

Greg Andrulis

A philosophy of mutual respect and trust

Greg Andrulis is the head coach at George Mason University. Before taking that position in 2005, Andrulis spent nearly a decade with the Columbus Crew, joining the team in the inaugural Major League Soccer season of 1996 as goalkeeper coach and then as the top assistant. He became the Crew's interim coach midway through the 2001 season and was given the job after the season. In 2002, he led the Crew to its first title, the U.S. Open Cup. In 2004, he took the Crew on a league-record unbeaten streak and was named MLS Coach of the Year. In 2006, he led George Mason to its first NCAA tournament bid in 20 years. Few American coaches have coached in as many levels of soccer as Andrulis.

When did you decide to become a soccer coach?

While a graduate assistant at Clemson, I realized that my desire to be a coach and a teacher could be combined as a collegiate coach.

What are the most important ingredients for a successful team?

Talent, desire, a clear vision, strong leadership and team chemistry.

When building a team, what is the first thing you look for?

At the MLS level, there is about a 30 percent turnover rate from year to year with regard to our rosters. Each off-season creates a unique opportunity to mold a team. The constraints of a salary cap, international player limits and limited acquisition opportunities create an interesting challenge. It takes a couple of years to mold a team into your own vision.

Who were you coaching mentors? What was the best advice you have received from them (or anyone) in regards to coaching?

My mom and dad started it. The compassionate educator within me came from my mom, and my strong work ethic came from my dad.

How do you define a championship team? What are the most important aspects of a championship team?

When the (Columbus) Crew won the 2002 U.S. Lamar Hunt Open Cup, there were two key ingredients. One was tremendous team chemistry—our motto, adopted from Coach K (Mike Krzyzewski) of Duke was "None of us is as strong as all of us." And the second ingredient was an incredible work ethic.

Does a player come with motivation, or is that something a coach can teach?

All players are motivated differently—some intrinsically, some extrinsically. The key is to find which buttons, when pushed, will produce the greatest results. Professional athletes are incredibly motivated by nature; getting them to the next level is the challenge.

What are three adjectives that best describe the perfect coach?

The three adjectives that describe the perfect coach are very different depending on the level that you coach at. Professional coaches, college coaches and youth coaches have completely different environments and frames of reference to work from. If there is common ground to be a successful coach I think it's in management skills; coaches may be more "situation-specific" at the higher levels than at the lower levels and have to adapt to an ever-changing environment. Coaching a team for

12 months (professional) versus 12 weeks (NCAA) creates a myriad of issues that require a different set of skills.

Does a coach need a philosophy to be successful? What is your philosophy? Has it changed over time?

My philosophy has certainly changed over time in regards to teaching the game. It's important to be a student of the game and adapt to the movement within the sport. Additionally, coaching a professional player versus coaching a college player has dictated some situation-specific adaptations.

Is it important for a coach to be liked by players?

Being liked is less important than being respected.

Looking back on your career, what events gave you the most satisfaction?

The events that have given the most satisfaction professionally would be winning championships. For example, it was very gratifying for me to win the NCAA Championship at Clemson with I.M. Ibrahim, a fantastic coach; the U.S. Open Cup; seeing Lamar Hunt jump up and down on the podium; the Supporter's Shield with the Crew; George Mason's first conference championship in 20 years in 2008. But as a coach and a teacher, it's more than that. Having a player who left college early to turn pro, and nine years later calling me from his college graduation ceremony to let me know he finally did it was a call that I'll never forget. Seeing a player who suffered severe off-field issues make a fantastic recovery is incredible. Sitting with Tom Fitzgerald on the bench prior to the first game at Crew Stadium and realizing that dreams and goals can be achieved. Looking back on my career, the events that have provided me with the most satisfaction did not occur on the playing field, but with the people around it.

Is a coach born with leadership skills or can they be learned?

Can leadership be learned? Certainly leadership skills can be emulated and learned. There are hundreds of books, seminars, etc., that provide guidance in this area. What I think successful leaders are born with is an internal intuition that separates the average from the great. What are the common characteristics of the Joe Morrones, Bruce Arenas, Gene Bakers and Sasha Crovskis of the world? There is something behind their success that is hard to learn, but that many try to emulate.

Can a coach create a competitor, or is that something the player brings to the team?

It's difficult to "create" a competitor. Personality traits are what make players unique and interesting. As a coach you can create a competitive environment. You can hope to surround yourself with players who love to compete, who love the battle. You can foster a competitive intelligence and help players compete within themselves and with others. I have had the great fortune of working with some incredible competitive individuals, and they all have some common threads— one being an incredible will to succeed.

Can teams learn from losing?

I believe that teams learn from every result, win, lose or tie. But you certainly want to learn a lot more often from success than failure!



Is there a formula for success? Are there any shortcuts to success?

I certainly don't think there are any shortcuts to success. You have to accept risk, take chances and be committed to your goals and dreams.

What is more important, game preparation or in-game adjustments?

Soccer is unique in that preparation and in-game adjustments have to be intertwined. Without the benefit of timeouts, unlimited substitutions and specific plays, it's important to prepare your team. It's important to prepare your team both for the situations that occur during a game and those that occur during a season. Game adjustments are an integral part of preparation. Often, the events of the game will dictate which adjustments have to be made. By preparing for these events in advance, your team will benefit. Ultimately, it's a player's game. Coaches live for practice, and players live for the game.

How important is discipline on a soccer team?

Discipline is incredibly important. Our philosophy is one of mutual respect and trust. We respect our players as men and unique individuals. We trust that they will make the right decisions on and off the field. We also realize that occasionally discipline needs to be reinforced. Although we don't have a lot of "rules," we have very high expectations. We try to not let discipline get in the way of leadership.

How does a coach win respect from players?

I think the best way to do it is by being prepared, being a hard worker, being a positive influence, and by being honest and caring.

How important is goal-setting? Team goals? Coaching goals? Win-loss goals?

Goal-setting provides direction, motivation and purpose. We spend a lot of time on our individual and team goals. Feedback, reinforcement and adjustments are an important part of the process. We set short- as well as long-term goals that are specific, measurable and relevant.

What was the biggest mistake you have made in your coaching career?

I'm constantly making and learning from my mistakes. But I don't dwell on them. We have never lost a game, but we have occasionally run out of time when we were behind!

Have you changed as a coach during your career?

I have changed as a person and as a coach. There is a natural maturation. I was 25 when I was named the head coach at Wright State. During the past 20

years, I've continued to learn and develop as both a person and a coach.

What advice would you give to a coach just starting in the profession?

If you are fortunate to find something in your life that you really enjoy doing, put your heart and soul into it. There is no "T" way in coaching. You are responsible not just for yourself, but for the lives and development of your team. It is an awesome and incredible responsibility. For the person just starting out, I would suggest that you realize that it's not about you. It's about the team.

How has the game changed during your career?

The game has changed in a very positive way. The advancement of our player-development systems over the past 20 years is incredible. Coaching methods, science, physiology, travel, tournaments, professional and national teams, etc., have provided players with incredible opportunities. The sky is the limit for the growth and further development of the "American" player and the game in our country. MLS has provided the U.S. soccer community with a compass pointed north. The success of our national teams, male and female, has been a tremendous source of pride and validates the "process." Will we always debate the methods and outcomes? That's healthy. The fact is that on any given day you can turn on the TV, surf the web and see incredible soccer being played. And almost always, there is an American on the field!

How about between youth players and elite players?

The biggest difference between coaching professional players and college players is just that: "professionalism." At the beginning of the MLS, when the teams were dominated with college players who for the most part were coached by ex-college players, there was no reference point for them on how to be a "professional." When a Thomas Dooley, Robert Warzycha or Brad Friedel were added to the locker room, things changed in a positive way, both on and off the field. The difference isn't small, it's huge. There is a natural Darwinism that occurs to be successful at each level. Going from college to professional isn't just about talent. There are a lot of very talented players who don't make it. There are close to 800 college teams and only 15 teams at the top flight in the United States. To be a professional player today means that you have to successfully compete with other players from all over the world every day, for all 12 months of the year. College players seldom, if ever, deal with that level of expectation. However, when a goal is scored or a save is made and you see the smile, or the jump for joy, that's the same at every level! ⚽

Luis Felipe Scolari

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Only to the point where it can't be influenced by people. I say "no thanks" to any technology that is controlled by human hand, particularly as it would be highly susceptible to manipulation. But I have no problem with a "chip" in the ball or something that people can't influence or which improves the transparency of the game.

Where has football developed more? In the physical or in the technical sense?

Most definitely in the physical sense. Today, any physically strong team can pose a problem for a technically superior side. Teams have a very similar training setup these days. There is hardly any difference in the physical condition of the players. This forces the technically better teams to think and act more quickly, and that isn't easy at all. So we are seeing more and more surprises in the global game. It's becoming more and more difficult for good teams to qualify for major tournaments.

You mentioned Kaka earlier. When you selected him for the 2002 FIFA World Cup, did you ever think he would soon become the best player in the world?

With 18- or 19-year-old players, it's too early to say whether they will make it to the top because a number of factors have to be right. But it was already obvious that Kaka had enormous potential.

Although Cristiano Ronaldo lost out to Kaka in the voting for FIFA World Player 2007, he's playing better than ever for Manchester United. A Cristiano Ronaldo in such form must be of great value to you.

Without question. He's a key player for both Manchester United and the national team. Cristiano is an example of a "boy" who has matured quickly, as a player and as a leader. I'm absolutely convinced that Cristiano will be among the world's best players over the next three, four, five years and, in the long term, as captain and one of the leaders in the Portuguese National Team.

The FIFA World Cup in South Africa will soon be upon us.

It's a huge event of tremendous importance for Africa, a continent that needs this boost for the development of its game. They are rich in talent, but lack the structural prerequisites and nerves of steel needed to make the ultimate breakthrough.

Brazil is also preparing to host the world of football in 2014. A different situation to Africa, but...

[interrupting] Just as important, especially for the development of the country. The country is looking forward to the responsibility, and I haven't the slightest doubt that it will be well organized under Brazilian management. This event is enormously important for the infrastructure of the entire country. It was also about time the five-time winners were awarded another World Cup.

What is Luiz Felipe Scolari like off the pitch?

Totally calm and relaxed. I spend most of my time at home with my family. A quiet life with no particular highlights.

Anyone who saw you against Ivica Dragutinovic [Scolari went for the Serb during a European Championship qualifier] would think differently!

It wasn't my greatest moment, but I won't let anything happen to my players.

Your wife Olga is said to have brought you to reason when she showed you the pictures.

That's correct. She was most unhappy with my behavior. But protecting my players is indeed one of the few things that can make me lose control. ⚽

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