

PATH FROM BEING AN ASSISTANT TO HEAD COACH

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In his motivational speech, Erdem Can shared his personal journey from assistant coach to head coach. The path was anything but straight; it was more like a rollercoaster.

I began my career as a basketball player. All I knew was that I wanted to be the best basketball player in the world. But I got hurt when I was 17. At the age of 19, at my university professor's advice I began coaching children aged 10 to 18 in all categories. I realized that there was another way to love basketball. The game has embedded itself in my body and soul. This is how my lifelong commitment to basketball began.

I didn't speak English at the time, but I recognized the value of knowing the common language of basketball, so I studied it diligently. I attended a basketball camp in the United States where I learned that the only way to improve yourself is to invest in yourself.

At age of 23, I was assistant coach in Turkish League First Division Bama, where relegation to second division was a real threat. I was investing in myself by watching games and attempting to comprehend them. After two months a new head Coach from New Zealand was hired. He was teaching me English, and I was teaching him Turkish.

Despite the low budget, our team reached the Turkish League semi-finals the following year. My head Coach trusted me and said we could go further together. All of a sudden in 2006, I found myself with the New Zealand national team, World Championship in Tokyo Japan. I had to mature. The Coach was fired at the end of the season. I was loyal to him and left because I did not agree with the way he was treated.

I was without a job. So I started working on the details of the opposing teams, on the terminology of the various teams, leagues, the rules and etc. The Coach then had an

opportunity to work in Greece and immediately called me as well. I had the right person to work with and he gave me the opportunity to improve. This is more important than simply having a position. Due to recruitment issues, the Coach lost his reputation and I was fired again.

When I was returning to Turkey I was not recognized by local professionals. I was again low on the rollercoaster. After 6 months away from the basketball industry, I decided to return to what I love, basketball. A small opportunity arose from the Turkish league's second division. There, I worked with a very honest and open Coach.

The following year, I worked as an assistant coach in Telecom's first division. I felt like I was rising up again. I went back to the years when I could work with the coaches and players on another level. After a year the new board members decided to change to whole staff.

I was sad and upset this time but I never gave up the self motivation, because basketball is part of me. As long as I work hard, I do my daily duties, it will go on the right way. The opportunity came to work as an assistant coach for a lower-level team that had just risen from the Second Division to the First. I was willing to sacrifice everything for basketball. The wise Coach provided me with an incredible opportunity to expand my mindset. I carried the entire workload; preparing game plans, working with players, pregame and postgame preparations, and so on, but I enjoyed it because my love of basketball. If you want to be the best, you must find your own path to maturity, as well as your own motivation and goals.

When the Coach resigned, I was offered the position of Head Coach at the age of 29. I accepted it. I was fired two months later. My biggest mistake was believing that I knew everything what I should know about basketball and that I

could manage the team. Looking back, I didn't deserve to be there at that time for a variety of reasons, including coach-player communication, reading the game, reacting to the situation, taking timeouts, and even substitution. Whatever happens, you must maintain your dedication and hard work, but more importantly, you must maintain your personality.

This was my fourth failure in a row, but I never gave up. I returned to Istanbul to reunite with my family and I began investing in myself again on a daily basis. Every day, I attended the best Coaches' practices. I researched MBA team terminology. You create your own culture once you have your own terminology. I was preparing playbooks while watching Jacob Radovich Europa League games and breaking down all of their offensive and defensive systems.

The following season, I became the last assistant, the video coordinator in Fenerbache. Even if things aren't going well, you must strive to improve yourself. Jacob Brothovic, a new coach, joined the team at the end of the season. I prepared a detailed DVD report on the Turkish players in the League for his request and also presented the playbook on Coach Jerico Drodovich's offenses that I had prepared earlier before I knew we would be working together. Jaco allowed me to develop as a person and as a Coach. I began to prepare games, talk with players, hold pre and postgame meetings, and discuss the game plan with him. After seven years, our relationship reached a new level.

You need to be yourself, you cannot be a fake person. You must be truthful and confident in the person with whom you work. And then he will give you more opportunity. If you are dedicated enough, if you feel you love the game enough and you are patient enough, it will pay off.

Turkey has never had such basketball success, as being Euro League champion five years in a row, making the final four three times, and so on. This provided additional motivation to other Turkish teams as well. Jayco decided to leave. With the help of Igor Kokoshka the new head Coach I was promoted to be in the Summer League by Eutyches. The opportunity of a lifetime does not come by chance; you must demonstrate your commitment. I was prepared to become a head coach in MBA, but I was not given the opportunity. I left despite my two-year contract. Then Coach Quinn offered me a position as an assistant coach for Utah Jazz. After a year, I

felt I was ready to be a head coach in Europe and to take on another challenge in my career.

We developed our own terminology to foster the ownership of players. A head coach's responsibilities are very different from those of an assistant coach. He must make quick decisions, manage fifteen different personalities, and maintain balance. He must be much more open, to listen to the players and persuade them that the team will improve through teamwork.

I believe the key word is to remain humble and hungry. Be committed to this job and recognize whether or not you are able to enjoy it. Because if you don't love basketball, I don't believe there is an open road ahead of you.