

# The Arete Manifesto

What is Arete Hoops? Who are we? What do we stand for? Why do we exist? Why should you care about what we have to say?

Put simply, Arete Hoops believes basketball can change your life because it has changed ours. We think basketball and sports have serious power: they have the ability to transform you, shape you, and mold you into a better basketball player and person. We want to give anyone who will listen the chance to consider these ideas because we want to give everyone a chance to make their dreams come true.

Our approach to basketball is a philosophy, a specific set of ideals. We have crafted this ideology through personal experience, by making observations in our lives, and building on the ideas of thinkers who express these ideas much better than we do.

**Our Mission is Simple:** We think the world can be changed through the game of basketball. We want to question the status quo. We want to think differently. We want to consider the traditional ideas of how to approach the game of basketball and take the path less traveled.

This is the ***Arete Hoops*** philosophy; our **manifesto**, the good stuff, the nuts and bolts of what we **believe**. We hope these ideas resonate with you and ultimately help change you for the better. We hope you make a decision to abandon a life of mediocrity and start walking the path of excellence.

# Commitment to Excellence

*“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”*

**- Aristotle**

*“Those who invest the most are the last to give up”*

**- Vince Lombardi**

Excellence is a process, not an instant solution. It grows slowly through long hours of training, habit forming, and consistency. It needs to be fed, watered, and cultivated daily. If we take Aristotle at his word, we don't act excellently because we are virtuous athletes, rather we become excellent athletes as a result of acting rightly.

Think about the construction of a skyscraper. Hundreds of hours of work must be accomplished before any construction starts. You have to work with an architect, get building permits, find a location, hire contractors, and find investors all before you see any visible results of your efforts. Before you build the structure, you have to dig the foundation, connect the plumbing, and pour the concrete, along with numerous other tasks. Hundreds of people have worked thousands of hours, yet you still can't see any resemblance of the finished produce. Yet, as time goes on, little by little, a structure starts to rise out of the mess and begins to look like a building. After months or even years of planning, construction, and hard work, you start to see the culmination of your efforts.

**Basketball is no different.** At times it might feel like your effort is getting you nowhere, and you can't see any visible progress, you can't see your skyscraper. Have patience! Believe that every time you make an investment to become a better basketball player is an investment in your skyscraper. Making a commitment to be excellent is **never a one-time decision**. Over the course of time when you consistently choose excellence over mediocrity, you create habits that start to shape you into a virtuous person. Excellence evolves from a difficult choice to operate differently than your default mode of operation. Over time, tendencies of laziness or mediocrity slowly dissipate and are replaced as your shining skyscraper of excellence rises from the chaos.

**Excellence is a decision that you have to make over and over again.** Your entire approach to practice, training, workouts, film study, and strength training is now guided by your commitment to excellence. Athletics give you the opportunity each and every day to decide what kind of approach you are going to take and what kind of basketball player you want to become.

You have a decision to make; there are two paths laid out before you. Will you find yourself **wandering** down the crowded path of mediocrity or **sprinting** on the path of excellence? Will you stop the construction of your game because you believe your efforts haven't made a difference, or will you continue in the assurance that eventually your investment is going to pay off.

**The choice is yours and the time to get started is now.** You don't have any more time to waste, the road to excellence is long and the journey is difficult, and its time to start walking.

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# Imagination

*"Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions."*

– Albert Einstein

No one has ever accomplished anything worthwhile without imagination. Imagination has the power to take you away from your present circumstance and help you think of a world in which things your dreams are reality.

## **Do you have the courage to imagine change before it happens?**

Imagination plays a huge role in sports. One of the biggest mistakes you can make as a player is to accept things for the way they are because your achievements are limited by the scope of your imagination.

Bad teams and mediocre players lack the imagination to envision a future that could be different than their present circumstance. Sure, a lot of players/teams **wish** their future would turn out differently than their current situation. But wishing something to be true and believing it will come true, are two completely different approaches.

The subtle difference between having faith that your moving down the path towards greatness and wishing that it to happen, is that faith has the power to move you to **action**. The great players allow imagination to influence their practice and hone their craft, which often leads them to train in **unique** and **extraordinary** ways. Basketball players with faith and imagination believe their dreams can become reality, because they know they have the ability to make their dreams come true.

Sports provide a platform for thinking about how imagination functions within teams, individuals, and organizations. For example, successful basketball programs approach the mental side of the game in a unique way. The collective imagination of the coaches and players fixate on a **larger purpose**, a **bigger cause**, and a **greater movement**. Winning programs cultivate a movement that rally around accomplishing **audacious** goals. Regardless of the specifics of their shared goal, the team adopts this as part of their identity. Over a period of time as a team pursues excellence together with a shared imagination, they become united, inspired, and strengthened through this common vision.

**Teams with imagination dare to believe they can accomplish things no one thinks possible.** Individuals with imagination refuse to be limited by any constricting restraints of what others think they are capable of. Mentally strong players and teams allow their imagination to bring them closer as a team and insulate them from the naysayers in the outside world.

**Imagination not only inspires future greatness, it illuminates the path you must travel to get there.** Imagination gives you a glimpse of life's future attractions and strengthens you along the journey.

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# Freedom through Practice

*"Freedom is obedience to self-formulated rules."*

– Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*

*Basketball is an intricate, high-speed game filled with split-second, spontaneous decisions. But that spontaneity is possible only when everyone first engages in hours of highly repetitive and structured practice--perfecting their shooting, dribbling, and passing and running plays over and over again--and agrees to play a carefully defined role on the court. . . . spontaneity isn't random."*

– Malcolm Gladwell

The word "practice" often conjures up ideas of mindless repetition and boring drills. If we approach practice as another item on our to-do list, we fail to appreciate that benefits that practice provides because ultimately **disciplined self-regulation leads to freedom.**

There is no greater benefit to an athlete than the ability to play with complete abandon or freedom - the most effective way to play with such freedom is through imposing particular constraints and limitations that give you great maneuverability within a competitive environment. Practice should be regarded as one of the most valuable currencies available to athletes because with it you can buy freedom. True freedom is not the ability to make impulsive decisions, but the ability to make decisions that contribute to your greater goal. Training and practice train us to create habits that test and refine our decision-making. **Practice forces us to make disciplined decisions** in a hostile environment so that we can respond in the midst of uncertainty in a game situation.

At times practice may feel constricting and limiting, but in the long run it gives you the ability to react positively to the spontaneous nature of basketball. Many people think that freedom is the absence of restrictions, when in reality **freedom is about finding the right restrictions.** Think about a shark for a minute; if a shark was completely "free" of all restrictions and was no longer confined to the water, it would start to flop around on dry land, and slowly suffocate to death! In the ocean a shark is one of nature's most ferocious predators, but taken out of its environment it becomes helpless! In order for a shark to stay alive it must "confine" itself to the water because complete "freedom" is ultimately harmful. The very nature of a shark does not lend itself to living outside of its prescribed environment. A shark must "confine" itself to particular restrictions in order to flourish.

Basketball is the same way. As athletes we have to **self-impose restrictions on ourselves in order to gain freedom** on the basketball court. We must commit to submitting ourselves to drills and practicing our shooting, dribbling, and passing so that we train ourselves to respond spontaneity of the game. Coaches will often tell their players to “*stop thinking and just play*” which points to the idea that they want their players to stop thinking about the decision process and **let their instincts** (cultivated during times of practice) take over.

This doesn't mean that practice has to be boring or repetitive! **Practice should be a reflection of your game environment.** Basketball is an intense, fast-paced series of split-second decisions that requires incredible focus. Practice will never get stale or boring if you put effort into making your practice “game-like”. This might require some planning and forethought, **but the quality of your practice determines the quality of your game.** Don't settle for anything less than the best in every workout, drill, and practice session. Your attitude towards practice is one of the few things that you have complete control over! Don't waste your opportunity to demand the best from yourself every day. The investment you make during every drill, practice, and workout will pay off sooner than you think!

Remember that excellence is **showcased** on game-day but **created** through the crucible of intense, focused, practice. Chase excellence at all costs by forming virtuous habits through practice! You won't regret it!

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# A Story of Greatness

*“Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great...Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life...Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline.”*

**- Jim Collins: “Good to Great”**

Ironically, the biggest obstacle keeping us from realizing our full potential **is not failure, but moderate success**. Failure can convince you that you’re not good enough, but moderate success can convince you that you’re just good enough. The most dangerous kind of lie we can believe is that our current situation is acceptable. We start to resign ourselves to this deceptive and dangerous notion of success; to use a swimming metaphor, imagine if a swimmer started treading water at the beginning of the race instead of diving in and racing to the finish line. Many of us are treading water in our lives and careers, believing that as long as we get in the pool, then that’s good enough. Once we believe the lie of **“moderate success”** we begin a gradual decline into mediocrity. **Simply put, good is the enemy of great.**

Both in the game of life and in the game of basketball we are given a blank script to write our story. Basketball is one of many templates (i.e. any life circumstance or activity that has the ability to mold and shape you) that has the ability to that showcase the larger reality of our lives; meaning **it has the potential to teach, refine, and change us**. Everyone is dealt a different set of circumstances both in life and on the basketball court – this is only to say that no two persons have the exact same background, talents, upbringing, or resources. Although we all start from different places, the great news is that **we all have a choice on how we write the story of our lives.**

Athletes are faced every day with decisions that contribute to the larger story within their athletic narrative. Athletics force us to navigate hundreds of decisions on a daily basis that accumulate over time to define who we are as athletes and people. Some people will have you believe that greatness is a matter of making a one-time decision to be great. **On the contrary, the decision to become great has to be made every single day, multiple times a day.** From the moment you roll out of bed to the moment you shut your eyes at night, you are given 24 hours to choose greatness. Memorable careers, special accomplishments, and lasting impacts are never accidental but the result of years of conscious choice and discipline.



Greatness is never defined by a desire to become better than someone else; rather, greatness is having the courage to never settle for only “good enough”. At first, the road to greatness might sound like a difficult path to travel (and often it is), but the good news is that once you choose the path of greatness all other roads start to look less appealing. **Don't let yourself settle for good, because good is always the enemy of great.**

### **Author's Note:**

Many authors, coaches, and friends have contributed in unique and powerful ways to the ***Arete Hoops*** philosophy. Much of this manifesto is nothing more than a collaboration of the cacophony of ideas from these various sources.

In particular I want to acknowledge several of the authors who have had a profound influence on this work both in direct and indirect ways. Tim Keller, Malcom Gladwell, Stanley Hauerwas, Jim Collins, Plato, and Aristotle are a few of the authors who deserve mention.