



By George Fust

Stop for a moment and think about the best athletes in your favorite sport. What attributes make them stand out? Persistence? Grit? Coaches can often be heard reminding players to

“never take a play off.” These standout players create advantages and opportunities for their team, and we admire their work ethic. We strive to emulate it. Now, imagine if all the players on a team performed this way. How awesome would their collective effort be?

This concept is an applicable metaphor for leaders. Except the game is not governed by rules that both “teams” follow. There are no set number of players, or teams, or even a conclusion to the game. The game is played in perpetuity and thus, is more about quality during the play rather than always being in the game. Never taking a play off means embracing perseverance and commitment to the team, while providing an example for others to follow- it's a mindset to do your best.

Today's Army requires dedicated members who strive to make valuable contributions to the team. Most people have encountered teammates who do not give their all every day. They clock in, sometimes contribute, and then clock out. Imagine if every member of your organization or team never took a play off. For a platoon leader in the Army, it might look like conducting that extra weekend barracks check.

For leaders, it means not turning a blind eye to racism or extremism. Students enrolled in professional military education give their all by completing assigned readings even if they know they will never discuss them in class. For commanders and their supply sergeants, it means accounting for and documenting all shortages during change of command inventories. Never taking a play off means not taking shortcuts, doing the right thing when no one is looking, counseling subordinates, making spot corrections, and embracing the concepts of the Army's institutional values, principles, and ethics.

Imagine how effective a team would be if all of its members lived by this mantra?

Never taking a play off is not just a moral obligation, it's also an individual obligation and the key to effective teamwork. Every interaction, training event, or other daily task is an

opportunity to contribute to the collective. Mediocrity must never be the default. If one just goes through the motions, opportunities to harness the true capabilities of individuals and the organization could be missed. If a teammate justifies poor performance with excuses, this behavior may be an indicator of underlying issues. The concept of no plays off includes taking care of each other. A leader or team member who is switched on will take the extra step to recognize and help others when they need to take plays off.

Many Army units do not have the luxury of drafting or trading players. While it does happen, the default setting should be to inspire, motivate, and provide opportunities rather than pass deficiencies to other units. An organization's culture should encourage and enable everyone to contribute their best each day. The spillover effect of this mindset can also contribute to areas beyond the profession to include families and external communities. Once you are committed to a no plays off mindset, it is unlikely to fade simply because you took off the uniform for the day.

Each of us has the potential to give our all for every play. Each of us can be someone others look up to and want on their team. Each of us is capable. When the dust settles, and we look back down the long path of our career, better to know you left it all on the field; that you gave it your all; that you never took a play off. This is how legends are made. This is how we win a game without rules or time limits. It is possible, but it starts with you.

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