

What Are We Really Doing?

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Editor's preamble: Sometimes I think I write these articles more for my own sanity than for anything else. I hope you, faithful reader, get something out of them and that they help you as a coach in our profession. I'm going to unabashedly though tell you right out of the gate that this one is for me. If there are others of you in my situation that find themselves wondering about the end-game of this job then I'm here for you too. To those of you who are finding life a breeze right now and everything is good...more power to you and read this for humor and amusement or else move on to parts of this edition of the Hard Court Herald that might be of more use to you.

We've been at this 2008-2009 season now for about two months as I write this (I'm sitting here on a Sunday afternoon on January 4th, 2009 in the bleachers at Eureka High School awaiting to watch my tenth youth basketball game of the weekend in a tournament that our feeder program is participating in). You, I am pretty sure, are as engrossed in everything that's going on with this year of basketball as I am...how's my team doing, who's up next on the schedule, who do I have a scouting report to write up for next week, what's that one night I get to go home this week after practice, what family event is next week that I'm forgetting, etc, etc, etc? About five times a week you probably get that innocent person that walks up to you and says, "Are you still coaching? How's your team?" You at first want to just give them that classic, mouth-breather look and say "Where have you been?"

Then it hits me: What am I doing?

Most people could give (insert your favorite sarcastic term here) about high school basketball and the myriad of hours that we put in. We don't produce a product that can be sold on a wide-spread basis. We aren't of high entertainment value or else we'd be charging a lot more at the gate and we'd be packing gyms like back in the good old days that we always like to talk about. In fact, most adults are amazed at anybody who would want to go back and spend time in a school building that they spent 13 years looking forward to the day they could walk out and never have to come back.

My team is having a tough season as I type this. We've played the schedule from hell and our record shows. We play hard 95% of the time and for that I am truly grateful and can't ask much more in that department. But when you've won 10% of your games, as a coach, you do ask for more...much more because it's in your nature. You also are of a mind where you just can't sit back and take it. Every game is a new challenge to you, your program and the years of blood and sweat you've put into it no matter what happened in the previous five, ten or twenty years. A season like this is when I'm glad I go out of my way to write up a game summary after each contest. With the local media in my territory only out to cover the elite, there aren't many articles to cut out to put in your end-of-the-season yearbook.

This is no pity-party though mind you. I've been through tough seasons before and have just come off a pretty "successful" season if "successful" is limited to the W-L columns. It's always around this time of the year though that the holidays and the time put in always kind've hit me like a ton of bricks. Families are taking trips, companies are giving time off, our fellow teachers are talking about sleeping in and doing nothing over the break while we are doing everything in our power to help a group of kids try to put a synthetic sphere in a metal hoop more often than another group of kids.

I do know what we're doing though and you do too, let's not kid ourselves. If I do my job right, then the same amount of boys will come back next year on their Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Spring breaks to stop by and visit or will e-mail or call and let me know how college or their new job is going...Or the dad of the 7th grader who just sat down with me (sorry for the pause in typing there) to talk about how his kid is growing up and this second year of being in our basketball program has really seen him mature and grow up...or the official of my son's sixth grade game today stops me and tells me about my graduate of a couple of years ago (who he was a sort of mentor to) who has turned his college GPA around in this his sophomore year...I could go on and on...and so could you.

On the surface, I don't have a clue about the title of this article. But when I think about it a little deeper, it all makes perfect sense.