The Butler Way

By Jay Hein

John Wooden, left, and Butler basketball coach Tony Hinkle were honored at the Old Timer's dinner at the Claypool Hotel Jan 22, 1966.

ESPN ranks the movie *Hoosiers* as the #1 sports movie of all time. What is it about an old-school coach, a basket hoop on the side of a barn, and underdogs that resonates so deeply in the American soul? The answer to that question can be found in the lives of two iconic Hoosiers: Tony Hinkle and John Wooden.

Tony Hinkle was born in 1899 and was a two-time All-American basketball star at the University of Chicago. After school, he went on to become Butler's coach for a half century. He coached 41 seasons of basketball and remarkably added a combined 69 seasons by coaching football and baseball at the same time. Oh yes, he also taught classes and served as an athletics administrator.

His teams won over 1,000 games on Butler's three different playing fields, but it was on the hardwood that he earned a national reputation and a national championship.

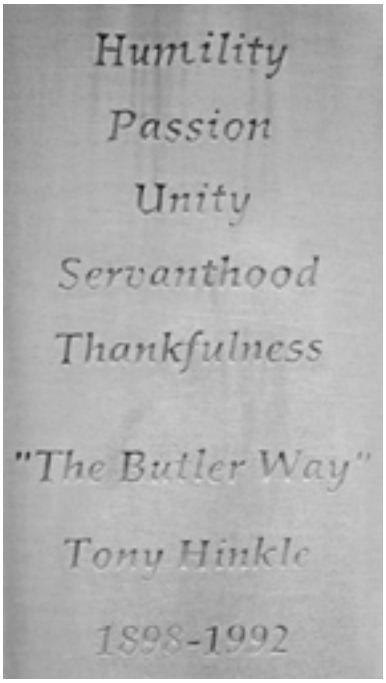
> This formula for success has nothing to do with pick-and-rolls or recruiting blue chip high schoolers.

Visitors to the field house that bears his name—location of both the real-life and Hollywood versions of the 1954 Milan Miracle—can read letters etched in granite that reveal the secret to Hinkle's success. It is a life code originated by Coach Hinkle and known as "The Butler Way."

This formula for success has nothing to do with pick-and-rolls or recruiting blue chip high schoolers. Instead, each time the Butler Bulldogs walk into the locker room they are greeted by a "We not Me" poster and then other signs that feature five keys:

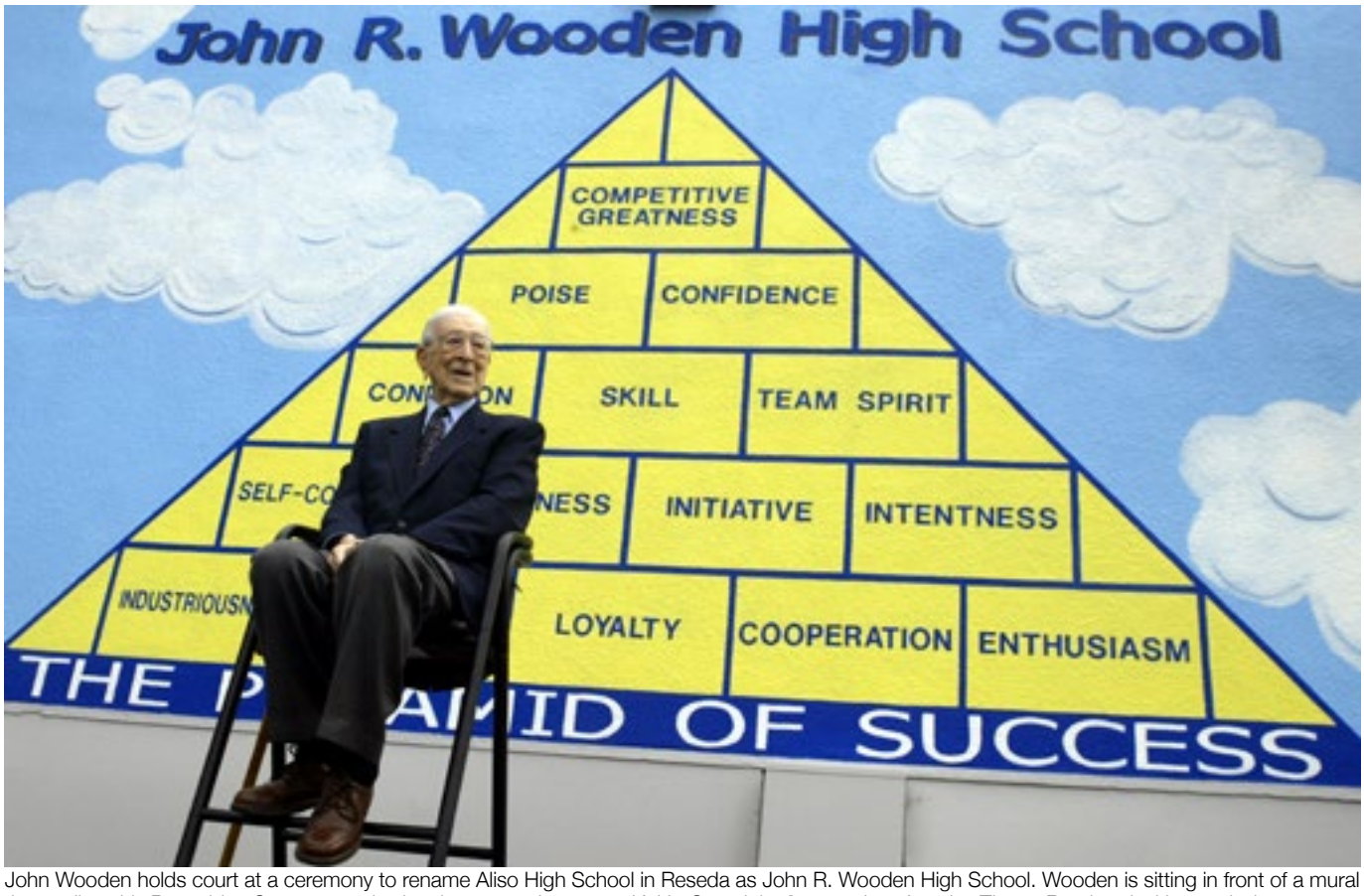
1) Humility – Know who we are, strengths and weaknesses
2) Passion – Do not be lukewarm, commit to excellence
3) Unity – Do not divide our house, team first
4) Servanthood – Make teammates better, lead by giving
5) Thankfulness – Learn from every circumstance

Hinkle's heir, Brad Stevens, took Butler to the 2010 and 2011 Final Four with an under-sized, mid-major team that evoked memories of the '54 Milan team while disposing of the nation's elite programs. During his Final Four press appearances, Stevens explained The Butler Way, "[We're] a values-based organization driven by a mission and a vision . . . I think it begins with selflessness and certainly accountability is very important, humility is very important." He then explained that the term itself is simply a tool for the team to explain to the outside world what truly goes on inside the organization.



One of Coach Hinkle's recruits that got away was a 1928 graduate of Martinsdale (IN) High School named John Wooden. The two would nonetheless become friends after Wooden became national Player of the Year down the road at Purdue. Wooden would later bring his mighty UCLA Bruins to play Butler at the field house, and yet the two shared more than friendship and basketball contests.

Born a native Hoosier, Wooden started his career as a dairy truck dispatcher and later became a high school basketball coach and English teacher. By the end of his career, he had won ten championships in twelve seasons, making him



John Wooden holds court at a ceremony to rename Aliso High School in Reseda as John R. Wooden High School. Wooden is sitting in front of a mural that outlines his Pyramid of Success motivational program. Lawrence K. Ho Copyright © 2005. Los Angeles Times. Reprinted with permission.

"Be true to yourself, help others, make each day your masterpiece, make friendship a fine art, drink deeply from good books – especially the Bible – build a shelter against a rainy day, give thanks for your blessings and pray for guidance every day."

arguably the greatest coach in American sports history. Yet amid the glamour of Tinseltown and against the backdrop of the 1960s cultural revolution, Wooden's coaching style channeled Hinkle's "Butler Way" and the advise his father gave to him while growing up in Indiana: "Be true to yourself, help others, make each day your masterpiece, make friendship a fine art, drink deeply from good books – especially the Bible – build a shelter against a rainy day, give thanks for your blessings and pray for guidance every day."

Above all, the legendary coach considered himself to be a teacher, and as his primary curriculum he used something he called "The Pyramid of Success." The idea was born from his father's wisdom and the experience he garnered during his own career. As a teacher cum coach, Wooden went on to impart his values in one of the greatest basketball players of all time, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar then known as Lew Alcindor.

Alcindor, for his part, joined many of his teammates in initially thinking that the coach's philosophy was a bit corny; after all, they were used to receiving nothing but praise for their talents. Yet from Wooden they heard such things as, "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Character is what you really are; reputation is what you are perceived to be." More importantly, Wooden exhibited his principles by the way he lived his life. The coach never earned more than $40,000 per year nor did he parlay his on-court success into worldly rewards. As an adult, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar adopted many of Wooden's values as his own.

In 2006, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels honored this favorite son with the state's highest award, the Sachem, which recognizes recipients who have achieved greatness and led a virtuous life. Wooden's career obviously demonstrates the former, but his best lessons are memorialized in the latter. Far away from the sound of bouncing basketballs, his legacy lives on through his Pyramid of Success that is still being taught to students, CEOs and soldiers today. His principles, alongside Hinkle's Butler Way, manifest the down-home values that permeate the heart of America.

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Character is what you really are; reputation is what you are perceived to be."