

Real Coaches Make a Difference

Written by By Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
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There are those in the world of athletics who believe in the axiom of players making the difference in the outcome of any sporting endeavor, but there is the opposite belief as well. Real coaches – the one we don't often hear about because of our desire to elevate one individual over another – do and will make a difference.

When Miyamura became the second public high school in Gallup, one of the most offensive remarks overheard – aside from the downward change in classification size, based on student population – was that the new school was going to have all the best athletes. This outright falsification was not borne out by any real fact – Gallup's basketball girls continued to win and the Bengal football and volleyball teams still could not win district – but the talk persisted in several dark little corners.

But it is a coach who often determines the outcome of games, and sports writers usually verify this concept by repeating, "The wins are given to the players, while a coach takes responsibility for the losses."

Back in the days of using rocks for baseballs and tree branches for bats, there was a team in the Gallup Babe Ruth League called the Sportsmen, and one year they were truly awful. The first half of the season was a fiasco, 0-8, and the coach quit after a final thrashing in mid-season. The sponsor stepped in to coach the rest of the summer, and with only one arm to make his point, this coach led, guided, cajoled, threatened and turned his players into a team. The second half was a complete turnaround for the players, 8-0 and put them in a position to vie for the league championship. The story did not end there, but perhaps it should have since the Sportsmen were eliminated in the final by a much better-seasoned team, 2-1.

The season-ending loss was sad, and taught most of us – wrongly, it seems in retrospect – that having a better group of athletes was more important than effort and teamwork. But the game could have gone either way, and really proved the importance of a real coach. I know it was for

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me! And I will never forget the lessons taught us by coach Ferguson.

A real coach is one who works with the players on the team and utilizes them in such a way that showcases their talents and covers up their faults as much as possible. If those talents need assistance, other players need to help out when and if they can. It is a TEAM that real coaches develop. Often repeated but too seldom accomplished is the adage, "There is no I in team."

In youth sports, real coaches are seldom seen or witnessed for several reasons: parent-coaches; other limitations that require teams to "fill" out a roster - sometimes mixing genders; age-driven divisions; replacements not up to the original caliber; family vacations and absences; and a lack of practice time because of the coach's regular job requirements.

Very few coaches at this level are found willing to put in the time and energy required to really TEACH the youngsters the intricacies of the game, or to analyze what each player does best. Instead, they focus on the negatives, and the less athletic players soon reach the obvious conclusion – they are simply taking up space on the roster.

Only soccer has a program to develop coaches of a better quality, and even then there are huge holes to fill in that training.

Eventually, the players come to the high school level where another factor presents a barrier, grades. Without the minimum GPA required by NMAA or other sports association, players soon find themselves ineligible. In some respects this requirement makes coaches jobs harder, but it is necessary since education rightly insists that students learn, at least to a minimum amount.

Real coaches coach! They do not just walk the halls of school looking for the biggest, strongest, fastest or quickest players, though that is also part of their job. The best ones also TEACH! It is the teaching where the differences are made.