

Letter From The Editor - Getting Back To Who We Are

John Wooden once said, "It's not what you teach, it's what you emphasize." Many times that relates to X's and O's, however all of us as coaches probably have a certain set of values and expectations of the members in our basketball program. We've always had a set of expectations and values in our program, but after attending a character conference this past summer, I asked myself the question, "Are we emphasizing those values in the things we do?"

That led me to revisit what our fundamental and foundational core values were for our program. Over the years there have been many buzz-words that have passed through what we do and what we expect, so this thought really helped me identify the core values that every decision on and off the court could always relate back to. As I started to identify these values, what was great is I realized that once they were finalized they truly had always been there. Whether verbalized exactly or under a different term, whether emphasized, used, or just written down, it was nice to be able to sort through 10+ years of a jumbled heap of values and narrow it down to five.

The 5 values identified were Team First, Hard Work, Resilience, Humility, and Pride. Each of them had a significant value in defining who we were and what we did, but together those five really had an impact on what everything we did stood upon. The next step after identifying them was to figure out how we could emphasize them in what we did so they became the true foundation of our culture in our basketball program.

What we decided to do as a staff is through the month of November we would introduce one value a week and build to the set of five by the time the first games started. When introducing each value, our coaching staff would show some type of video that related to the value, discuss the definition of the word, talk about what it looked like in action, and gave examples of what it would look like both on and off the court for our players. Then throughout that week, the coaches would watch at practice and in school to see who was working to live out that value. At the end of the week, we gave out a symbol to the player at each level that represented that core value to the best of their ability that week. The next week, when we repeated the process with the next value, the player that currently held the previous week's award would pass that along to another teammate of his choice. By the end of the 4 weeks (we introduced 2 one week), we had some symbols that represented our core values that our players were starting to take ownership of and recognize each other, taking it out of the coaching staff's hands and giving them the ownership and accountability of representing our 5 core values.

While the first season in doing this did yield some challenges for us, I look at it now and know that implementing this idea is going to pay off for the future of our program and what it means to be a player in our program. Perhaps the best thing we did with this, in my opinion, is at the end of the season we eliminated the classic MVP, Best Defensive Player, Most Improved Player, and Hardest Worker awards from our recognition banquet. Instead, we had the players and coaches vote on the player that represented each core value to the best of their ability all season long. Each value winner received a more sophisticated symbol that was passed around all season that they could keep. We recognized the winners at each level together for each value.

Again, while this isn't an X's and O's thing it is something I wish I had done a long time ago in this organized fashion. I know it is going to take some time to break some old customary habits (who gets the MVP award, etc...), but I truly believe in reflecting upon it that any decision we make in the future for our program and our kids will always be rooted in our 5 core values. So I would challenge you as you head into this Spring thinking about how you are going to build your program starting this summer - what values does your program emphasize to reach the goals you want to achieve, and more importantly the quality of young man or young lady you influence to become a better version of themselves. Have a restful spring and good luck heading into the off-season! November will come calling soon enough!

Jason

The Process

By: Jason Wolfard, Lindbergh High School - Editor and Darrin Scott, Jackson High School

By now, many coaches have heard the term "Focus on the Process". Nick Saban has been highlighted as a top coach who excels in getting his team to embrace this concept. Many times, he says his goal is for his players to just focus on dominating their opponent on that current possession and then moving on to the next one. Many coaches will tell their players to just do their job when it comes to game play. But in a world where so much emphasis, especially on the outside, is about winning and what the scoreboard or your record is at the end, it is difficult to get a high school kid to understand focusing on the process instead of what the scoreboard says, what happened 3 plays ago, a call a ref made, or a big game coming up in a week.

I became aware of a book called "Chop Wood, Carry Water" through my side business as I was reading about leadership. The author, Joshua Medcalf, has been in our Q&A section in our newsletter in the past. This book highlights a man who wants to become a Samurai warrior but struggles with what we consider "instant gratification" - a problem that is very evident in today's world. When you look at the title, it relates back to an ancient Chinese proverb. "Before enlightenment chop wood and carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood and carry water." It is a terrific read, whether you want it for yourself or want to use it with your team. The chapters are quick and easy and have simple concepts that you can use with helping yourself or your team embrace the process.

This year, myself and Darrin Scott of Jackson High School implemented this book with our team. We wanted to share what we did and how it helped our team this season. We hope that it helps you and your team, even if it isn't this book, work on this powerful concept.

Lindbergh Basketball 2017 - "Play In The Moment" (Jason Wolfard)

This year, our team had a pretty good collection of talent, but along with that talent came some ego that I knew as a coach I would need to control in order for us to be successful. In the past, these kids had always been focused on the points on the board and the names in the paper that they had trouble focusing on the things that yielded those results. The great thing however is that through the off-season we had built a belief that we could achieve great things as a group.

It was that belief that I think allowed us to bring in this concept of “Playing in the Moment” throughout the season.

The nice thing about this book and working it into what was already a busy schedule for these guys was that the chapters were very short thus allowing us to read short parts at a time and have some reflection. After assigning 2-3 chapters over a period of a few days, I would use our group message and ask a simple question - “What thought stood out to you?” They would respond with some really good insight, and in return I could use that to apply to situations throughout the season.

Perhaps the biggest thing that “Chop Wood, Carry Water” did for us this year was not allow us to look ahead to the “big games” or “big rivalries”, but instead really focus on the current opponent. It really helped our guys know that we had to put an over-emphasized focus on what we were in control of instead of what others and other things could possibly have influence on us. As the season progressed, I would start to see the guys hold each other accountable and even understand that the daily hard work that sometimes didn’t always seem fun was necessary for us to get to where we wanted to be.

In the end as I look back upon it, really working to implement this concept into our culture this year allowed us to do what the book talks about and surrender the result. It helped the kids handle the adversities of runs by the other team, a bad or missed call, an opposing crowd that was really on us in a game, and have a focus in timeouts that the current play was the most important. And what we all found was that by surrendering the result and playing in the moment, we were also able to enjoy more of those moments together which made this season just a bit more memorable for us.

Jackson Basketball 2017 - (Darrin Scott)

The Chop Wood and Carry Water book fit perfect into our character building this year because of it’s content and the way the chapters were set up. The chapters were short enough that we could do one chapter per week and focus on that for the week. We have always done character building but this was the first year we used a book to follow.

Our first goal for this year was to get our players to think about where their value comes from and how will they define success. When you are competitive it becomes very hard to identity yourself as a person other than a basketball player. We wanted our players to think about their character and we wanted them to think spiritually. Chapter 9 “What Went Well” fit this perfect by talking about your value doesn’t come from what you do it comes from who you are. We had our players write down what they did well, what they need to improve on and where their value is coming from each week.

Our next goal was to get our players to think about what is really important to them. Chapter 7 “Guzzling Salt Water” was perfect for this. When we view the wrong things as success we begin to realize that none of those things truly satisfy us. They just end up leaving us thirsty and wanting more. We have them right a character description of themselves which describes the ideal person they would want to become. We then make that their challenge to use that as their definition of success.

Our next goal was getting our players to surrender the outcome and focus on the process and making sure they understood the process. Chapter 21 “Surrender” and Chapter 12 “Rough Side of the Mountain” fit perfectly with this goal. The point of rough side of the mountain was if you keep your eye on your goal and don’t focus on the daily steps you are taking you will end up falling down. We stressed the importance of focusing on the process of walking up the mountain. You have to go step by step which means we have to work day by day. We also talked about the adversity that can influence you to take your eyes off of your daily steps.

Things such as missed shots, to’s, officiating, off the court influences, etc. can get us to take our eyes off of each step and cause us to fall back down the mountain. An example of where I thought we showed growth was in our sectional round game, we started the game getting down 14-4. Our guys did a great job of not panicking or losing their composure in that moment and responded to get back in the game. We then started the 2nd half on 16-0 run which carried us to a victory.

Chapter 17 “Bamboo”

“Most people want the 90 foot tall bamboo tree without the 5 years of the process. They want the bamboo to grow to 90 feet tall in 6 weeks, but without the 5 years of invisible growth, the bamboo wouldn’t have a solid foundation, and it could never sustain the massive and rapid growth that occurs.”

Our coaching staff used this chapter more than any other chapter in the book. As coaches we many times become frustrated when players don’t progress or get it as quickly as we would like. We many times have to focus on the process and realize some of our fruit may come after they have finished playing basketball for our program. We have to continue to coach them and keep watering the bamboo whether we see growth or not.

Q&A With the Difference Makers

Joe Shoemaker - Oran High School

Joe Shoemaker is currently the head boys basketball coach at Oran High School. Eighteen years ago, Coach Shoemaker started his career in coaching as an assistant coach at Advance High School. After 5 years of being an assistant, he became head coach and spent the next 4 years at the helm of the Hornets. Coach Shoemaker then took the same position at Oran High School, where he has spent the last nine seasons. In his 13 years as head coach, Coach Shoemaker is 254-118 (83-31 at Advance and 171-87 at Oran), including 3 Final Fours appearances. This season, Coach Shoemaker led Oran to the Class 2 State Championship, the Eagles’ first-ever state championship and also received the honor of being named the 2017 MBCA Class 2 Boys Coach of the Year. The Hard Court Herald had an opportunity to catch up with Coach Shoemaker after the Show-Me Showdown.

Hard Court Herald: You're about a week into being the freshly-crowned Class 2 State Champions. Now you've had some time for that to sink in, how would you reflect on the 2016-17 season?

Joe Shoemaker: I am really proud of how the team played very unselfishly and as a team. They truly didn't care who got the individual credit. I really believe that played a major role in our accomplishment. I am trying to take some time to enjoy the accomplishment, because during the process I was trying to focus on the task at hand and make sure we were as prepared as possible.

HCH: You've had three Final Four appearances in the past. How did those experiences help you, personally, with this season and, ultimately, the state tournament?

JS: I just tried to keep our routine as normal as possible. We tried to "do what got us here" and play the same way take the same shots etc. I also talked about embracing the moment and not to be afraid of failure. A loss isn't failure unless you fail to learn from it. I also told them I thought we had played a tough schedule and wouldn't play someone better than we had already seen. As a coaching staff we spent as much time as possible scouting and preparing for any team we might possibly play. I am lucky to have two great assistants who don't get enough credit for all the work they do.

HCH: Did you change or adjust your message to your players this season because of their experience when playing on the state's biggest stage? How did you keep their focus throughout?

JS: The biggest thing was not to be afraid of the moment and to embrace it. We talked about focusing on the process and make the right basketball decision and we would be able to live with the results. As long as we did that with good effort and attitude, we would have no regrets.

HCH: You had the opportunity to experience winning a state championship while also coaching your son in the process. What was that like for you, both as a coach, as well as a parent?

JS: It was obviously a dream come true. It has been something we have talked about his whole life and for us to be able to bring the first basketball state championship back to Oran is awesome. As a parent to see all of his hard work pay off and for him to have a good weekend and great game in the finals is something I will always remember.

HCH: Now that you've achieved the ultimate goal, what is your plan for your returning players to keep them "hungry" to get back to the Final Four?

JS: Each team has its own identity and this is something that makes each team unique. Next year's team hasn't accomplished anything yet and will have the same record as everyone else to start the season 0-0. If we don't improve in the off season then we will be behind other teams who have put in the work during the offseason to improve.

HCH: You've been a head coach or an assistant coach around southeast Missouri for almost two decades. How has the high school game changed, in your opinion, since you began coaching?

JS: I think the biggest change is kids don't seem to play on their own anymore, in the back yard or at the park. With technology they have too many other options that they spend time on. I also believe that some (not all) summer teams have focused on individualism and not offensive

and defensive team play. I think we live in an instant gratification society and few are willing to continue to work hard if they don't see instant results.

HCH: Going along with the last question, do you believe the number of "career coaches" are dropping around the state? If so, why do you think that's happening?

JS: Yes, it does seem that way. It can be a very unforgiving profession and like I said we, in my opinion, live in an instant gratification society and many people don't have the patience that it takes in this profession. I really believe I was very lucky to spend several years as an assistant, under some great mentors, before becoming a head coach. It also takes patience from the school and communities to allow a coach to get his system in and time for it to work.

HCH: You've had a long tenure at Oran High School. In this day and age, coaches change jobs frequently or get out of it altogether. What's your advice for any young coaches coming into the profession, or that have only been in it for a few years, on achieving long tenure at their schools or in the coaching profession?

JS: You have to love and respect the game; you can't get into it for the wins, glory or money. You should always put the players first in your decisions and remember that you are helping to shape the leaders of tomorrow. Never sacrifice wins for doing something the right way. Be honest with your players, parents, administration and community. It also helps to have a very understanding and forgiving family.

So You Want Me To Shoot More?

Years ago, I recruited a very good soccer player to the college team I was working with. She was the "real deal" and I was so excited to have the opportunity to coach her! She made great decisions off the field, was an A student, a great teammate, managed her time well, and she was a talented soccer player - what a combination!

But the truth is I struggled to coach her during her freshman year. It wasn't her work ethic or an attitude problem, it was a communication issue. It was like we were speaking two different languages. Here is what our conversations often sounded like when I was giving her feedback:

"We need you to get higher into the attack." ... "So you want me to shoot more?" ... "No, but give yourself some freedom when we have possession." ... "So I don't need to track back as much?" ... "No, you still need to track back but you can move into that space more." ... "So you want me to ..."

Ultimately, I would get frustrated and she would be on the field totally confused about what we needed from her. And let me be clear, this was a player I adored and I knew she was trying her very best, but we just couldn't get on the same page.

When the season ended I knew I had to make a change, I owed it to this student-athlete to figure out how to help her to be at her best. I made an appointment with the Director of our Academic Support Center and I explained the situation. I ask if there was any insight she could

provide on how this student-athlete processes information because what I was doing CLEARLY wasn't working.

The Director asked me if I was familiar with the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and I nearly jumped out of my seat with excitement! I had been a fan of this assessment for many years but I had never considered using it with a student-athlete.

I met with this player and I explained that I was frustrated with our communication. Like many student-athletes, she immediately thought she had done something wrong. I was quick to explain that was not the case. As a coach and an educator, I took full responsibility for not being able to teach her in a way that works for her. I strongly believe as coaches we need to adapt to the unique needs of our players and I had not done a good job of that with her.

She was open to taking the MBTI and the results were amazing! She and I were wired very differently and in the stressful moments of a game I was digging it to how I like to learn (assuming that everyone is just like me) and she needed the opposite. I was literally coaching/teaching her as backwards as I could - no wonder she was confused! But the MBTI gave me a very clear understanding of what she needed from me as her coach. As a result, we were able to come up with a plan and I adjusted how I gave her feedback to allow her to be at her best.

I am so grateful that we had an Academic Support Center, that I had a student-athlete who was willing to try something outside the box, and that together we figured how she best learns.

Years later I made the decision to become a certified practitioner of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. I can now help others with this process. If you'd like to talk about how the MBTI can help you understand yourself and those around you please [click here](#).

Oh, and her sophomore year, well, that was fun. She was a beast, but more important was the deeper connection we developed in the process. Our student-athletes deserve to have our best and sometimes that means we need to ask for help.

My experience says it is worth it.

Molly Grisham - A Person Of Influence LLC