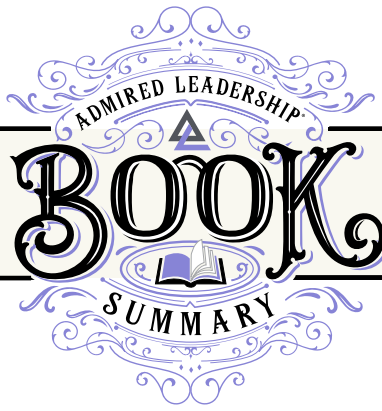




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



October 2022

# Sum It Up

1,098 Victories, a Couple of Irrelevant Losses, and a Life in Perspective

BOOK AUTHOR: PAT SUMMITT

Published 2013



Pat Summitt was an Olympic gold medalist and, at the time of her retirement in 2012, was the NCAA Division I basketball coach with the most wins. She was diagnosed in 2011 with early-onset Alzheimer's, and her autobiography *Sum It Up* chronicles her life's journey. Starting out as a poor farm girl, she went on to become one of the best college and professional basketball players and eventually one of the most successful coaches in history. Throughout it all, she maintained a positive outlook and a high level of excellence despite her personal struggles and numerous health issues.

## Key Quote

"Too many people opt out and never discover their own abilities, because they fear failure. They don't understand **commitment**. When you learn to keep fighting in the face of potential failure, it gives you a larger skill set to do what you want in life. It gives you vision" (p. 19).

## Key Points

### PERSPECTIVE ON ALZHEIMER'S

After her diagnosis, Pat decided that the only thing she could not do was change the disease. Instead, she made a list of what she could do: "I can continue to work for as long as possible – I refuse to stay at home and rot away. I can resist the pressure to retire and disappear. I can decline to be afraid, or self-conscious. I can try to be an example: it's easy to **tell** people how things are done; real teachers **show** people how things are done" (p. 339).

"Although Alzheimer's was a dire diagnosis, it didn't mean I had to quit living a productive life" (p. 16).

"The brain has an amazing ability to compensate – to transfer tasks. A spinal tap didn't test for leadership, or relationships, or the capacity of my heart" (p. 18).

"I'd always told our players that attitude is a choice. 'It is what it is,' I said, 'but it will become what you make of it'" (p. 339).

## CHILDHOOD INFLUENCES

Pat Summitt was raised with several brothers who were older and faster than her. Pat reflects: "I couldn't stand to be second at anything, a bet, a dare, a race, or the nightly games of basketball with my brothers in the hayloft. If I lost, I'd tell them, 'We're going to play again after we finish our supper.' If I lost again after supper, I'd say, 'We're going to stay out here all night.' We'd play until I was on a winning side, because I had no intention of going to bed in second place" (p. 25).

"My father expected us to act responsibly and to make our own decisions in the fields. If you didn't know how to do something, like say change a broken blade on a mower, you studied the machinery or the problem and learned for yourself, without pestering him with questions" (p. 35).

Summitt frequently talks about how influential her father was in her coaching style. His expectations were high, and his children were required to be hardworking, independent, and cooperative. Summitt never questioned her father's love. His rules were straightforward, and his punishments were serious. He hugged her for the first time when she was 43 and rarely gave his children praise. You are only as good as your players. Life and coaching advice came from Pat's father: "You don't take donkeys to the Kentucky Derby" (p. 94).


## COMMUNICATING WITH PLAYERS

"In the absence of feedback, people will fill in the blanks with a negative" (p. 215).


"The first thing you say, and the last thing you say, will stick. Everything else goes in one ear and out the other" (p. 221).

During the recruiting process, Pat would handwrite letters to players. She did not want this to discontinue when they became a part of her team, so she delivered warm notes on a regular basis. "I could say the same thing twenty-five times, but when it was written down, just reading it once in permanent ink could make all the difference" (p. 213).

"I decided to make our players say 'two points' out loud whenever I gave them a compliment, whereas if I gave them a criticism, they had to say 'rebound,' meaning shake it off, take the lesson, and then move on" (p. 215).



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Summitt quotes Geno Auriemma: “You could say ten things and nine of them are ‘you are the greatest in the world at nine things, but you suck going to your left.’ They leave and say, ‘Coach says I suck.’ I like to say things right in front of the team about reality. I like to say, ‘This is what you’re doing and this is why it’s costing us, and does anybody have any questions?’ Because now they have to confront. They can’t go their separate ways and say, ‘He said...’ No. **Everybody** heard it” (p. 248).

Summitt never participated in “negative recruiting,” which is talking down about their opposition’s weaknesses and downfalls. She only talked to recruits about what her program had to offer and why they should come to play for her (p. 318).

“If I’d learned anything in all my years of teaching, it was that when you reach an impasse with a player, you get what you demand, not what you ask for. If players see even a waver in you, they will give you what they want to give” (p. 253).

## COACHING PHILOSOPHY

“Our rules and policies were just another expression of caring. There is an old saying, ‘Rules without relationship result in rebellion’” (p. 208).

“To have a great leader you must have eager followers” (p. 219).

On her first day as head coach, she decided to start by acting really tough and then lightening up if needed. After day one, twenty of the forty players never came back. But one of her advisors said, “Better to have seven or eight who really want to be there” (p. 91).


Her response on how to coach women: “don’t worry about coaching ‘women.’ Just go home and coach ‘basketball’” (p. 6).

Summitt read hundreds of leadership books throughout her coaching career. One of the platitudes that stuck with her the most was from Zig Ziglar’s **Reaching the Top**: “You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help other people get what they want” (p. 98).


When her players were arrogant or not performing to the best of their abilities, Summitt would punish the whole team in order to make the individual feel accountable for the collective pain (p. 125).

After suffering a humiliating loss, Summitt made her players run sprints on the opponent’s basketball court after the game so the opposing fans would see. The girls were very concerned about appearances, and this punishment was one of her most effective techniques. She explains, “those workouts had a purpose. I was trying to teach them a lesson about commitment. I measured our performance by two things: effort and execution. I was willing to coach execution for as long, and as forgivingly, as our players needed me to.” However, she adds, “I wasn’t patient or forgiving about effort” (p. 167).

With a particularly shy player, Summitt taught her assertiveness by making her plan and coach a practice. She had to learn to take ownership of the team (p. 176).



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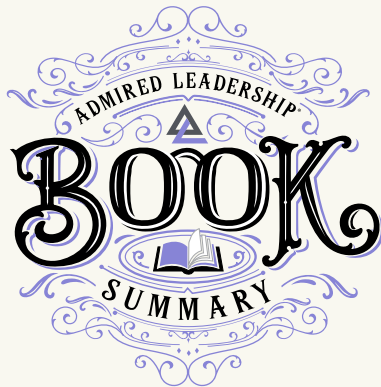


With all players, Summitt coached them not just on the field but also helped them improve their GPAs, supported them with their families, and helped them with their goals after graduating (p. 205).

Summit believes, "You never blow your own horn. You let others blow it for you" (p. 312).

"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" (p. 119).

Summitt, P. (2013). **Sum It Up: 1,098 Victories, a Couple of Irrelevant Losses, and a Life in Perspective.** New York: Crown Archetype.



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