



## SOFTBALL EXCELLENCE

with Cindy Bristow

# You Think You Want a Team Full of Stars?

**F**or years I've heard people say that the best coaches in our game win because they have so many great players. Statements like, "who couldn't win with that lineup?" get uttered all the time as people wrongly think that great teams are easy to coach as all these great players must totally get along, agree completely with their role and playing time and do every single thing the coach says. But anyone who's ever coached these elite teams knows that's crazy! Great teams have the same problems and issues that all teams have, they just have better talent. You might be surprised to find that even these great teams, in order to become great, must have three completely different types of players on them.

Within every company and softball team there are three very distinctly different types of people or players; we'll call them A's, B's and C's. Each of these groups has their own specific role and each role is important to the group's ultimate success. The better you are at identifying each group within your team and making sure these groups work FOR, instead of against you the better your won-loss record!

A softball team is nothing more than a miniature workforce working to accomplish softball wins just like the work force at General Mills is working to make Wheaties or Dell's workforce is making computers. Sure, Dell and GM have a ton more workers than you do on your softball team but you might be surprised to find all of these workers and players have some important things in common.

Know Your A,B and C's – There are basically three different types of players (or workers) in life; A, B and C players. While this example is taken from the business world it definitely applies to softball teams and makes a ton of sense to me.

Let's take a quick look at the characteristics of each of these and how to distinguish A's from B's from C's:

**"A" PLAYERS: "A" players are just that – A grade. They're independent, hard working, driven, and self-motivated. A's are competitive and want to be the best at everything they do. A's typically look out more for themselves since they're so driven for their own performance. Your Challenge with "A" Players is that you have to keep them challenged or else they get bored. A's also get frustrated at other's lack of performance so you will be challenged to keep them stretching their skills while helping them learn patience for their teammates. Bored A players get into trouble either on your team or else they start looking to play on another team. Any of your players (or maybe even your own kids come to mind?)**

**You cannot give A players the same boring tasks day after day at practice since these don't challenge them at all so you've got to work hard to keep them motivated because they need more challenges than your other players. Does this sound familiar? Doesn't this sound like exactly what Dan Coyle talked about in his book, The Talent Code, when he said players must "stretch" themselves in order to improve and A players will in fact stretch you in order to continually keep them challenged.**

**"B" Players: "B" players are your average players. They do their job and they do it well. B players do everything you ask of them and want to improve but not too much. They never want to be the star. 80% of your team will be B players but since they do their jobs they only take about 20% of your time. B players are good at whatever they like doing and tend to avoid things they don't like. B players look out for the team. B's work hard but just might not have the physical gifts the A's do, or the over-the-top motivation to excel. Your Challenge with "B" Players is that B players do well with praise so you've got to make conscious efforts to praise their efforts and results. Praise and recognition is what helps B players and their performance level. While it might not be your style to recognize or compliment remember that good coaches adapt their style to get the best out of their players.**

**"C" Players: "C" players are often slackers. They do as little as possible to get by and aren't motivated to change their role on the team. C players have no aspirations to take away anyone's starting position or role above them and are content with doing the same thing over and over and over again. C players won't go above and beyond in anything they do. C players are perfectly happy with playing an inning here and there where an A player would be very angry with that. C players are not that talented and could be a B Player but they don't want to work that hard. C Players are Team players but they aren't going to volunteer to stay late or work more. C's often miss practice for reasons other than injury and do just enough to stay on the team. C players are often on the team for reasons other than success such as social reasons like being a part of things, or for the travel or to be with their friends. Getting to the next level is not a part of a C's mentality. They typically aren't playing to be an all-state player. Your Challenge with "C" Players is that you will have to keep an eye on them and sometimes even discipline them in order to get them to produce. They will usually be role players so give them a role that's comfortable for them, let them clearly understand it and as a result they can be good and valuable team members.**

What Does This All Mean? - Most of your team will be B's with a few C's and A's but since they are much harder to manage or keep motivated you will spend all your time with the A's and C's and very little with the B's. Remember that praise matters to the B's so you've got to make a concerted effort to say each player's name every day, or pat them on the back or some other gesture to let your B players know you're glad they're there.

While A players are the most motivated and competitive players it would seem like we'd all want nothing but A Players on our team. But to quote Lee Corso – Not So Fast My Friend! With a team full of all A Players you won't have any team unity, you'll be challenged too much, you'll have no role players, and since somebody has to be on the bench a team full of A players means A's are on the bench – which will create nothing but team dissension and spell doom for your season. C players are much happier on the bench and that's why they are great role players. While A players are who you'll no doubt want up in the bottom of the 7th with the season on the line, or in the circle pitching with 0 outs and the bases loaded, they are just like every other group – they have their role within the team picture and are simply one of the 3 groups we need to have involved for or TEAM to be a success! So the next time you are selecting your team don't just watch for skills but also keep your eyes peeled for players that can play all 3 roles on your team, and play them well so your team as a whole purrs through the season as a cohesive unit!