

# PRACTICE

Building Character Through Soccer



## Commitment:

*Definition: The act of pledging or engaging oneself*

*Synonyms: responsibility, pledge, guarantee, promise*

## Commitment Story

Paul "Whitey" Kapsalis was a hard working young soccer player growing up in the 1970's and 1980's in Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, and finally Indiana where his family had settled by the time he was a sophomore in high school. He was undersized and not a superstar by any means but had an incredible internal drive and squeezed the most out of his ability by earning a college soccer scholarship to Michigan State. His dream however, was to play for Indiana University, the defending National NCAA champions.

Whitey's size and talent did not catch the eye of Jerry Yeagley, the head coach, or anyone at IU for that matter, but he was determined regardless of their lack of interest. He turned down his scholarship to MSU and traveled to IU just a few days prior to the preseason, informing coach Yeagley that he would like to tryout as a "walk on". Coach Yeagley warned Whitey that he had no chance of making the IU varsity who was returning 7 starters from their National Championship team. Whitey wasn't deterred and showed up at tryouts anyway determined to make the squad. Despite coach Yeagley's warning and against heavy odds, Whitey earned the lone available spot on the team, beating out 20 other players.

Whitey was redshirted as a freshman, played very little the next year and rarely made the traveling roster. Each year, he was told by IU staff that he did not have the talent to play for Indiana and that he should transfer to another school where he might get to play. He continued working each off season to improve his chances but after he broke his foot in training and missed the entire 1986 season he was told once again by the coaching staff that he would never play for IU and that he should transfer.

Whitey worked extremely hard in the off season to come back from his injury but by the time the next season had started, IU was unranked and without direction. Coach Yeagley admired Whitey for his commitment and determination, and named Whitey as captain in the preseason for his depleted squad. Despite being captain, Whitey did not start the first 5 games that season and when he did finally get his chance, IU won 16 consecutive games to move to No. 1 in the national rankings. That season, the team lost in the regional finals to Clemson but the year after Whitey graduated, IU once again won the National Championship.

Even after he was gone, many of the players in that 1988 championship team credit Whitey Kapsalis, the undersized, moderately talented player who would never play at IU, but who became captain against all odds, as a shining example for perseverance and commitment. His example from prior years propelled them to the title.

Thirty years later, Whitey, a career businessman, credits his decision to follow his dream to play for IU as the defining moment in his life. "I'm very proud of the fact that I stuck to my core values, that I was true to myself, that I didn't take shortcuts," Kapsalis said. "What I learned about failure is that failure is a mindset. To me, failure would have been not trying."

To find out more about Whitey, please read "To Chase a Dream", by Ted Gregory which chronicles Whitey's unlikely story.



