



# “Dabo’s Safe Seat”

There are a lot of reasons why the Clemson University football program has become so solid.

Whether it's Dabo's supersized belief in his team, his courage to call a fake punt pass (that led to a first down) to a 300lb defensive lineman creating a huge momentum shift in the college playoff, great coaching by the offensive and defensive coordinators, a special and gifted QB, timely defensive stops and fortuitous plays in key games during the season, or a group of players with the rare combination of size, speed and talent, Clemson has been a force of belief, will and skill.

But for all the talk about Dabo's fun personality and down to earth coaching style, there's one big reason for Clemson football's success that hasn't been mentioned and I believe it could be one of the biggest of them all: **Dabo's Safe Seat.**

Dabo's office has a chair his friend found and brought him from a remote fishing village. He said it was one of those fishing villages where guys sit around in a circle on these stools and talk about life, family, fishing, etc.

It gave Dabo an idea and he called it the **Safe Seat**. He placed the stool in the team meeting room and after each practice a different teammate sat on **the Safe Seat** while the team gathered around him in a circle. Dabo then asked the teammate questions about his life, his heroes (**Heroes**), his defining moment (**Highlights**), and his challenges (**Hardships**). When Dabo was finished asking questions, the rest of the team were free to ask questions as well.

It was called the **Safe Seat** because it was a safe place for each person to share his story and heart with his team. It was a safe place to be vulnerable knowing that whatever was shared while sitting on the stool would not leave the room. It was a safe seat in a safe room.

As each teammate took their turn in the **Safe Seat**, the players began to know each other a whole lot better. The walls of ego, pride and selfishness came crumbling down as vulnerability and authenticity paved the way for meaningful relationships, trust, and strong bonds that helped create a connected team.

Connection is one of the most important elements you want to foster because it has been found that a connected team becomes a committed team. A connected team will commit to each other, fight for each other and serve each other. When the pressure mounts, adversity strikes and the game is on the line, connected teams rise up together and, more often than not, find ways to win close games.

It may be more exciting to talk about X's and O's and Heisman trophy candidates than it is about a stool from a fishing village. After all, even the most connected teams won't win championships if they don't have great coaching and talent.

But with Clemson, Dabo and his **Safe Seat** brought all the belief, all the talent, all the individual goals and all the potential **together** to build a connected, joyful, and committed team.

## **EXTRA NOTE:**

- We like to call this exercise “**Heroes, Highlights and Hardships**” and there also is a video you can watch about it.
- Another place we refer to this exercise is in the **3D TEAM RETREAT**. In an introductory exercise, we discuss the **WHY** of the players and part of the **WHY** is to feel connected and part of a group. To reinforce this concept, we do an exercise called “**The 3 S's - Safe, Secure & Significant**” which is a similar exercise you could do to kick off this concept in Preseason.

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**“MAKE IT A GREAT DAY +1”**