



Lady Vols head coach Pat Summitt with her team's record eight national championship trophies.

Coaching Legend Pat Summitt

Summing up the life of the NCAA's *winningest* coach

BY LAANNA CARRASCO, MA

Pat Summitt is one of the best coaches ever. She's the all-time winningest coach in NCAA basketball history, having led the University of Tennessee women's basketball team, the Lady Vols, to eight national championships. Her life and career are relevant to all athletes, and she provides a superior model for female leaders and coaches with her formula for winning, called the Definite Dozen.

The Definite Dozen consists of 12 principles for

bringing diverse people together to communicate, work hard, be disciplined and follow a system to achieve success. For Summitt, very often it worked to perfection. In her book *Reach for the Summit* (Crown Publishing Group, 1999) she writes that when a good plan works, "you don't write it off to luck or good fortune. You examine it, and ask yourself why things turned out so well."

With self-reflection and a unique ability to evolve her

coaching style, Summitt never turned away from real effort or settled for less. Constantly retooling her team's mode of attack on the court, she studied the Chicago Bulls' Triple Post system, which had been developed by the Bulls' assistant coach Tex Winter and had been employed by the Michael Jordan-led Bulls with championship success. Putting her own spin on the Triple Post allowed Summitt and the Lady Vols to win their way to the first of three straight national championships starting in 1995-96.



Summitt coaching in a time-out huddle.

Summitt's childhood had accustomed her to hard work and enduring discomfort to get the win; she grew up picking tobacco and doing farm work in rural Tennessee. She played basketball in a hayloft with three brothers. Under her father's authoritarian parenting style, she developed a distinctive mental and physical toughness that has guided her in perhaps her most challenging obstacle, being diagnosed in 2011 with early-onset Alzheimer's.

After that diagnosis, Summitt wrote her third book, *Sum It Up* (Random House, 2013), with Sally Jenkins. The book is a memoir that details how she built the Tennessee fan base from 500 to 15,000 in three years, emphasized charm and finesse to garner resources and open up opportunities for women, and campaigned to bring the full-court basketball game to all female players.

Summitt is presently devoted to mentoring the Lady

“A lot of people are afraid of commitment because it means they’ll have to say ‘that’s the best I can do.’ They elect to be average. When you compete, you decide to find out what your real limits are, not just what you think they are.” —Pat Summitt in *Sum It Up*

Vols as Head Coach Emeritus and working with her foundation on research, education and support for people with Alzheimer's. Summitt was unavailable for an interview, but I talked to her co-author and friend Sally Jenkins about Summitt.

BFS: How has working with Pat Summitt on her three books and covering her career changed your life?

SJ: It taught me what someone who is really good at something does. Getting to know her totally changed what real quality looks like for me. She was in command of every-

thing during the time that she wrote her first book and could juggle it all seamlessly.

BFS: What are three things you have learned from her?

SJ: First thing, confidence comes from work and practice, not from inspiration. You practice the way you intend to play. Confidence under pressure comes from conditioning, prepara-

tion and habit.

Second, tackle the hardest things that you are most afraid of. It's easy to work at things you are good at, but greater success will come if you work at the things that you find unpleasant and that are hardest.

Third, there's no excuse for losing your composure, ever. Your moment-to-moment conduct is under your control.

Yes, Pat screamed from the sidelines, but she treats everyone like the king and queen of England. She never pitched a hissy fit, and has never been rude. Her conduct is always good, decent and respectful.

BFS: What can we as athletes and coaches do to keep Summitt's legacy alive?

SJ: The best thing is to make sure that women's basketball keeps growing in a fiscally sensitive way to continue to

create opportunities for women. Chances for women are hard fought, and we need to keep expanding that. For example, the WNBA needs to keep establishing a stronger place – any contraction of that is undermining her legacy.

We also need to continue to expand opportunities for women in the NCAA. I know that if Pat were still head coach, she would be having meetings with the SEC to figure



Summitt coaching Candace Parker, who subsequently was named 2008 MVP of the Women's National Basketball Association.



Summitt with her son Tyler after winning a national championship.

out how to make women's basketball as big a moneymaker as men's. That would open up more opportunities for more women's sports.

BFS: How did strength training set Summitt's teams apart?

SJ: She was constantly reevaluating conditioning. I remember that there was a period when the team was continually losing to Texas and she knew they were doing something different in the weightroom that her kids weren't doing. So she changed the way her kids trained, and supported having women lift heavy weights. This made her teams stronger, leaner, and from there on out they were annually the fittest team.

BFS: How did Summitt encourage her players to push themselves to their limits and take ownership?

SJ: She knew that a lot of kids have never really pushed themselves. They don't know what they have in them. She would demand they rise to her level, and that was encouragement.

She would show a kid a shortcoming, and in the very next breath show them a solution. She'd identify something they weren't very good at, and say, "You're terrible going to your left, but you can be good at it and here's how." Then, she'd show them a tape of someone driving left and she'd say, "Can you do that?" And the kid would



Summitt working the sidelines in a game against Duke.

say yes, and then she'd coach them to do it.

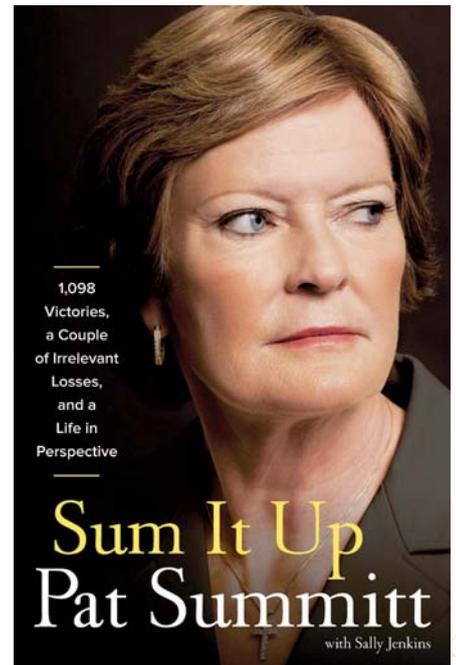
She encouraged them with answers. I remember a time when her junior point guard, Loree Moore, tore her ACL in a win over Duke. She was the best point guard in the country. Pat went to the team and put Loree's stats on the board and she asked them, "Can you make this up?" She showed them that if the starting five could each score two more points a game, grab one more rebound, or give a little more effort on defense they could pick up the slack. They believed it and went on to make it to the NCAA final against UConn.

LC: How did Summitt's smart

approach to creating opportunities for women in sports allow her to be so incredibly successful in changing the sports world for women?

SJ: She was a transformational figure for women and built the first popular women's basketball team. What was unique about her was she coached them like basketball players, but she did it in a feminine way that was very charming.

Her charisma, personal will and dynamism allowed her to convince people to do what she wanted them to do. She was very good at talking to people in power and gained a level of acceptance from male coaches. **BFS**



To learn more about Coach Pat Summitt's life and coaching philosophy, pick up her latest book, *Sum It Up*, which she co-authored with Sally Jenkins.

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