**Molly Fletcher:** Welcome to Game Changers with Molly Fletcher, where we take you behind the scenes with peak performers to learn what makes them tick and discover how you can apply their lessons to your life. I'm your host, Molly Fletcher.

[00:00:30] Today's guest has set the standard for success in college basketball. In his 32 years at the University of Connecticut, Geno Auriemma has led the Huskies to 11 national titles, 18 final for six perfect seasons and 45 conference titles. Under his leadership, his team set unbelievable winning streaks of 90 games and 111 games straight and won a record four straight national titles [00:01:00] from 2013 to 2016. One thing's for sure all he does is win. Entering the 2017 and '18 season, Geno was just nine wins shy of the 1000 mark. On today's episode, Geno shares how he built a championship culture at UConn, the unique challenges that come with unrivaled success and what he looks for when evaluating talent. And does he ever get sick of winning? [00:01:30] You'll have to listen to find out. Here's my conversation with Geno.

So Geno, you have won an unreal number of games, national championships, Olympic gold medals. You've coached some of the most unbelievable players. How do you define success?

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, the sad thing is [00:02:00] in today's world, success is how much have you won? How much money? How do you keep score stature that you've reached in life, whatever the case may be? I really believe that success ultimately is are you comfortable with the way you do things? And are you comfortable with the approach that you take with the people that your success [00:02:30] is dependent on? Are you able to prepare, whether it's employees or players or anybody else? Are you able to prepare them for what they need to be prepared for? And then after that, it's out of your control. That's the one thing that I really learned later on, obviously that this idea of [00:03:00] thinking that you, because you're in charge that you can control the outcome of everything that you can make people be whatever you want them to be, that you can dictate the course of events. That's a recipe for just misery.

So I've gotten myself to the point where as long as I feel like I'm comfortable with my approach, I'm comfortable with the way I deal with things, I'm comfortable with the level of preparation that I've tried to put [00:03:30] everybody through, then you know what? The rest is out of my hands.

**Molly Fletcher:** So let them go out there and do what they do once you've prepared them. It's about the process is what I'm hearing you say a little bit too.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah. You've got to trust something. You have to trust the people that you work with, because if you don't trust them, intuitively they know that and they really can't perform at their best if they feel like there's not a certain level of trust there.

**Molly Fletcher:** Well, and I think you said the word [00:04:00] trust, and I think one of the most unbelievable things about what you've done is you've been able to sustain success at UConn in college athletics, which means you get a new group of girls every year and your teams change year to year, and you have four years to bring out and make the best and greatest impact with a changing and ever evolving group of girls. You talk about trust, how do you build trust in a short period of time?

**Geno Auriemma:** That's a big key, [00:04:30] obviously. I think it starts for us anyway during the actual recruiting process. So if we're involved with a couple of kids and we're trying to get them to want to play at UConn, I've got to give them a reason other than, "Hey, if you come here, you'll win championships," because everybody's telling them that. And yeah, we can say, well, we have 11 of them, so you can be more [00:05:00] certain here, but in the end, I don't think people make decisions based on that. So I think you've got to get them to trust you and that you are going to have their best interests at heart, that what their goals are, are going to be what you're all about. And they can tell that, they can tell whether you're in this for your own personal gain or whether you're in this because you're trying to help them reach their goals. And that's one of the things that [00:05:30] I think we've done a really good job of.

We say, "Look, you can trust us that we're always going to do..." Obviously, we're always going to do what's in the best interest of our team. However, you have to understand that in the end, if you do the things that we say are important, if you trust us and you do those things, you will get what you want out of this based on what your talent is. And we have some credibility there, because people will say, "Well, you have 11 national championships, why do you keep doing this?" [00:06:00] You're right, I don't need anymore. And is one more going to change my life? It's not. So you keep doing it because there's a group of kids may be coming in, like you said, people change in your program that are coming to you saying, "Hey, coach, can you do for me what you've done for all these other great players?" And now you feel like the sense of obligation. "Yeah. You know what? I think I can. So you need to trust me that I'm going to do that. And I need to trust you that you're going to do your part."

**Molly Fletcher:** And so Geno, do you do that? [00:06:30] I would imagine in your first couple of years of coaching, it was a different process for you. You could do it with your words certainly, but the track record wasn't there. Now you've got a track record that's unbelievable. Other kids can look at kids you've put out and see the success. So how did you build trust early on in your career with people where you didn't maybe have the track record per se? And then how do you do it now? Beyond the words, as you're sitting in their living room, what are some of the other things that you do? Are there some processes, some [00:07:00] procedures, if you will, that you do with them?

**Geno Auriemma:** Again, it always depends on what you have to offer. So let's say for sake of argument, let's say my first coaching job, I was an assistant at the University of Virginia. Well, if I walk into your house and I say, listen I'm assistant coach at the University of Virginia, right away you don't care if I'm a robber. The fact that I'm talking about the University of Virginia makes you right away [00:07:30] go, "Wow, that's pretty cool, that's a great school, it's a great location, an amazing environment. The tradition of excellence there as a university is as great as any place in America. Wow." So there's instant credibility. Now, they just have to like you a little bit and you can get them to go to school there.

Well, now when I get the job at Connecticut, I have none of that. So the only thing I do have is me. So now I have to talk to kids and [00:08:00] say, "Listen, right now we have nothing." And you're honest with them. "Look, right now, we have nothing. I can't promise you anything. I have no idea, because I'm in this for the very first time." So you're sitting in a kid's living room and you're, first of all, identifying what kind of kids are receptive to this message. They're normal down there with kids that are not looking for some exotic things that you don't have and they're not good enough. They're not the best players.

So I say, "Listen, I'm not anywhere near [00:08:30] where I want to be, but I think with your help, we can get there and I need you to help me get there and I will help you. And together we can build this thing. So I'm trusting you to help us build it," which to those kids mean a lot. "Wow. Here's a person coming in telling me I can be at the ground level building something. Who knows what it would be?" And I'm given an opportunity to play division one college basketball. And I had a little bit of credibility, because I coached there, [00:09:00] Virginia. So it wasn't like I was coming out of nowhere. But back then, it was more about the promise about being good.

**Molly Fletcher:** To be a part of building something special. Yeah.

**Geno Auriemma:** Correct.

**Molly Fletcher:** When we think about college athletics and putting new kids on the court and in a team environment every year where it's fresh, how do you get players to embrace their roles? Well, understanding that their role could change at any time, how do you do that?

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, it's getting harder, [00:09:30] because kids today are so influenced by so many outside forces. When I started, kids didn't have a lot of access to a lot of information.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah. Now there's social media and all these other influences. They're getting just chatted out all the time.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah. So now they're being bombarded by all kinds of stuff. So for me now it's more of a matter of, "Okay, here's our approach to you. If you come to Connecticut, [00:10:00] these are the things that are possible." And you can outline for them, "These are the things that are possible." And the kid will say, "Well, what's my role going to be?" And the minute that a kid asked me that a red flag goes up. Or a kid says, "Well, what position am I going to play?" That's another red flag. And then the kid says, "Well, you have so and so and so and so and so and so on your team, where do I fit in?" Then another red flag goes up.

So all of these questions that a kid would ask [00:10:30] means we're probably not going to recruit that kid, we're probably not going to get that kid, because my approach is always to answer those questions with another question. So we're recruiting a kid and the kid says, "Well, coach, if I come to Connecticut, what would my role be in your program?" And I'll say, "I have no idea. Why don't you tell me what your role should be or you want it to be or you think it could be?" And the kid says, "Well..." I say, "Well, you don't know that right now, do you? Because you don't [00:11:00] know when you get to college, how good you really are. So if you want me to tell you what your role is going to be, and then you get there and you can function in that role, you know what? Then we both lose. So why don't you come to Connecticut and show me how big of a role or what role you want to play in our program?"

**Molly Fletcher:** I love that. Yeah, totally. But I'm thinking about people that are listening that are in a corporate world that are trying to hire people who ask them similar questions. To me, your approach is just awesome and applicable to business people in [00:11:30] any industry.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah, like you said, if I'm hiring you, if I'm talking to you or somebody is hiring me and they say, "Well, what are you looking for? Well, I'm looking for a job where I can do A, B and C. Okay. We think your role can be A, B and C." And that person comes on board. And they now are put in a situation where that's what they're being asked to do. Well, what if they can only do A and B? Well, now you've got to readjust their role. [00:12:00] What if they can do A, B, C, D and E? Well, now they have a huge role and you got to be prepared and they got to be prepared. Well, they're going to prepare themselves obviously, if they're that talented. That now they're going to jump over some people that you just hired recently, which you just recruited recently. So it all depends on what do you have to offer? It's not like, I'm their coach. It's not what I'm offering you, it's what do you have to offer us once you get here?

**Molly Fletcher:** That's [00:12:30] good stuff. That is good stuff. You talk about A, B, C, D E F, and one of your colleagues said once, quote, "Geno wins because he makes the best players better versions of themselves." And so you do though. In my opinion, in my judgment, you create D, E and F. You help them unlock that. How have you been able to do that without sacrificing a team culture, without compromising what appears from the outside looking in to [00:13:00] be a remarkable and connected group of girls?

**Geno Auriemma:** Again, it's not as easy as it once was. It was never easy, but it's more challenging now than it was in that kids come out of high school now and they have this vision of themselves based on what their parents want, based upon what peer pressure says or what their view now is of what being a star is. So my approach has always been, " [00:13:30] Listen, everybody has to be a little bit selfish. And the great players, and I'm sure the best performers in every company are selfish. That's how they got to be where they are. They want more for themselves than most people do. Or they're willing to do things sometimes to get more things, to get more recognition, to get more money, to get up a promotion, whatever the case may be."

So my team in my recruiting, I'll say, let's say I got Breanna Stewart or Maya Moore [00:14:00] or Diana Taurasi, iconic players, right? And I'll say, "Well, listen, you have to be a little bit selfish. If you're not, you're never going to be great." Now, that selfishness has to come within the context of our team. So, number one, you need to be selfish. In what way? Well, you have to want to win every game, you have to want to be undefeated, you have to want to dominate as a team. Why? Well, because if our team wins every single game, then the people that are in charge of picking [00:14:30] who are the best players in the country are going to go, "Well, let's go to that team. They don't ever lose."

So they come to our team and they'll go, "All right, this team never loses. Why? Well, see that girl right there, they get 20 points, 12 rebounds and five assists every night." Okay, that kid's first team All-America, not because of the 20, 12 and five, but because we won every game. So we want you to shine, we want you to be a star within the context of what our team [00:15:00] is trying to do, not the other way around. I want to be a star and I hope our team wins. And if I'm a star on a losing team, well, then guess what? You're just a good player on a bad team and no one will ever know whether you can be a good player on a good team.

**Molly Fletcher:** Which is a heck of a lot more fun in it.

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, the people that you want recruiting you at the next level, whether it's a pro team or whether it's the biggest and the best business, they're a winning team. And they want to know, can [00:15:30] you function in a winning team, where other people in the team are as good as you and not everybody can, but they can function great when they're the star of the show and everything is built around them. Now, all of a sudden, you get to a corporation or you get to an environment, a team wise where you... And that's one of the beauties of our program is that you come out of high school and you say, "Well, I'm a first team All-America. I was player of the year in my state. I was Gatorade player of the year." Okay, great. Now you show, but you look around, you go, "Damn, there's nine [00:16:00] more of those guys look just like me."

**Molly Fletcher:** Exactly.

**Geno Auriemma:** Exactly. Now, what are you going to do?

**Molly Fletcher:** Take me into the living room with a conversation with a kid who is that kid that's, that special, but they're going to be in an environment with nine others that are as good as them and as well respected in the big cheese in their town and all that stuff. How do you get them to make that shift with regards to really appreciating the value of a team? And maybe it's a gut thing, Geno, I'm not sure, but how do you know if a kid who's a stud [00:16:30] on a program that's not that good, but they came out of a community and they're a total stud and then they get there, how do you know that they can gel?

**Geno Auriemma:** You cross your fingers a lot of times with these high school kids, because you don't know. You can take a guess and you can take an educated guess. And when you've been doing it for 40 years, you know what one looks like and you know what one sounds like and what it feels like. And I use examples. I'll say, "I know what people are telling you." And they'll be like, "Well..." I say, "I know [00:17:00] that this school, this school and this school is going to come in and go, why do you want to go to Connecticut? You're never going to be playing 35 minutes a game. They've got this kid, this kid, this kid, where do you fit in there? There's not. You can come here, we'll build a whole program around you."

And I'll give an example and I say, "Well, when we were recruiting Diana Taurasi..." So she was the number one player in the country coming out of high school. And somebody said to her, "What's wrong with you? Why are you going to Connecticut? [00:17:30] You know they have Sue Bird, Svetlana Abrosimova and Shea Ralph. Those are three starters and they're all back for another two years, at least. And their first team All-America and they all play your position. Why are you going there?" And she goes, "If they didn't have those guys, I wouldn't want to go there."

**Molly Fletcher:** Nice.

**Geno Auriemma:** She says, "Where else would I want to be, but where the best players are so I can challenge myself against the best players every day?"

**Molly Fletcher:** That's the mindset you want. Yeah.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah. So when I tell the kids [00:18:00] that they're like, "Yeah." And then what's funny, I use another one because my daughter was in the theater, is in the theater still. I say, "Listen, there's a lot of great programs for you out there. There's a lot of great coaches. And if you go someplace else, that doesn't mean that you're a bad kid or a bad player or you're crazy, just means that was the right fit for you." I get that. So I'm not for everybody and not everybody's for me. That's all right. [00:18:30] There's nothing wrong with that. If we got every good player in America, who the hell will we play against?

**Molly Fletcher:** Right. Yeah.

**Geno Auriemma:** So I'll say to them, I say, "Look, what are your goals? What do you want? We talked about being selfish. Now, I want you to be selfish right now and tell me what do you want? Tell me what you want. Four years from now, when you're done, tell me what you want to have happened. Come on, write it out for me, lay it out for me so that we can look back on it and see how we did. So tell me." [00:19:00] And invariably, the kids that we get will say, "I want to win a national championship." I say, "Are you sure about that?" I guess. Well, in order to do that, you're going to have to go where there's a lot of other good players, because you're not going to win the national championship by yourself. And they're like, "Okay." So what else do you want to do? Well, I want to be an All-America or a national player of the year or whatever. Okay. All right. Well, we've had more All-Americans than anybody so obviously you can be an All-American here. We've had more national players of the year than anybody. [00:19:30] So you can do that here. We've had more number one draft picks than anyone else you can do that here. So what else? So why I want to play on the Olympic team.

So invariably, those three things come up with all the really, really great players that we recruit. So right away now, we're saying, "Well, where do you think you can go to get that?" I say, so let me use an example, "Let's say you want to be a big star in the movies, where do you think you will go?" The kid says, "I will go to Hollywood." " [00:20:00] All right, exactly. So what if you wanted to be a Broadway star, where do you think you could be a star? Well, I'd have to go to Broadway Malyan. Well guess what? This is Broadway of college basketball."

**Molly Fletcher:** I love that. That is so good. And Geno, what's amazing. Tom Izzo is a close friend and a guy that I've worked with for a long time and time.

**Geno Auriemma:** I love Tom.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah. He's the one. It's so cool to listen to you talk about this, because I hear similar things and Tom does a very similar thing with his kids. He sits down [00:20:30] and walks through what you just highlighted. And then he does, he says, "Okay, so if I'm a good coach, would that mean that I would hold you accountable?" When they're already there, when they've already committed and they're playing. If I'm a good coach, what would my role be in this? And well, coach, what do you mean? You are a great coach. Tom said, "That's what they say." And he goes, "No, don't be asking me, tell me what my role would be." And they say, "Well, I guess..." Tom goes, "How about I hold you accountable to these goals, to national championships, to All-Americans?" How do you approach goal setting [00:21:00] with your team and with your kids?

**Geno Auriemma:** I think Tom is absolutely right. And I've had to do that with a couple of kids where at the end of their sophomore year, now the great ones, not the average ones, the great ones, and I've had to do that at the end of their sophomore year where we called them in and I would sit down with them in the springtime and I would say, "Let's go back to recruiting and let's go back to what you said. Remember what you said, you said you wanted to win national championships, you wanted to be an All-American, [00:21:30] you wanted to play on the Olympic team, whatever the case may be." Yeah. So, well, I'm here to tell you, after the first two years, none of those things are going to happen for you. Now, we might win a national championship, but it won't be because of you. And the kid just looks at you like in the eye like, "Holy shit."

**Molly Fletcher:** Right. This guy's real.

**Geno Auriemma:** And I say, "Based on what I've seen, your work habits, your intensity level, your ability to function, your willingness to want to do the hard things, [00:22:00] all these things, you wanting to be coached harder, all that stuff." I say, "Based on what I've seen, it's not going to happen. So here's what we have to do I think you and I, one, we have to change your goals. So why don't you eliminate all three of those things from your goals? And then you can keep doing what you're doing and you will have success. Or how about you change the way we're going about things, the way you go about what you're doing, how about you change all the [00:22:30] things that you've been doing since they're not working, and then let's keep those goals?"

**Molly Fletcher:** What do kids mostly do?

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, the ones that are good enough, the ones that are really serious, they change their work habits, they change the way they do things, they buy-in more completely and they end up reaching their goals.

**Molly Fletcher:** Right. With your support I'm sure and the other team.

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, and I say, "Look, it's my job to tell you this." Or I could just blow, smoke up your butt for the next two years and then after you leave, I'll still be here [00:23:00] and you'll go off someplace and you'll say, "Man, if my coach was better, if my coach was more real, if my coach was harder on me, if my coach was more demanding and held me accountable, I could have received my college goals." So I say, "So you're not going to blame me for this. I'm going to make sure that it happens. And if it doesn't happen, it won't be because I didn't do my part."

**Molly Fletcher:** Wow. Lucky girls play for you, man. That's for sure. That is about-

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, they don't think they're lucky while they're going through it.

**Molly Fletcher:** Well, [00:23:30] when you think about what are the top three or four characteristics you look for in a player? What would those be? And why? And then on the flip side of that, what are the red flags? What makes you get up and walk out of a gym and go, "Man, I don't want this kid?"

**Geno Auriemma:** If I'm watching a kid play, I'm watching the game, the first I'm going to think about is can I see myself coaching this kid? Do I see myself being able to interact with this kid? And will this kid listen to me? Can I make [00:24:00] a value judgment on that? I don't want to just rely on their athletic ability. So obviously, they're already talented enough or I wouldn't be watching the kid. Can I get a connection with this kid? Well, I won't know that till I talk to them. Okay. Number two, do I even want to talk to them based on the fact that I don't think this kid is very unselfish. I think this kid is very selfish. Just watch her. Look, every time she's open, she shoots it. Every time she's not open, she shoots it. [00:24:30] When her teammates are open, she doesn't really do a great job of making her teammates better or feeling better about themselves.

She wants all the attention for herself and she's already getting all the attention, because she's the best player on the floor. And she's not willing to spread that around her teammates. Is she a moaner that she better moan about everything. Referee makes a bad call and she pitches. The coach takes her out of the game, she makes faces and goes and sits at the end of the bench, puts a towel over her head and says, "Screw this." [00:25:00] Or she throws and passes and bounces off her teammates, because they're not good enough. And she pitches at her teammates. So right away, are they unselfish? Because again, you're going to show up here and there's going to be nine other kids just like you, you better be unselfish in that regard. And you say, well, then you just said you needed them to be selfish. Yeah, it's a fine line that these kids have to walk. So that's number one.

Number two, do they want to pass the ball? And can they pass the ball? Because again, if you show up here [00:25:30] and there's nine girls and they all can score, when they're open, you better give it to them, because when you're open, they're going to give it to you. And then that develops more of that trust than, "Hey, coach said, if I'm open, I should shoot it." The coach said, "Well, one of my teammates is open and I'm not, I need to pass." So then that becomes part of your team thing. So are they unselfish? Can they pass the ball? Are they great teammates?

**Molly Fletcher:** All the non-verbals that you mentioned. Yeah. Right?

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah. Do they have the ability to communicate? [00:26:00] Can they hold the conversation? Do they communicate with their teammates, their coaches? What's their body language like? I already know you're a good player, I want to evaluate these other things. So the flip side of that is when I see the absence of those things, I just say, "Hey, forget it. This kid's not for us."

**Molly Fletcher:** And I'm sure you've done that. You've probably walked away from-

**Geno Auriemma:** Absolutely, lots of time.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah.

**Geno Auriemma:** I've had a couple of our coaches over the years come to say, "Coach, this kid's [00:26:30] really, really good man." I'm like, "Okay, why do I think there's a but there? Well, she's got some issues. I go, what do you mean she's got issues? Well, she's got some things that we're going to have to deal with if we recruit her." I say, "Wait a minute, what do you mean we're going to recruit a kid who's got issues?" I say, "We're UConn, we're the best program in the country." I say we're like Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon. Do you think they recruit people that have issues? They wouldn't be where they are if they have people [00:27:00] that have issues.

They go and get the best people that have limited issues, almost no issues, other than they're really, really good at what they do. The other people who are trying to catch them, they're the ones that have people with issues, but they can't get the best people. So we are not going to get those girls with issues. Now, that doesn't mean we end up with perfect people all the time. Once they get here, we go, "Oh shit, we didn't see these issues." [00:27:30] Of course, they've got issues, but they're able to hide them a little bit better than other people.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah. Well, and one of Tom's famous lines is you better be better than your problems.

**Geno Auriemma:** Exactly right.

**Molly Fletcher:** So they may have issues, but the good outweighs the bad.

**Geno Auriemma:** Hey, look, he had dream on in four years. So you need them.

**Molly Fletcher:** Hey, man. Tell me about your relationship with your staff, your coaches?

**Geno Auriemma:** I've been fortunate that my coaching staffs have been [00:28:00] together a long time. Chris Dailey, my assistant has been with me the entire time, 32 years, I guess it is. And then we had another former player, Jamelle Elliott was here 14 years and Tonya Cardoza was here 12 or 13 years, and then they got head coaching jobs. And now Shea and Marisa have been here 8, 9, 7 years, both of them. So we have some consistency in our staff. [00:28:30] There's the message that goes out to the players is very consistent year after year, after year, after year. That's number one. Number two, I really allow them to own the program to the level that they want to own it.

And Chris Dailey, if I'm going for a month, I'm going to have to worry about what decisions are being made, how they're be made or whether anything's getting done. And she's not checking with me every half an hour to go, "Hey, look, this came up, should I do this or that?" [00:29:00] And then when it comes time to coaching, "Hey Shea, I want my guards to be able to do this." At the end of the day, they have to be able to do this, this, this, and this, how they get to that place, that's up to you. So now that kid's got like a million things in her office that she's investigated, studied, whatever, and drills that she's going to use to teach these guards how to do the things that I want done. And now these are hers. She owns them. So she's out there [00:29:30] with a passion, not Coach Auriemma told me he wants me to do it this way. I don't really buy it." So I give them the opportunity to own a lot of this program so they don't like they just work for me.

**Molly Fletcher:** You create a team environment for your staff too, it sounds like. Yeah.

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, think about this. This is something I would want to get across to all the people listening. When was the last time that you were not on a team and when's the next time you will not be on the team? How about never? So [00:30:00] in your family, when you're 12, if you have brothers and sisters and mom and dad, if you're fortunate, that's the team. And then you make your first team when you're 10 or 11 and you're on a team and you have to learn to function in that team. You have to function at home if you have brothers and sisters. And then you get married or you have a partner, and then you're a small team or you have kids and you have a big team. And then you go to work and you work at a big company, but they put you on small teams. So you are never not on a team.

[00:30:30] So my staff and I are a team. My assistant, Chris Daley, Shea and Marissa, the three of them are a team. And then they impose their will on our upperclassmen. And our upperclassmen are made to feel like, "Hey, you guys are a team within a team," because we're always saying, "Hey, you older guys, you should know better."

**Molly Fletcher:** Right. Sure.

**Geno Auriemma:** And then they impose their will on the younger guys. And the younger guys are a little team, "Hey guys, we're new here, we're [00:31:00] always getting shit on." So we got to stick together, all that stuff.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah, totally. Yeah.

**Geno Auriemma:** So everybody has a connection and then it just gets filtered down. So everybody feels like they're accountable to the people above them and to the people next to them.

**Molly Fletcher:** One of the questions I wanted to ask you is you are constantly looking for ways to get better inside of what has been a tremendous successful program and continues to be incredibly successful? [00:31:30] And what I see sometimes is sometimes people when things are going great, when they're at the top, they're afraid to change when things are going the way in which they think they ought to be going, how do you balance that? You've had great success, but you always are trying to get better and continue to evolve. Tell me a little bit. Get me inside your head on that one.

**Geno Auriemma:** My biggest fear is that it becomes boring and monotonous and that winning [00:32:00] just for the sake of winning becomes the goal. And there's no excitement to it anymore. There's no challenge to it anymore. And then even winning isn't fun anymore. And for me, the biggest thing is when you've done something really good and we've done it for a long time, for me, the big challenges, all right, I don't want to change what we're doing, because obviously it's better than most, but how do I tweak it so that it's a little more exciting, [00:32:30] that it's a little more fun, that there's a little bit of another spice added to it that changes the flavor of it? You to be willing to experiment. So you have to be willing to look at other places, at other things and go, "Why did the Dallas Cowboys years and years and years ago when I was younger, why did they have a different setup than most other teams?" Well, they have better players. No, that's not the answer. They have a better vision of what it would look like.

[00:33:00] So why would, why were the 49ers with Bill Walsh, why were they different? Well, they had Joe Montana and they had Joe, "No, that's not the answer, because lots of people have good players." What were they doing that other people weren't doing? And so I'm constantly looking at different things that other people are doing to say, why did they decide to do it that way when no one else was doing it that way? If you do that, when you're losing, it's a desperate move you're searching [00:33:30] and you end up changing every year, because you're constantly grasping at straws. But when you do it, when you're on top, you're looking down at the valley and you're getting a chance to pick and choose what or how much or how little you want to add to what you have.

And that's the best time to do it, because nobody's going to look at you and go... I don't look at it as well. What if we fail? What if this doesn't work? What if I change my approach [00:34:00] to the way we play defense or to the way we run our offense or to certain things that we do? What if I change and it doesn't work? Well, so what? What are they going to say? I'm not worried about failure.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah. See, that's huge. I couldn't agree with you more. I think we need a higher failure tolerance overall in our world today.

**Geno Auriemma:** Now maybe I can say that, because I've had so much success.

**Molly Fletcher:** Sure.

**Geno Auriemma:** And I tell this to coaches all the time, when I speak to them at clinics, "Look, I'm not here to tell you [00:34:30] that if you're in your second or third year and you're trying to save your program or you're trying to build a reputation, that you should go out there and go, I don't give a shit what anybody thinks. I'm a risk taker man. I'm going to try." You're going to have to really weigh these things and go, "Okay, well, it makes sense, how do I..." But at the same time, if you firmly believe in something and it's who you are and it's part of your personality, then you know what? If you're going to go down, go down your way, do it the way you want to do it. [00:35:00] And if it works, it's because you had the courage to try something. And if it doesn't work, you had the courage to try and fail. And in the end, your next opportunity, you'll be better because you tried and failed.

**Molly Fletcher:** It'll make you better.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah. And I'm always looking. Even now, we won four straight national championships, we came to practice last year. The first three days of practice, we were working on something completely new that we hadn't done the year before. Well, we have a bunch of new girls, they've never brought blah, blah, blah, blah. [00:35:30] Everybody's like no, no. Well, we went 38 and one, 37 and one, whatever the hell it was, and we won all those games in a row with a bunch of girls that nobody thought were going to be that good. And we did a bunch of things different than we did the year before. And this year we have everybody back and I'm already lining things up that we're going to do that were different than last year.

**Molly Fletcher:** Well, and I love that you said you look at the NFL. I'm sure you look at the NBA, you look at men's programs.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah, no question.

**Molly Fletcher:** Right. [00:36:00] In other words, if you're a technology company, you can look at an apparel business if you're vice versa look around. Yeah, I love that.

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, you try to find people that are thinking differently than everybody else in their industry. So like you said, if you're a technology company or you build cars or you look at somebody that's selling hamburgers and you go, "What's their makeup? What are they [00:36:30] doing that everybody else who's selling hamburgers isn't doing?" And not just technically, what are they doing, but conceptually, what are they doing?

**Molly Fletcher:** Study success.

**Geno Auriemma:** Study success and study failure like, "Hey, look at these guys, they tried this, they had it made, they were on top of the world. And then all of a sudden they decided to reinvent themselves." And I don't buy that. I don't believe in that. I don't believe in reinventing myself. I am who I am. We [00:37:00] are who we are. We are not going to reinvent. But last time I checked, automobile still have four tires and they have a steering wheel. So that hasn't changed, but a lot of stuff that goes into making that thing most, changes every year.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah, that's a great analogy. Geno, you touched on the change in kids today and youth sports. I'm super passionate, we have three daughters. Tell me, Geno, about what role you believe parents ought to play in their children's lives [00:37:30] in regards to sport or if it's theater or whatever it might be? What role in your opinion should they play?

**Geno Auriemma:** Every single parent, me included, has wanted to raise a child that was talented in some aspect, whether it's theater or art or music or baseball or gymnastics or they were spelling bee champions or they were [00:38:00] budding scientists. We all would hope that one of our kids or all of our kids have that passion and that talent. And most of us are not fortunate enough to have those kinds of kids, but they all have something. They're not going to become world class violinists at Carnegie Hall, but they all have something. And you have to recognize as a parent, what is that, that they have? What is it that they have and how can I help nurture that, instead of how do I [00:38:30] take advantage of that? How do I make them into something that's spectacular?

Well, they may not have the ability to be spectacular. And now you're living your lives in an effort to make them into something that they may not be able to be, and you're scaring the hell out of that. Or they're really good and they have the potential to what will be division one athletes or be on the stage at state repertory things that they have, whatever the case may be. And you say, "Well, what's my role in that? [00:39:00] Well, I'm going to be their agent. I'm going to go around." You hear these parents today doing stuff and pushing their kids or branding their kids and helping them grow their brand and going to schools and watching their kids play and running out on the court, having fights with the coaches, this bizarre behavior that goes on at criticizing other kids on the team.

**Molly Fletcher:** Yelling from the stands. Yeah, it's crazy.

**Geno Auriemma:** [00:39:30] Caring more about your kid's success than about the team's success, and teaching your kid, it's all about me. And then there's the parents that at the end of the game, the kid gets in the car and you go, "Hey, how'd it go today?" And then the minute the kid starts complaining about something, "No, we're not going to have that, because if that's how you're going to handle this, then you know what? I'm not coming anymore your games." So it's either you're going to enjoy this, we're going to have fun doing this, and you know what? Beyond that... [00:40:00] My son did this. He would come home and go that you're not going to believe this, my coach... I said, "Well, you're going to talk to your father as a coach and you're going to complain about your coach?" I said, "Well, come on now."

**Molly Fletcher:** That's not a good idea.

**Geno Auriemma:** You know better than that. And then as a parent, you go and you get caught up in because you want it so bad. I don't think the parents are intentionally bad and or intentionally trying to hurt their kids or anybody else, it's just you want it so [00:40:30] bad for your kids. And I think you have to just be there, drive them to where they're going, sit there and watch. Don't watch if you can't handle it and just try to take it as how would you like if your kids came to watch you work and were yelling and screaming and acting stupid at your job?

**Molly Fletcher:** Yeah, that's funny. Sure.

**Geno Auriemma:** Just let them go out there, let them have fun, their talent will dictate how far they go. Just encourage them to follow it, whatever [00:41:00] that is.

**Molly Fletcher:** Well, I think there are so many, and you know this better than anybody, teachable moments in sports or theater or whatever teachable moments that we, as parents can cultivate and nurture inside of all these little moments all the time with our kids that can be powerful.

**Geno Auriemma:** And we have to take advantage of those. Reward great behavior, "Hey, that was great, man." Not great play, not tremendous accomplishments, just reward [00:41:30] little things that a kid does. That's the one thing I can say, my son played college basketball, my daughters, one of them played in high school, one is in the theater, the other one's got three little boys. And you know what? You go around and go, the one thing I really, really appreciate about all three of them, they're all great teammates. They all really, really enjoy the aspect of being on a team, they enjoy the comradery with their teammates, with their [00:42:00] coworkers, with their fellow cast members. They love the appreciation that goes into, we all work together and look what we did.

I don't want to blow my own horn, but I was never good enough to play beyond junior college at any level in basketball, but at the same time, I always prided myself when people say, "Yeah, what was your greatest accomplishment as an athlete?" I say, "Look, I was a great teammate. I knew my role, I knew where I belonged and I was on teams that [00:42:30] were amazing, great teams, championship teams. And I was on shit teams where guys ruined the teams, because of their own selfish behavior." So I know what great teammates look like. And I've always wanted to surround myself with great teammates. And I've taught my kids I hope, to be great teammates.

**Molly Fletcher:** Geno, you have been so generous with your time. And so we end every show with rapid fire. [00:43:00] And let me just fire some questions at you and you can just fire back. All right. Are you ready?

**Geno Auriemma:** Go ahead.

**Molly Fletcher:** One word to describe you.

**Geno Auriemma:** Complicated.

**Molly Fletcher:** One word your players would use to describe you.

**Geno Auriemma:** Bizarre.

**Molly Fletcher:** Greatest influence on your life.

**Geno Auriemma:** My mother.

**Molly Fletcher:** What's your favorite book?

**Geno Auriemma:** Oh wow. A Soldier of the Great War.

**Molly Fletcher:** Awesome. I'm ordering that now. What is your biggest pet peeve?

**Geno Auriemma:** [00:43:30] My biggest pet peeve probably is people who keep saying that they're going to do something and then telling you how good they are at what they do.

**Molly Fletcher:** What's your greatest accomplishment?

**Geno Auriemma:** I hope my kids.

**Molly Fletcher:** What is one word you would use to describe UConn basketball?

**Geno Auriemma:** Relentless.

**Molly Fletcher:** I love it. So these are awesome answers. Here's my last question. What game changer inspires [00:44:00] you? And why? In other words, when you think of somebody in your world that maybe you've coached or that's on your staff or in your family that you believe is a game changer, so there's somebody that does something at the highest level, what is it that they do? And why do you think it is that they've had the success that they've had?

**Geno Auriemma:** In a goofy way, first person I thought of when you said that was Chris Dailey, my assistant, because everything she does is done with a thoroughness and a passion [00:44:30] and attention to detail and in a way that the integrity and the honesty with which it's done and the respect that she has earned from everyone, not because of she doesn't have any faults, because she's got a million, she's got a million faults and I would be able to point out every single one of them. But if you ever want something done and you want it done [00:45:00] the right way and you want it done better than anyone else could do it and you want it done two weeks ago, even if you ask her today, then that's your girl.

**Molly Fletcher:** Wow. That's awesome. That's why you guys have been together so long.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah. She's everything I wish I was. And a lot of things that I'm glad I'm not.

**Molly Fletcher:** That's a hell of a teammate.

**Geno Auriemma:** Yes, it is.

**Molly Fletcher:** Geno, thanks so much. I got to tell you, I am humbled and honored to have you on today. I truly am.

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, thank you for having me. I'm so glad we could do this.

**Molly Fletcher:** [00:45:30] This is awesome. We made it work.

**Geno Auriemma:** And you know what? I learned a lot, because we're getting ready to launch a podcast. It's going to be called the Geno one on one. And every show, we're going to have someone on that is a little bit different, not necessarily sports related at all or basketball related at all. And we're going to get into some of the things you talked about. We're going to get into away from this person's world that everybody knows about, who they really are.

**Molly Fletcher:** [00:46:00] You're peeling it back. You're getting real with them, which is just-

**Geno Auriemma:** Yeah.

**Molly Fletcher:** That's what people want. That's what I think people want. Well, I know you will kill it with that. People will love to listen to it I know I will.

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, I appreciate that. Thank you.

**Molly Fletcher:** That would be awesome. Well, Geno, thank you so much. I'll be cheering for you this season for sure. And I can't thank you enough. You're a gift to women sports.

**Geno Auriemma:** Well, I appreciate it. And thanks for having me. I admire the way you do things. Was a hell of an interview and I get a kick out of answering questions [00:46:30] that are insightful and thoughtful, because it makes me think about my answers instead of just same old that I've been answering all my life. So thank you.

**Molly Fletcher:** Well, thanks for being real. All right, coach, be safe. Thanks so much.

**Geno Auriemma:** Thank you. All right. Bye-bye.

**Molly Fletcher:** Thanks as always for listening to Game Changers with Molly Fletcher. If you like the show, be sure to subscribe on Apple podcasts. There, you can listen to previous episodes [00:47:00] and leave us a review, which helps other people find out about the show. For more about me visit mollyfletcher.com. Until next time, stay curious and be bold.