

Selecting Your

*Dream*



# TEAM

**BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING AN OLYMPIC-CALIBER BOARD**

*By Fred Laughlin and Henry DeLozier*



In 1992, the USA basketball team defeated Croatia 117–85, winning the Olympic gold medal. The score was the closest any opponent would come to the group of US players known as the Dream Team, which included rebounder Patrick Ewing, ball handler John Stockton, and scorer Michael Jordan. The Dream Team operated as a unit, with each player applying his individual skill to the team's objective.

It may be a stretch to compare the election of a club's board of directors with the selection of an Olympic basketball team. Yet, while there's no gold medal for those elected, the principles of assembling a club board are not so different from those US Olympic Coach Mike Krzyzewski will employ when he selects the 2016 squad. In this article we describe those principles and share thoughts on applying them to a club's board election process.

### PRINCIPLE 1: BE INTENTIONAL— DEFINE YOUR TEAM

How would you describe the types of people you want on your board?

We like to use three categories of criteria:

1. Required characteristics
2. Desirable characteristics
3. Desirable experience/skill sets

**Category I: Required characteristics** are just that—required. Your bylaws may contain some necessary criteria, such as a candidate being an equity member, being a member for a certain number of years, or having served as a member of a committee. But we like to see the board expand the list of essentials to include qualitative features such as, for example, a candidate being known as a person of trust and integrity, a team player. Although such qualitative features are hard to define, they are the most important of the required characteristics.

Team players don't come with personal agendas; they listen to the views of others; and they foster the collegial culture you want on your board. Don't worry about the lack of a concrete definition of a team player. Your nominating committee will know it when they see it.

**Category II: Desired characteristics.** You've heard that a club board should mirror its membership, and here is where you make it happen. Club memberships are typically diverse, and you want your board discussions to benefit from that diversity, i.e., from a full range of perspectives. Decide which perspectives would be valuable on your governing body (different age groups, different genders, different interests in club activities, etc.). You may want to be specific in terms of the number of board members in a particular category, e.g., at least one from each age group, or you may simply direct the



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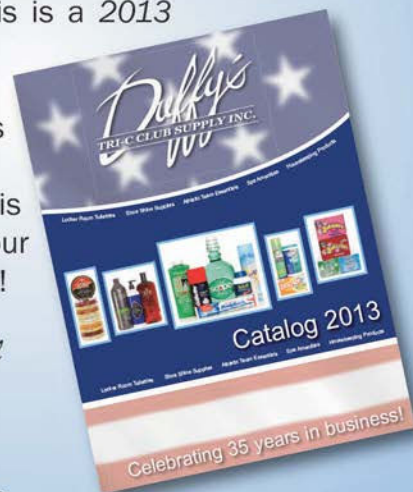
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nominating committee to take the makeup of the board into account as it evaluates candidates. Be careful here, however. You are seeking perspectives, *not* representatives. You don't need board members who consider it their responsibility to represent a particular age group or activity. Such an attitude leads to factions and cliques. Although you want your board discussions and decisions to benefit from the different perspectives around the table, you want decisions to be made in the interest of the club overall. Debate as many; govern as one.

**Category III: Desirable experience/skill sets.** Along with the multiple perspectives you want at your board meetings, you also want multiple skills and expertise—perhaps an accountant, an attorney, an engineer, a real estate expert, and members from other professions. The list

will depend on your type of club and the kinds of issues your board and club may be facing.

Once you have completed the criteria under each of these categories, put them in writing. Develop a board profile (see sidebar) and instruct your nominating committee to honor it during its process of selecting candidates. Remember that Category I traits are the only ones required of each candidate. The characteristics in Categories II and III are desirable, but not mandatory. You may not be able to check off every item in Categories II and III. But your board can direct the nominating committees to try. Instruct it to ensure that all candidates possess Category I characteristics and to put forth its best efforts to select candidates with perspectives listed in Category II and expertise/skill sets in Category III.

**PRINCIPLE 2: FORM AN INDEPENDENT AND OBJECTIVE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Assembling a nominating committee that is independent and objective is a goal that is far easier to set than it is to accomplish. If your bylaws dictate the process used in forming your nominating committee, then you are bound to it (unless you can amend the process). It is difficult to define an "ideal" process for selecting nominating committee members, but our general advice is to keep it simple. Clubs devise complicated schemes for populating nominating committees in an attempt to achieve independence and objectivity. But these processes are often overengineered and add an unwanted level of complexity to the election process.

The most efficient approach is to select the chair of the nominating committee based upon the highest standards of integrity and impartiality. Allow him or her to

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use the same standards to choose the other committee members, and present them to the board for approval. While this may be the most efficient method of forming a nominating committee, most clubs would rule it out as politically incorrect and undemocratic. It places too much power in one person. So, most clubs install methods, such as having a nominating committee election by the members, using a lottery to pick committee members, using the immediate past president to chair the committee, or doing it one of many other ways. Your approach will depend on your club's culture and the level of trust your members have in the board. Whatever process you choose for selecting your nominating committee, ensure that it includes a filter that tests for independence and objectivity. And also be sure that your nominating committee is committed to using the board profile you have established as part of honoring Principle 1 above.

**PRINCIPLE 3: USE AN UNCONTESTED ELECTION PROCESS**

The third principle in building a Dream Team is to conduct an uncontested election, i.e., have the nominating committee select a slate of candidates equal to the number of board positions to be filled. No election process is completely devoid of politics, but uncontested elections keep the damage brought on by politics to a minimum. A contested election will frustrate your attempts to build a Dream Team. Your new board members will be elected on their popularity, their affiliation with a particular group, or some basis other than the merits posted on your board profile. If your bylaws call for contested elections, try to change them. Even if you have an uncontested election process, your bylaws may allow for nominations by petition signed by a certain number of your members. If so, incorporate two features into your election process:

- Ensure that your ballot distinguishes between the nominees from the nominating committee and the nominees from petitions.
- Require voters to vote for the number of candidates equal to the vacant slots on the board.

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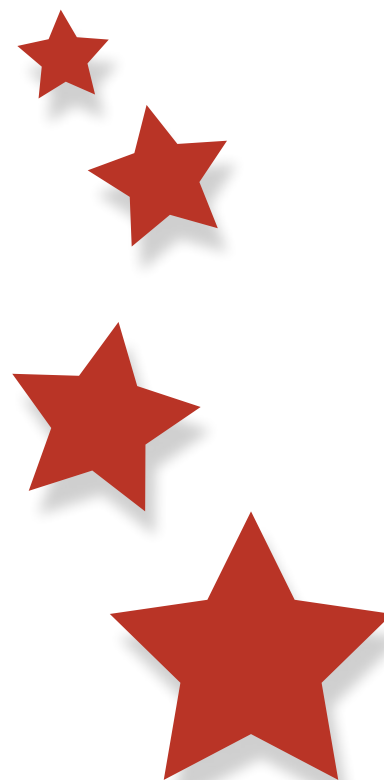
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If you include these two features and have honored the first two principles in this article, your members will elect those candidates nominated by the nominating committee.

Calling your board a Dream Team may seem like hyperbole, but the principles and practices described above are attainable. If you don't define what you want your board to be, you won't achieve it. Decide what your ideal board looks like, write it down, select a nominating committee that will honor the board profile, and watch your Dream Team develop and serve your members with distinction. 🌟

**About the authors:**

*Fred Laughlin is a consultant specializing in club governance. Henry DeLozier is a principal with Global Golf Advisors, which specializes in providing club managers with strategic guidance and best management practices. Between them, they have worked with more than 200 club managers and boards. Both DeLozier and Laughlin teach governance and strategic thinking at Business Management Institute (BMI) V. They can be reached at HDeLozier@globalgolfadvisors.com and flaughlinaz@mac.com, respectively.*



## SAMPLE BOARD PROFILE FOR SELECTING NEW DIRECTORS\*

The three categories below reflect the board's perception of the ideal configuration of its membership. The profile is "aspirational" in that it is rarely achieved at every point. However, it serves as the primary reference point for the nominating process. The nominating committee is instructed to use the profile to inform its process in selecting new board members.

**I. A candidate must:**

- A. Be a member in good standing for at least three years
- B. Be widely known as a person of integrity
- C. Have demonstrated the ability to work as a team member
- D. Have served on at least one club committee for at least one year

**II. We desire a board that reflects multiple perspectives in terms of:**

- A. Type of interests and club activities
- B. Gender
- C. Type of memberships
- D. Age group

**III. In addition to meeting the criteria in Category I and helping the board reflect the perspectives in Category II, the board seeks members who possess the traits listed.**

OUR IDEAL BOARD PROFILE WOULD HAVE AT LEAST ONE PERSON IN EACH CATEGORY BELOW	DIRECTORS WHO HAVE	PROSPECTS WHO HAVE
A. Experience on other nonprofit boards		
B. Legal expertise		
C. Financial expertise		
D. Hospitality expertise		
E. Expertise in technology or social media		
F. Experience as a business leader		
G. Expertise in real estate and local zoning regulations		
H. Expertise in construction and building maintenance issues		

\* The entries in this sample board profile are for illustration purposes only. Each club will have its own set of mandatory and desired criteria.