

**"Read it, learn from it, and then apply the principles to your life!"**  
**Stephen M. R. Covey**, *The New York Times* bestselling author

# Team of Destiny

How the NC State Wolfpack Won the 1983 NCAA Title  
...and How You and Your Team Can Choose to Be Champions



**Thurl Bailey**  
with Ken Shelton

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# INTRODUCTION

**A**s former basketball players and coaches—and NCAA National Champions—we know a lot about achieving and winning. However, we also know what can be learned from failure and losing, the flip side of the same coin of competition. And so, in this book, we openly share our life and court experiences with one clear goal in mind: To help you win in your field and achieve your goals and dreams.

“Hold fast to dreams,” wrote African-American poet Langston Hughes, “for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.” We all want to fly, holding fast to our dreams.

## **MY FATHER’S FINAL STORIES**

On December 13, 2016, I sat with my then 83-year-old dad at his home in Nash County, North Carolina. It would be my last day on earth with him. I and my siblings had been with him for several days before, and we were all very aware of why it was important for us to be there together. At one point during this time, he spoke with each of his three sons and his two daughters, in essence to deliver his final advice to us collectively and individually, before he moved on to his next journey. He was very coherent and talkative when we arrived and seemed calm and collected for a man who had lived a full life and knew he didn’t have a lot of time left.

He put us all at ease, sensing that his children would have a tough time coming to grips with the inevitable. As we sat around his bed, he seemed so lively and excited that he had a captive audience—something he hadn’t had

with all his children for many years—and so he began taking us on a journey back in time to dates and places we had never been. Sure, we had recollections of some of the stories, but it was different this time. We were taking this final trip with him together as a family. Although we had lost our mom, his wife several years before, it was as if she was along for the ride too. He would smile each time he mentioned her name in a story. We always knew it was true love.

Because of that moment, I came to truly appreciate the importance of life stories. Our personal stories can pierce the hearts and minds of others and change us.

Here are six reasons why I think our personal life stories matter:

- Stories have universal appeal
- Stories help us understand our place in this world
- Stories help us learn how to act in specific situations
- Stories help us shape our perspective of this world
- Stories help us understand others' perspectives
- Stories pass down vital knowledge and morals to our posterity and legacies

## **WHY TELL OUR STORY NOW?**

Some might think it strange that my teammates, coaches and I would retell our stories now in 2020 of that unfathomable 1983 season. There are several media accounts of that time in basketball history. But to my knowledge there is not a book written by the collective team. No one has really told *the stories—and backstories*—this way, from a front-row-seat perspective.

These stories and backstories are so important, especially today as we struggle to form championship teams of diversity and destiny. This is why

that particular time in our lives is still relevant and vital to today's dreamers.

I've been pondering a book for a while. Parts of me love talking about that 1983 team and other parts are too painful to reflect on—such as losing our coach, Jim Valvano, to cancer 10 years after that storied season, losing a loving soul like teammate Lorenzo Charles several years later and a few others over the years. I elected not to attend their funerals, not because I lacked respect. It was just the opposite. I decided to celebrate their lives in my own private and special way. Few things have hit me with such devastation over my almost 60 years of existence.

When I lost my parents a few years ago, I was blessed to have been prepared. I was with my dad when he took his last breath and I spent a week with my mom before she passed away. But I wasn't ready to lose a man, Coach Jim Valvano, who had such an amazing effect on me as a person, as an athlete, as a friend. Knowing what I knew about him and his persona, I believed that Jim Valvano could overcome anything, because of how he carried himself, how he taught, how he convinced us that any goal was attainable with the right talent and team.



**1983 NORTH CAROLINA STATE WOLFPACK**

**National Champions  
Atlantic Coast Conference Champions**

**Front Row:** Alvin Battle, Thurl Bailey, Sidney Lowe, Dereck Whittenburg, Quinton Leonard, Harold Thompson  
**Second Row:** George McClain, Walt Densmore, Dinky Proctor, Cozell McQueen, Lorenzo Charles, Mike Warren, Terry Gannon, Ernie Myers  
**Back Row:** Manager Gary Bryant, Head Trainer Craig Sink, Assistant Coach Ed McClean, Assistant Coach Ray Martin, Head Coach Jim Valvano, Assistant Coach Tom Abatemarco, Graduate Assistant Coach Max Perry, Manager Steve Whitt, Assistant Trainer Jim Rehbock

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Pos.	Name	Height	Year	Hometown
F	Thurl Bailey	6 ft 11 in	Sr	Cedar Heights, Maryland
F	Alvin Battle	6 ft 8 in	Jr	Rocky Mount, N Carolina
F	Lorenzo Charles	6 ft 7 in	So	Brooklyn, New York
F	Walt Densmore	6 ft 7 in	Fr	Tuscaloosa, Alabama
F	Tommy DiNardo	6 ft 7 in	Jr	Jamesville, N Carolina
G	Terry Gannon	6 ft 1 in	So	Joliet, Illinois
F	Quinton Leonard	6 ft 8 in	Jr	Louisburg, N Carolina
G	Sidney Lowe	6 ft 0 in	Sr	Washington, D.C.
G	George McClain	6 ft 0 in	So	Rocky Mount, N Carolina
C	Cozell McQueen	6 ft 11 in	So	Bennettsville, S Carolina
G	Ernie Myers	6 ft 4 in	Fr	Bronx, New York
F	Walter Proctor	6 ft 8 in	So	Somerset, New Jersey
F	Harold Thompson	6 ft 6 in	Fr	Raeford, North Carolina
F	Mike Warren	6 ft 6 in	So	Raleigh, North Carolina
G	Dereck Whittenburg	6 ft 1 in	Sr	Glenarden , Maryland

#### Head coach

Jim Valvano

#### Assistant coaches

Ray Martin

Tom Abatemarco

Ed McLean

## HOW TO BELIEVE AND ACHIEVE

However, the focus of this book isn't centered on the championship game that made us famous, or about presidential visits, or even about Jimmy V and his talent as a coach. It's more about *learning how to believe and achieve*, as told through the eyes of myself, my teammates and coaches, and about how to *use life's experiences to help others win their game of life*.

A person doesn't have to be president or win a national championship to understand that *success is as much about the journey as it is the end result*. In a small way, maybe this book will allow others to come along for the

trip. Hopefully, just like in our championship team, readers learn something about the important journeys we all undertake.

The original premise of this book was to interview each player of the North Carolina State Wolfpack's 1983 NCAA Championship Team, to document their journey. From those who were players on that team to others who worked closely with us and played a valuable role in helping us reach the ultimate goal. But after the interviews, I felt that it wasn't enough—the book needed to be less about us and more about you—how you can become a champion at whatever you choose to be and do.

Each individual had some extraordinary experiences that led them serendipitously to be a part of an unforgettable experience. Jim Valvano was an amazing leader and a visionary coach ahead of his time. There are many who came to know about our championship journey through the sports documentary *Survive and Advance*, that debuted on ESPN several years ago. The documentary was a wonderful depiction of our journey, but now readers have a chance to get to know much more about the characters behind the championship and the people who made it happen. Everyone has a personal story or journey and I believe there's much we can learn from each other. Although many know about our championship, few know about the individuals who helped make it happen. My hope is that as you journey through this book, that the words within these pages resonate with you.

## **REUNION AT THE WHITE HOUSE**

As members of North Carolina State's 1983 national championship basketball team, we still try to meet every couple of years since that unforgettable March and April, to renew friendships, reminisce and acknowledge what we have learned in the ensuing years.

But each time we engaged in our storytelling, there was a sense of absence, partly due to the loss of revered teammates and coaches, but also

because of the absence of something that seemed to leave our championship celebration incomplete.... an official visit to the White House to meet the President of the United States.

We finally did get there in 2016, when President Barack Obama invited us to the East Wing for a ceremony that was 33 years in the making. It was worth the wait.

I told a writer at the time that our visit was “majestic” and “surreal.” I’m not even sure there were enough words to describe it, though “overdue” might be another one.

I had privately taken on the responsibility to initiate the effort to get us an invitation to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, primarily because I was from the D.C. area and had worked as a congressional page for three years during the summers after graduating from high school.

It’s not like the powers-that-be had totally ignored us. The 1982-83 season culminated in a live video feed with then President Ronald Reagan, which at that time was wonderful and somewhat technologically groundbreaking in itself. But it wasn’t up-close-and-personal. We had missed meeting with the President because NC State’s athletic department officials were concerned that we might somehow violate NCAA recruiting rules by appearing to have the President’s endorsement. So that’s where the matter sat for decades.

If it doesn’t seem that politics have dramatically and rapidly changed, consider this: When I asked Utah Senator Orrin Hatch in 2016 if he could help get us an audience with the President, he said he thought he could, even though Hatch was a high-ranking Republican and President Obama a Democrat. Senator Hatch asked me to write a personal letter of request and promised, “I’ll walk it right into President Obama’s office.” So I put pen to

paper and wrote to President Obama in hopes that he might grant our long-standing wish:

Dear Mr. President:

In 1983 our North Carolina State University men's basketball team, coached by the late Jim Valvano (Jimmy V), beat the University of Houston Cougars for the NCAA Championship. Because of players like Hakeem Olajuwon and Clyde Drexler, the Cougars were the heavy favorites to win. As a college basketball fan yourself, I'm sure you can recall the significance of not only what that championship meant to our team, but also the message it embodied to the world that, with strong determination, the underdog can achieve great success.

It was an incredible journey for a group of young men who committed to the philosophy of a young enthusiastic coach to, "Never Ever Give Up." I encourage you, Mr. President, if you have not already, to watch the award-winning sports documentary, "Survive and Advance" which chronicles our miracle run.

With that said, the one thing that has eluded us for these many years is a chance for the members of our team to visit the White House by invitation of the President of the United States. To my knowledge, we may be the only NCAA championship basketball team to not be officially invited. My hope is that you will grant an opportunity to a team who truly embodied the definition of what sports should represent. We were, as producer Jonathan Hock penned it in the documentary, "A team of destiny, led by a once-in-a-generation coach, that capped the last true golden age of college

basketball.” But even more than that, our story was one of hope, commitment, vision, and how a team of individuals with a true purpose could achieve the ultimate goal.

Over the years we have lost a few members of our basketball family, including our coach Jimmy V and teammate Lorenzo Charles who scored the championship game’s winning shot. However, every year we all try to find time to reunite in Raleigh, N.C., to honor their memories and carry on the legacy of that season. I hope that you will seriously consider and grant us an opportunity to visit you in our Nation’s Capital.

Shortly after, I got a call from a White House representative. Soon we were in D.C., meeting with the President. Whether or not a person agrees with certain administrative policies, being greeted by the Commander in Chief is special.

## **THE POINT OF THIS BOOK**

You have agency, meaning you have a choice. You can choose to become what you most want to become—a dream that is in harmony with your unique set of talents, gifts, abilities and characteristics. And with some personal discipline, along with some training and coaching, you and your team may have your title shot and your meeting with the President.

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