

Foreword

This summer I reflected on our 2010-11 season here at Arizona with tremendous pride. We had a special season, winning 30 games, claiming the last-ever Pac-10 regular-season championship, and advancing to the NCAA tournament Elite Eight.

In our final game against eventual national champion Connecticut, we missed two three-point shots on the final two plays of the game. If either shot had gone in we would have advanced to the coveted Final Four in Houston, but they didn't. I am fine with the result because of one reason -- our team "played to win!" The final score is always one that you can live with as a coach when your team does that.

The upcoming season will be my 19th as a college basketball coach. If I add the five-year experience as a student-athlete at the University of Pittsburgh, this becomes the 24th college basketball team that I have been a part of in as many years. If there is one constant belief I have held onto over this time, it's the idea that college basketball is such a player's game.

When I think about the most successful teams of which I have been a part, the one constant is the presence of special players.

As a freshman at Pitt in 1988 I was fortunate to be a part of a Big East regular-season championship team that included the best rebounder in college basketball, Jerome Lane, and the Big East Player of the Year, Charles Smith. They made up one of the best front-lines in the country that year.

In 2004, while I was an assistant coach at Xavier University, we lost in the Elite Eight to Duke in a thrilling game in Atlanta. On that team were two senior guards, Lionel Chalmers and Romain Sato, both of whom became NBA draft picks later that summer. They led us on and off the court in a brilliant way.

As a head coach I have been a part of two other Elite Eights, in 2008 and 2011. My 2008 Xavier club was incredibly talented and unselfish. For most of that season we had six players averaging double-figure scoring. Three seniors, Stanley Burrell, Drew Lavender and Josh Duncan, traded individual statistics for 30 wins. They constantly, relentlessly, daily played to win.

Of course last season at Arizona we were led by one of the best players in college basketball, Derrick Williams. Derrick led the nation in free throw attempts per game

and was a very efficient player.

As a team we ranked third nationally in three-point field goal percentage defense (29.3) because of our perimeter depth. We identified our strengths and executed them consistently. As a result we improved in a dramatic way throughout the season.

My job as the head coach at Arizona is to teach our players the meaning of "Play to Win." My biggest responsibility in doing this is to identify our players' strengths and then enable them to execute these strengths within the framework of our team concept over and over again. This becomes our identity -- who we are and what we do well. It's up to me as the coach to bring out this identity. This is essential in our sport, with one game ending and the next one beginning in just 24 to 48 hours, especially during conference play and the postseason. Our primary focus has to be on our own execution and statistical analysis, not our opponents!

As I prepare for a new season with a new edition of the Arizona Wildcats, I find myself asking so many questions. How can we continue to defend the three-point line at a high level? It is such a significant part of today's game. How can we improve our two-point field goal percentage defense (50.4)? It is hard to believe the success we had a season ago with our two-point field goal defense being what it was. With the loss of Derrick Williams, along with his incredible ability to get to the free throw line, can we still be an offensive team that can thrive in this area?

These are the most meaningful statistics to me -- our own. As we search for answers, I constantly remind myself of the importance of teaching our players what it means to play to win and the constant reinforcement of "do what we do" better than our opponents.

At Arizona, this challenge always begins and ends with our own team and our own special players. Our goal each season is to shape our team's identity. This identity will be supported by our own statistical analysis and to me that's the most meaningful point. Simply put, our focus is on us.

We pride ourselves in being "A Player's Program" in pursuit of what it means each season to "Play to Win."

Sean Miller
University of Arizona Head Coach