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Consistency Breeds Success

Seattle Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll has won at all levels of the game. His consistent approach and competitive nature drive his success.

By Paul Markgraff

When Pete Carroll coached at the University of Southern California in the early 2000s, his teams got better season after season.

In his first season with the Trojans, Carroll's team went 6-6, and saw its fair share of critics grow louder. But Carroll was methodical. That first season helped his players learn to understand one another. While that sort of success didn't manifest itself on the field, it definitely manifested itself during spring practice the following season with increased energy and performance.

In year two, Carroll began to see some of the execution he was looking for from his players. By year three, his system had been in place, new recruits gained experience, execution improved dramatically and the team found itself ranked No. 1 at the end of the season after winning the Rose Bowl. They were crowned AP National Champions.

"You gotta have some good fortune along the way," Carroll said. "You have to take chances and you have to have great support."

Prior to joining the USC staff, Carroll coached both the New York Jets and the New England Patriots in the NFL. He left the NFL after 1999 when the New England Patriots went 8-8 and missed the playoffs.

After just a couple of years with USC, NFL teams began once again looking hard at Carroll, but he was content at USC. Over the coming years, he would be frequently asked if he was going to return to the NFL. Reporters often asked if he would retire at USC, a question that baffled him.

"Why do people want to make you say that?" Carroll said at the time.

Carroll remained with the Trojans through 2009,

amassing 83 wins and only 19 losses. He won the 2003 American Football Coaches Association Division I-A Coach Of The Year Award, as well as numerous other honors for his on-the-field successes and coaching style.

In 2010, Carroll joined the Seattle Seahawks, and despite going 7-9, the Seahawks managed to capture first place in the NFC West. Seattle won its wild card game, but lost to the Chicago Bears in the Divisional Playoff game that season. Carroll's Seahawks would miss the playoffs the following season and lose in the Divisional Playoff round during the 2012 season.

Then came 2013, and like the Trojans of the past, Carroll's team just gelled. They dominated opposing teams, going 13-3 through the regular season. The Seahawks suffered only one loss before the month of December. On February 2, 2014, Carroll and his Seahawks hoisted the Lombardi Trophy after defeating the Denver Broncos 43-8 in Super Bowl XLVIII. On that day, Carroll became only the third football coach in history to win a Super Bowl and an NCAA National Championship.

"What's important to me in coaching is winning on a consistent basis and being successful over long periods of time," says Carroll. "We all know it's hard to do. That to me is more important than winning one time."

Competition Is King

For Carroll, that consistency comes from treating everything as a competition and always trying to get better. It doesn't matter if it's football practice, football games or any other activity.

"For me, everything is about competition. Everything is about competing," he says. "Every single aspect of everything we do is about competition. We are always competing to do



Pete Carroll's USC teams were known for their resilience and execution. His 83-19 record at USC shows how well Carroll and his staff coached their players to buy in to the program with energy and enthusiasm.

things a little bit better, to find a better way. And you are either going to do things better, or you are not. It's an aspect of how we approach our business that we are always trying to do things better than they have been done before.

"That kind of a thought guides us when we're in camp or a clinic. It'll drive you crazy, but you can't ever be satisfied," says Carroll. "It's a motivator and a driver. Through all of the beliefs we have, we always try to do a little better, try to fix it and try to find a way to make us more successful."

Carroll reflects upon a book he read by University of North Carolina women's soccer coach Anson Dorrance, who currently holds a coaching record of 625-28-20 – a .943 winning percentage – and 22 national championship titles.

In his book, *This Vision Of A Champion*, Dorrance explains how he watched University of North Carolina men's basketball head coach Dean Smith in practice and co-opted many of Smith's ideas and principles.

"It was all about creating a competitive

cauldron on your practice field, making it so highly competitive that your players have to perform every single day," says Carroll. "They have to work at it every day. They have to win or lose every day, and they get graded on winning or losing every day. It gets pointed out whether they won or lost to make them develop the attitude that everything is important. Everything counts."

Carroll thinks of his entire life as a competition, and he's proud of the fact. To be competitive is to be motivated and driven, he says.

"If you're coaching your position or you are an offensive or defensive coordinator on either side of the ball, you need to ask yourself the question: 'What do I feel about this?'" says Carroll. "What do I think about the screen or pulling guards? What about bump-and-run, man-to-man coverage, or two-coverage? You have to think about what you are doing and ask yourself the questions. But that isn't far enough, because if you don't answer that question, then you haven't done

anything. Go to the next step and come up with an answer about what you feel. Now you can make a statement about what works for you. Then you go about the next step and live with it, see if you can support it and make it work for you.

"This will help you learn how to deal with difficult situations and how to deal with the media," he says. "It's about getting ready for the world around you and then trying to create how you want it to be."

Practice Like You Play

The first place the competitive nature of an individual player or coach can manifest itself is at practice. To give your team a chance at the vision the coaching staff has established for it, the team must practice like they mean it.

"Practice and the preparation for practice is as important as anything we do," says Carroll. "That is our time, our opportunity to get ourselves ready for the gameday demonstration of what we are all about.

"Practice must be important," he says. "It must be an event that gets coaches and players alike jacked up every single day on every single drill.

"I am always trying to get my coaches jacked up," he says. "I want them fired up and loud. It's totally on the coaches. Our coaches have to coach up every single day in every aspect of their work. If they can't get jacked up, how can our players get jacked up? Our players will go where we take them, so we have to lead them there."

For Carroll, practice has to be high energy with a lot of noise. He expects to see organization and order, players moving quickly from one drill to the next. He does not want to see players standing around or wasting time.

"There is no downtime in practice," says Carroll. "Everyone needs to be going the whole time. If that is happening, then practice is going in the right direction."

Carroll says that practice must be highly competitive. Whether it's one-on-one, two-on-two, offense vs. defense, nine-on-seven, it doesn't matter.

"Keep score. We keep score on drills," he says. "You have to have winners and losers every day. They have to be playing the game every day. It keeps the whole energy of practice up. They have to realize that every day at practice is a battle." **AFCA**