A COACHING PHILOSOPHY

COACHING IS TEACHING AT ITS BEST

When applying for almost any coaching job, there is a good chance that the hiring authority, be it the Athletic Director, Head Coach or even the administrative head of the institution may ask you this question, “What is your coaching philosophy?”

For me, I can answer the question in one sentence: “Coaching is Teaching at its Best!”

While I might like to tell you that this philosophy is truly mine, it really was handed down to me by an outstanding college football coach some 40 years ago. While serving as a Graduate Assistant Football Coach at Ball State University, I met Doyt Perry. Coach Perry had been the Head Football Coach at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, OH from 1955 through 1964. During that time, he won the Mid-American Conference Championship 6 times, recording 77 wins, 11 losses, and 5 ties. As it turned out, our Head Coach at Ball State, Dave McClain, had played his college football at Bowling Green and he had married Doyt's daughter, Judy. Being that Doyt was Dave McClain's father-in-law, he would visit Muncie on occasion to see his daughter and grandkids and to see us practice and/or play a game. After practice one day, I had a one-on-one moment with Coach Perry and I asked him the question, “If you could tell me one thing to help me be a better football coach, what would it be?”

Coach Perry responded without hesitation, “Always remember that Coaching is Teaching at its Best!”

I liked his answer but I still wasn’t totally sure what he meant. So I asked him, “Can you explain to me exactly what you mean by that?”
Living by his own words, he said “Sure,” and gave me this explanation. I paraphrase, but essentially, this is what he said.

*When you teach in the classroom environment, you can expect that your students will run the course of the entire grading scale. You will prepare lesson plans and teach the same material to all of the students, but your students will grade out from “A” to “F”. You will have some outstanding students who are self-directed over-achievers and they will be “A” students. You’ll have others who are hard workers but maybe not quite as driven or gifted and they will be the “B” students and then you’ll have the average “C” students who do what it takes to pass the class. There will be a few “D” students who probably show up for class unprepared and who really are not all that motivated, and you’ll probably have a couple “F” students who for lack of effort or for not wanting to be there at all, fail the class. Now, as a teacher, you understand this reality and while you do the best you can, you find that most often your students cover the entire grading scale.*

*As a football coach, you cannot afford to have a “C” level athlete playing for you. For example, if you have an “A” level cornerback go down with an injury and you replace him with a “C” level cornerback, there’s a good chance that “C” level cornerback will cost you 14 points! And so, as a football coach (or any coach for that matter), you have to be the absolute best teacher you can be! You need to do all you can to make every player an “A” player even though that will never be the case. And so it is, Coaching is Teaching at its Best!*  

I liked his philosophy and it did make sense to me. Over the years, I learned to accept the reality that not everyone can be that “A” player no matter how well they are coached. I did, however, understand that what was most important was that I needed to be the absolute best teacher I could be whenever I was coaching anyone, be it on the athletic field or as it was for me later in my career as a sales manager. And so, that became my coaching philosophy, *Coaching is Teaching at its Best!*
I now fast forward some 40 years. The landscape for athletics in this country has changed immensely. College athletics, especially at the D-I level, are big business and the emphasis on winning brings an inordinate amount of pressure for both the coaches and the athletes. Specialization is now the standard for most aspiring athletes and for many it starts as early as when they are 8 or 9 years old. The youth athletic programs in all sports across this country are highly organized and in most cases with a heavy emphasis on winning.

As a certified youth official in both ice hockey and lacrosse, I have seen how the highly competitive environment at the youth level can, in some cases, lead to negative experiences and outcomes for coaches, officials, parents, and most importantly, the young athletes themselves. I personally love competitive athletics and I believe that the playing fields, baseball diamonds, ice rinks, etc. across America are some of the best places to learn tough life lessons and the value of the competitive spirit. I believe in the use of scoreboards and am not a believer in giving every kid a trophy just for participating on a team through a season (Certificates of Participation would be just fine, thank you). But, for the right lessons to be learned, we need quality leadership in the form of our youth coaches in ALL sports.

That being the case, I have written this short, easy-to-read book to help youth coaches in ALL sports be the best teachers they can be! In other words, this book brings to life the coaching philosophy I have always adhered to going back to 1974, Coaching is Teaching at its Best!

I hope the Ten Tips I cover on the following pages help you as a youth sports coach understand how to be the best teacher you can be as a youth coach. In doing so, you will not only enhance the quality of the experience you are providing for the young athletes you coach but probably will enhance the experience for their parents as well. And, maybe best of all, it will eliminate some of the pressure you put on yourself as a youth coach and allow you to experience the true fun of coaching.
For your efforts as a youth sports coach, regardless of the sport you may be coaching, I thank you. You are helping shape the future of our great country by working with young people and teaching the young athletes you coach. As the saying goes, “You may be nobody to the world, but to someone, you may be their world.” As a youth coach, you need to remember that every time you take to the playing field, court, ball diamond, ice rink, etc.

Be thankful for the opportunity you have with the young athletes you coach and remember what a privilege and honor it is to serve as a youth coach. I am confident that you will be a GREAT teacher and example to your young athletes.

Now, let's get started.

Coach B