



Outside the Box

► by **Tom Field**, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Assistant coaches

The arena is sold out and the fans are frenzied as their collective roar rocks the house. The score is tied at 67, and the home team takes a full time-out with 5.2 seconds left in the game. The excitement and anticipation of the final play is nearly unbearable. The team gathers on the bench, yet the head coach and his three assistants are standing in their own huddle off to the side choosing the strategy that will be employed to win the game.

More perspective

There is intensity in their eyes, but based on a high level of knowledge and trust they work through the decision calmly — four sets of eyes and ears, four brains, and nearly 100 years of combined playing and coaching experience. Their meeting has taken less than 30 seconds, and they turn to the team ready to communicate a clear plan of action that will send their players to the tournament championship.

Basketball is a great sport that combines athleticism, discipline and creativity. In many ways it is also a simple sport — five players to a side, a relatively small

playing surface, a manageable set of rules, and a clear objective. Why then does it take more than one coach to assure a successful team? Couldn't just one knowledgeable and experienced head coach handle the job?

In the highly competitive environment of organized sports, head coaches understand that to prepare their teams for exceptional execution and to fully understand the flow and emerging strategy of the game, the odds of success are enhanced when the combined experiences, perspectives and skills of several professionals are brought to bear in practice and on game day.

While the head coach is orchestrating practice and building strategy for the next series of games, one assistant is drilling guards, while another focuses on the footwork of centers and power forwards. The third assistant is on the road evaluating talent and building relationships with coaches, players and parents as part of the recruiting

effort. During game-day preparation, each coach will have a set of responsibilities — one to determine the other team's defensive game plan while another is planning how to defend the best point guard the team has faced all season.

Come game day, everyone knows that adjustments will have to be made as the competition unfolds, time-outs are

expended, fouls accumulate, and bench players emerge with the hot hand. Each assistant must be ready to deliver a concise and valuable insight at key moments in the game. The most successful head coaches effectively utilize not only the

talents of their players, but also the unique perspectives that each assistant coach brings to the game.

Once the season is complete, coaches either schedule time to observe and interact with the staff of other basketball programs or invite in a variety of advisors to provide fresh perspective, ideas and approaches. Ultimately, the head coach makes the big decisions, sets the course of direction, and is responsible for the culture and attitude of their program. However, they are constantly in search of information and skills. They constantly fine-tune their program so that every detail and nuance is accounted for in the quest for a championship.

Assistant coaches in beef industry

What's to be learned from basketball coaches that can be applied to leading a successful seedstock enterprise? There are two key lessons to be learned from those

storied coaches who roam the sidelines. First, we all need a few assistant coaches. Granted, we may not be able to afford a full-time set of assistants. However, there are clear benefits from accessing the talent of specialists. My suggestion in terms of your assistant coaches would be to include the following sets of expertise:

- Veterinary medicine
- Forage management and nutrition
- Finance and economics
- Risk management
- Marketing and customer relations

Individuals with experience and technical know-how in these areas are invaluable and can play an instrumental role in game-day preparation, execution of the plan and adjusting to changing conditions. For these assistant coaches to be effective, they need access to information, an understanding of the available resources, as well as deep awareness of the operation's strengths and limitations. Just as the head coach has to expend time and energy in building a relationship with the assistants and in creating a cohesive team that leverages individual talents in pursuit of team goals, so must the successful seedstock manager.

Secondly, find successful people who can be brought in to provide a fresh perspective of our enterprises, or take the time to learn from successful people at their place of business. In this process, we should look not only for successful models from within the beef business but also from other sectors of agriculture. Perhaps best of all, we need to find a few role models and mentors from entirely different industries or businesses.

The cattle industry is a complex business, and it is the rare individual who has the breadth and depth of knowledge to go it alone. Remember, when the game is on the line, a few good assistant coaches may make the difference between victory and defeat.

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