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M211 Intro to Sport Management
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Sports Career and Leader: Tom Coughlin

Introduction:

Growing up sports have always been a huge part of my life. As an athlete, I would love the competition aspect and building my skills to make me the best player I can be. As a fan, I would love to keep up to date with my favorite teams and watch them play as much as possible. Some of my greatest memories are from sports. As a New York Giants fan, I don’t ever remember being happier than when I witnessed the Giants win two Super Bowls Championships. Today, my days as a high school athlete are over but my love for sports is not. As a student pursuing a Sports Management and Marketing Major here at Indiana University Bloomington, I want to keep sports apart of my life and hopefully have a career in the industry someday. Therefore, for my Student Choice Assignment I have decided to research the man who made me love sports as much as I do, the man who had lead my favorite team to those two Super Bowls, and the man who I will always admire, Tom Coughlin.

Name of the Leader:

Tom Coughlin is currently the Executive Vice President of Football Operations for the Jacksonville Jaguars. At the age of 70, Coughlin has worked the majority of his career as a coach and hopes continue influencing football by overseeing all its aspects for the Jaguars. Throughout his journey with a number of different NFL teams he has both failed and succeeded. From this,
he is a man filled with wisdom and experience having been around the game of football longer than most of those working around him in the industry. When one chooses a career path and travels down that path for numerous years, one will only gain more passion and knowledge. Tom Coughlin is a perfect example of one who used his years of experience to find his success. He gained more passion and knowledge not only in the sport of football, but learned how to find success in the sports industry throughout his career.

**Background:**

Tom Coughlin was born and raised in Waterloo, NY, and went on to attend school at Syracuse University receiving a Master’s and Bachelor’s degree in Education. Tom also played wide receiver for the Syracuse Orange football team where he set the single season pass receiving record in 1967. As an athlete Tom had a strong understanding of football and wanted to use his love and knowledge of the sport to influence others. In 1970 he went on to get his first head coaching job at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and after a few years he left to join the staff at Boston College. Coughlin decided to then leave the collegiate level and bring his talents to the NFL. From 1984 to 1990, he worked as a wide receiver’s coach for the Philadelphia Eagles, Green Bay packers, and finally with the New York Giants where he earned his first Super Bowl ring. He then decided to return to Boston College as head coach where he served for five more years.

Tom Coughlin’s success in Boston lead to him being hired by the Jacksonville Jaguars as his first head coaching position in the NFL. He worked for the Jaguars for eight consecutive years and decided to leave the organization in 2003. After taking a year off from football, he was then hired as head coach for the New York Giants. Four years later Tom Coughlin lead the
Giants to the Super Bowl. Although he had already experienced a Super Bowl with the Giants once before, this was his first time as head coach. Unfortunately, their opponent was the New England Patriots who were the first team to ever be undefeated going into the Super Bowl. The Giants miraculously won that game and Coughlin became one of the most respected coaches in the league. Four years later in their 2012 season, the Giants found themselves once again in the Super Bowl, once again facing the New England Patriots, and once again playing in Phoenix, Arizona. The New York Giants were champions this time too, and Coughlin became the oldest coach ever in the NFL to win a Super Bowl. The next few seasons were rough for the Giants where they failed to make the playoffs multiple times. In 2016 Coughlin was forced to resign after his 12 seasons and two Super Bowl victories as head coach for the Giants. Although he was old, other teams in the NFL found great interest and value in Coughlin because of his prior success. He was then hired back to the Jacksonville Jaguars in 2016, where this time he serves as the Executive Vice President of Football Operations.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

Tom Coughlin as a head coach had one overarching job and organizational goal, and that was to win games and with enough wins maybe a Super Bowl. The typical lower level jobs as a coach involves developing players by practicing their skills and touching upon the brim of how deep the sports can go. In the NFL there are coaching staffs that contribute to the support behind a team. For a head coach in the NFL it is their job to lead a staff and a team to compete against other premier coaching staffs and teams.

To truly perform this job of head coach well you must have effective organizational skills because of the vast aspects and details that tie into coaching a football team in the NFL. The
head coach is the leader and it is their job to coordinate and make sure that their team and their players execute and perform the way they see best fit. While a team only plays a football game once a week, the other six days are dedicated to analyzing film and preparing the offence, defense, and special teams for their next opponent. The management processes of directing, controlling, and evaluating is done on a daily basis for a head coach (Table 5.1). To orchestrate all these different factors and prepare roughly fifty men to perform their vision is something that is not done easy. Tom Coughlin not only does all this but he learns from his experiences too.

Everything that makes up this job description can only be performed by someone who has the upmost management and organizational skills (Table 5.1). In an article about the Giants satisfaction with Coughlin, Ian O’Conner recalls his first encounter with Coughlin in 1992 where Tom said, "I can pull stuff out of drawers and tell you what I'm doing every minute of every day for a whole calendar year." (O’Conner). He rose to be premier at what he does and through his determined work ethic that turned him into a coach who can lead, inspire, and motivate a team to perform at their best.

Today Tom Coughlin has the same goal as before, and that is to win games for the Jaguars. As the Executive Vice President of Football Operations, he puts all his admired organizational skills to good use and reviews a broader scope of a team and the game. While he no longer coordinates the teams play by play, he still works to put the most effective and efficient team on the field and be successful. This involves the management process of staffing and recruiting new players and, making sure all the coaches and staff are doing their job, communicate with players and staff members, and things of that nature (Table 5.5). I guess you can say he still coaches but only this time he’s not on the sideline.
Leadership:

Tom Coughlin is a strong and stern leader. He is someone who believes in hard work and gives one hundred percent effort at all times. He always made sure his practices were difficult and his players were competing fully. Tom would motivate his players to be their best in any circumstance. He always kept the vision and goal of the super bowl in the back of his player’s minds and never let them forget how all the pain and hard work is worth it (Table 5.5). Some thought his tactics were absurd, like for example he would fine players for being two minutes early to a meeting because he made it a rule to be five minutes early, or like how he would heckle players for not wearing the right colored socks.

While his tactics were considerably harsh, they always worked and kept his teams in line. However, one thing that makes Coughlin such an effective coach is his ability to listen and adapt. A characteristic of a successful leader is someone who trusts their subordinates and invites dissent (Table 5.5). One time the Giants team captain Michael Strahan had received a fine and began disputing with his Tom and told him, “Coach, your losing this whole team.” (Mochari). After that Coughlin understood his players concern and eased up on his rules and fines, and he showed the team that he cared about them.

The one thing that truly makes Tom Coughlin a great leader is his contagious hope and belief in his team and his players. He coached to win, even when the games didn’t matter. Any successful leader must encourage the risk to go for it all (Table 5.5). For example, when the Giants played the Patriots in the last game of the 2007 regular season, the game had no importance since both teams were already headed to the playoffs. As a successful leader he kept his cool and never stopped fighting (Table 5.5). Coughlin played all his starting player’s the whole game and motivated and lead them all he could the best team in the league. Even though
the Giants ended up losing against the undefeated Patriots by three points, they were proud of themselves. In an article from Inc.com by Liam Mochari recalls the Giants quarterback Eli Manning saying after the game, “I never saw a locker room so upbeat after a loss because we played so well, did some good things and hung in there in a game where we didn't have to play. We wanted to. We wanted to come out and play well, and we did that.” (Mochari). This is the kind of morale and infectious optimism that Tom Coughlin generates and it played a major role in the Giants Super Bowl victory that season.

Tom Coughlin was the best thing that had ever happened to the Giants. He knows how to lead and care about a team like no one else. A lot of his players looked up to him as a father figure because he was always fully dedicated to them as if they were his own blood. One of his players ended up marrying Tom Coughlin’s daughter and is now privileged enough to call him father-in-law.

Conclusion:

Although I am undecided on the career I wish to pursue, if being a head coach in the NFL is someday my set goal then I would want resemble Tom Coughlin in my own and best way as much as possible. I would find opportunities within Indiana Athletics and strive for internships with NFL teams. I would absorb as much information as I can from my experiences. I would begin coaching for a high school team to develop my skills. And lastly, I would try to work my way up to hopefully someday land the head coaching position of my NFL favorite team, the New York Giants. I know I would face tons of challenges throughout this journey and once I reached the position. Challenges like failure and loss games, like people telling you that you’re not good enough, and like people constantly trying to sway you and tell you what to do. Once being head
coach for the Giants it will only be worse and more amplified. However, if I resemble the management and leadership qualities of Tom Coughlin then I know that I will be successful too.

I have three important things that I have taken away from my research and study of Tom Coughlin’s career and famous Super Bowl victories. First is that once I find something I love and a career I am passionate about, I must to go for it full throttle and never stop trying to reach the top. Tom Coughlin never stopped doing what he loves and even at the age of 70 he’s still going strong. Second, I must always be fair. Tom Coughlin understood it as a player and exercised it as a coach. I know that as a coach or any career, if I want my players to give me their all and work their hardest, I must give them my all and work my hardest in return. Lastly, I am taking away Tom Coughlin’s outstanding work ethic. I know that I can be successful through the management, organizational, and leadership skills that lead the New York Giants to two Super Bowl victories, and some of my greatest memories as a kid.
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