, runners

were sent out to fast food joints to grab

burgers for everyone and, true to his word,

by late in the afternoon Murphy and his

wife fired up six gas barbecues and grilled

everyone there either a steak or a chicken

breast. From seemingly out of nowhere

came a few cases of all kinds of beverages.

By dusk, the love affair at this small

college between a football coach and a

community was in full bloom.

### **MURPH’S PLAYBOOK**

*It helps to add a positive twist to things. Instead of having the school’s buildings and grounds crew do the work, Murph turned it into an event that helped bring the boosters together – and more importantly – put them on his side. Don’t add more than necessary. Keeping things simple is still a worthy goal.*

Just as the clock ticked down to zero and the horn signaled another championship, several seniors hoisted an orange bucket overhead and dumped the icy liquid all over the spot where Murphy *had* been standing. In the flash of an eye, the 50-something coach pivoted away just as the liquid began to cascade out of the bucket. Laughing, the players grabbed their coach and threw him on their shoulders as they carried him toward the middle of the field. But before they got too far, Murphy tapped a senior captain on the head and mouthed the words,

## Tim Timmons

because it was too hard to hear among the celebration, “put me down.” Understanding, they lowered their coach to the turf so that Murphy could greet losing coach Nick Talbot.

“You did it again, you son of a gun,” Talbot said as the two old friends and rivals shook hands and then embraced. “One of these days, I’m going to be the one who’s getting the congratulations instead of you.”

Talbot was smiling, but only Murphy and those in the coaching fraternity could know what a tough moment this was. A year, no, a seeming lifetime of work, all boils down to a 60-minute game. Worse yet for coaches is that the game is largely out of their hands. Once the ball is kicked, the players take over – for the most part. To wind up on the losing end is a tough, tough pill to swallow.

“I know you will, Nick,” Murphy said. “You’re a great coach and no one deserves to be here more than you.” Then he pulled his friend close and whispered “It just won’t be me on the other side of the field any more . . . but don’t say anything.”

Before Talbot could say, ask, or even do anything else, the Huskies couldn’t hold back the celebration any longer and Murphy was whisked away by the crowd. There were more hugs, handshakes and even a few tears. As Murphy got toward the tunnel, there was another large group waiting for him. This group was even more special, they were former players who came from near and far to watch their beloved Huskies and their beloved coach win another title.

Some were barely out of school and in their mid-20s. Others showed a few gray hairs here and there. To a man, they showed devotion. They all had waited respectfully off to the side, understanding that the moment belonged to the young men in uniforms now. But when their coach got to them, they couldn’t hold back any longer.

So Murphy went through another round of hugs and

## COACHING SUCCESS

handshakes, feeling like the guy who had just won the Hoosier Lottery rather than just another football game. From the euphoria of winning one single game that was the culmination of months of hard work; two-a-day practices to late night and early morning (and even a couple of all night) film sessions with the assistant coaches; to the mix of emotions he felt for his coaching brother Nick; to the almost fatherly pride he felt toward his players; and now to a group of men who thought enough of Murphy and their school to come back from points near and far; especially knowing that this would be the last time he'd ever experience anything like this . . . it was the most emotional he had ever felt in his professional life.

By the time they all reached the locker room, Murphy knew what he wanted to say. As the din began to subside and the assistants hollered for quiet, Murphy stood up on top of a bench.

“Men, look around you and remember this moment. Look in the faces of your teammates. Look at your coaches. Look at your lockers, this room and look at those former Huskies who came back for this game to support you. Look hard, men, because I want you to remember this moment. I want you to be able to close your eyes 20 years from now and remember exactly what this feels like.

“This is your moment, men. You’ve sacrificed. You’ve worked hard. You’ve sweated. You’ve busted your butts. You pushed yourselves. You pushed each other. You supported each other and you never gave up.

“Teddy Roosevelt once said that the credit belongs to the man who is in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood. Who knows the great devotion and sacrifice it takes to get here and who are those cold and timid souls knowing neither victory nor defeat. Men, today and forevermore you know victory. You are champions, and I’m proud to be your coach!”

## Tim Timmons

And with that, the players and those assembled rose as one in a great cheer. Knowing what was coming, it became too much and Murphy felt the tears flow down his face.

Early the next morning, Murphy called his old friend, the athletic director.

“Max, do you have a little time this morning” Murphy asked. “I’d like to stop by and see you.”

“Sure,” Petry said to the most favorite coach he had ever hired. “Come on by, Carol would love to see you, too. How about lunch?”

“No thanks, but I’ll come by for a cup of Carol’s coffee, if that’s OK? I’ll be there around 10?”

“Great,” Petry said. “See you then.”

He hung the phone up and stared at it for a long time. Murphy never called him Max.

Murphy’s wife touched him on the shoulder as she walked by. Even though they had been talking about this for months, she still wasn’t sure if he was going to go through with it or not.

“How ya doin’, hon?” she asked.

Murphy looked at his wife of a quarter century. He remembered when they first met and how it had been love at first sight – at least on his part. She was a second-year teacher and he was a first-year teacher and coach. They talked briefly in the teachers’ lounge at least once a day. She had a real interest in football, which made her just fine in T.J.’s eyes. It was in fact, T.J.’s eyes that sold Julie on him in the first place. She told him that she saw a fire and dedication in his eyes when he talked about his players. But she saw the wonder of a little boy on Christmas morning when he asked her out on their first date. He knew he had found the woman of his dreams – and told her so on their first date. Although she didn’t say so right away, she knew it too. So here they were, almost 30 years later and she knew he was about to give up some-

## COACHING SUCCESS

thing he loved nearly as much as he loved her. Although she was excited that they would finally have a lot of time together, part of her was a little scared, too.

“Okey-dokey,” he smiled. “How you doing?”

“Just fine as long as you are,” she said.

The drive to Max Petry’s house was only 10 minutes, but today it seemed like hours. Though this wasn’t even official, T.J. knew this was the first step. He parked the Jeep at the curb and got out. He looked up and down the street and thought how the scene could have come straight from a Norman Rockwell painting. Sycamore trees lined both side of the block and the houses were mostly white wood-framed homes with brick chimneys and shutters. As he walked from the curb up the sidewalk to the front door, he noticed how Max kept the grass edged along the drive and sidewalk. Murphy smiled. He wouldn’t expect anything less. Before he even had a chance to ring the doorbell, Max had thrown open the door and gave his friend a huge bear hug.

“Heck of a game yesterday, coach. That might be the best team you’ve ever fielded here,” Petty smiled as he pulled Murphy through the door and toward the den.

“Thanks, Coach,” Murphy said. “They did look good, didn’t they?”

“*Look* good?” Petty exclaimed. “They *were* good. Shoot, they were great. I’m not sure they couldn’t play right up there with the Boilers and the Irish.”

“Whoa, let’s not get carried away,” Murphy laughed. “Those teams are in a whole different world than us.”

“So, what brings my favorite coach calling on me this morning – considering in all the years I’ve known you you’ve never once asked to come by at 10 on a Sunday morning.”

“Max,” Murphy began as they walked toward the den. “It’s time to hang up my whistle.”

The news made the front page of the local newspa-

## Tim Timmons

per, the Daily Herald. Normally sports stories were relegated to the front of the B section, but there T.J. Murphy was being carried off the field with a banner headline that exclaimed: Murphy Leads Huskies to Title; Retires. There were several stories; some on the game, but most on the reaction from players, fans, alumni and faculty on Murphy's surprise announcement. No one, with the lone exception of Julie, saw it coming.

Although he should've known better, Murphy was surprised that such a fuss was being made of the whole thing. After all, he was just a coach. A football coach. But to the community at large, he was an icon, a rallying point. He was the reason Saturdays were events – from tailgate parties to victory celebrations. Simply put, Murphy saw this as a natural progression. He had done the job he came to do, and although he still enjoyed the job, the time had come to move along. Most importantly, he wanted to let someone else have a chance. Sports and coaching were realms of the young – or at least not the old. And with each passing season, Murphy felt a little older.

So here he was, Monday morning at the office. It was pretty much like any other Monday morning except this time he was beginning a task he really wasn't looking forward to. He was cleaning out the office. There were boxes everywhere. Pictures with other coaches, players, school presidents, pro coaches and players. Plaques and certificates. A career all bundled up in a few pieces of paper, wood and acrylic.

The ringing of the phone made Murphy jump.

"Football office, Murphy," he answered the same way he'd been doing for years.

"Coach? Walt Smith. I was hoping I might catch you before you got out of the office."

Murphy knew Smith reasonably well, or at least as well as he knew most of the real boosters. Walt Smith owned a local business and had been a huge Huskies fan

## COACHING SUCCESS

since way before Murphy came along. The coach thought Smith to be a good guy – hard working, honest, successful.

“Just packing some stuff up,” Murphy said. “I didn’t know I had accumulated so much.”

“I understand,” Smith said. “We’re sure going to miss you out there on the sideline every Saturday. And actually, that has a little something to do with why I’m calling. Can I ask about your plans? Do you have another coaching job lined up or anything?”

“No, nothing like that, Walt,” Murphy said. “I’m going to semi-retire. I honestly don’t have any real plans at the moment. Julie and I’ve talked about a little traveling. There’s been a book I’ve thought about trying to write for a while. I really don’t have any plans set in stone yet. Why?”

“Well, just an idea. Would you be willing to meet me at my office and hear me out? Afterward, you might think I’m totally crazy and laugh. Or, it could be an hour that might make a huge difference in your retirement.”

“Jeez, I don’t know, Walt,” Murphy said. “Could you give me a little more to go on?”

“Coach, do you remember when you talked a bunch of us into painting bleachers all day on a Saturday?”

“Sure,” Murphy chuckled.

“Let’s just say I’m asking for an hour of your time in return,” Smith said. “Fair enough?”

“Fair enough,” Murphy said, even though he felt a little uneasy. “How’s tomorrow afternoon around 2?”

“Great, Coach,” Smith said. “See you then.”

As Murphy hung up the phone, he had to admit that he was a bit intrigued.

The next afternoon at 1:50, Coach T.J. Murphy shut the door to his car and stood in the parking lot of Smith’s plant. It could have been an impressive sight, but just fell short. The visitor parking lot probably held 25 or so cars. Murphy knew the employee lot in the back would have a few hundred cars and that it was full practically 24 hours

## Tim Timmons

a day. The lines on the blacktop were faded and nearly gone. Weeds grew in a few cracks here and there. The grassy area by the front entrance had a flagpole that reminded Murphy of the goalpost at Huskies Stadium when he arrived. The grass needed cut – badly. All said though, it wasn't remarkably different than many other plants around Noblesville. Still though, knowing Walt Smith ran this place caused Murphy to feel a little surprised. He wasn't sure what he expected, but he knew this wasn't exactly it. Walking up the sidewalk, Murphy had to tug a little harder than he thought on a glass door that was heavy and dirty. Another surprise.

Once inside, Murphy found a reception area with worn carpet, a scraped up metal desk and no one in sight. He looked at his watch and saw it was 1:55. Five minutes to spare, but it wouldn't matter if no one knew he was there.

Just then, a side door opened and a woman walked through, gave Murphy a quick glance and sat down in a huff. Picking up a nail file, she stared at a half red, half unpainted nail and, without even looking up, said, "Can I help you?" The tone left no doubt in Murphy's mind that helping him wasn't real high on her priority list.

"I'm T.J. Murphy and I have a 2 o'clock appointment to see Mr. Smith," Murphy said politely, sure that Walt Smith's name would at least get him a little attention.

He was wrong.

Punching a button on a board that Murphy couldn't see, the woman announced to apparent thin air, "Would you tell Mr. Smith that a Murphy guy is here to see him?" Then, without skipping a beat – and without looking up – she pointed to her left and said "Have a seat over there. He'll be up in a little bit."

Murphy smiled a little as he walked to a plastic chair that looked like it belonged in a cafeteria – from the 1950's. The chair had scuffmarks and smudges dotted all over it. Although Murphy was used to taking a knee in a

## COACHING SUCCESS

grassy field and certainly wasn't concerned with getting dirty, he decided to remain standing. At least he was in the process of making that decision when a door behind him opened and Murphy turned to see a smiling Walt Smith.

"Coach!" Smith smiled, extending his hand. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate you coming over."



"My pleasure, Walt," Murphy said. "I've got to admit, you've piqued my curiosity a little bit."

"Good, good," Smith smiled. "That was the idea. Come on back to my office and let's talk."

Smith opened the door and Murphy headed toward it. He couldn't help but notice the look he was getting from the receptionist. It wasn't a bad look, although he wouldn't say it was a look he expected out of a professional receptionist. It was more puzzled than anything.

As the door closed behind them, they were in a long hallway with plain, carpeted floors and pictures on the walls. At the end of the hallway, a door opened into a large office that had much nicer carpet, rich wood paneling on the walls and a massive desk with a couple of plush wingback chairs in front. Smith gestured to one and waited for Murphy to take a seat.

"Could I get you anything, Coach? Coffee, tea, pop, water?"

"A cup of coffee would be great, Walt," Murphy said.

Smith walked over to an L-shaped area of the office where he apparently had a coffee maker.

"How would you like it, Coach?"

"Just black, thanks," Murphy said. He had to admit that the more time that went by the more his curiosity was getting to him. And never being the kind of guy who preferred waiting, he said, "So what's this all about, Walt?"

Smith smiled as he walked across the room with a