

## **An Adjure for Diversification in Participation**

**By: Chris Miller, Associate Editor, Grandview High School**

The beginning of the school year has always been a fun time for me. Seeing middle school students come in from one year to the next and see the changes in their height and how much different they are now from last year is something astonishing to see as their teacher. And when you teach middle school physical education, you notice the physical changes, especially in students that participate in athletics. This school year, however, I noticed something that I was unfamiliar with in this age of students. When having conversations with several students, who played 7th grade basketball last year for our school, I made this disturbing observation.

As usual, I tend to spend the first few days of my physical education class trying to make sure I make connections with all of my students, so I can get to know them better. Even as the head boys basketball coach in the high school, I want to have a great relationship with any student who might be interested in playing basketball; but as the P.E. teacher, I want athletes that will play sports in all three seasons: Fall, Winter, and Spring. When I talk to students who I know play multiple sports, I'll ask them how their summer went and how football, cross country, or volleyball practices are going (those are the only three Fall sports we offer to middle school students). After that, I always tell them to keep working hard, and make sure to be ready for basketball season this Winter. During a conversation with one of our best 8th grade athletes about football practice, I was shocked to learn that he was not playing this season. When I asked why, his response was even more shocking:

*“Coach, I just want to focus on basketball right now.”*

Wait... What? This is an 8th grader was telling me this; it wasn't even a high school kid!

Who is planting these ideas in this kid's and parents' minds?

Now as a basketball coach, part of me felt really good about the relationships that have been developed by myself and my coaching staff to have this sort of athletic kid desire to spend his time on nothing but basketball. After five years of cultivating interest in your sport, there's a certain level of satisfaction that came with hearing those words come out of that 8th grader's mouth, especially when it seemed that it was easier to pull teeth back then than to get kids to want to play basketball. Now, numbers are higher than ever in students coming out to play for basketball. However, my small inkling of satisfaction quickly shifted to dismay. This student was a 3-sport athlete. He was the kind of player you wanted in your program: he had grit, spunk, hard-working, coachable, and excelled in any sport he participated in. I began to wonder why he didn't want to play. Did I say something to discourage him from playing another sport? Did I not promote multiple sports? Is there something going on at home? These and many other

questions quickly filled my mind after hearing his reply. I tried to reason with him and mention how well he played at football and running track last year as a 7th grader. Before I could rattle off too many reasons to play, he threw another curveball at me:

*“My parents said I need to pick a sport and focus on being good at it.”*

In my coaching experience, there's always been a few players that I have lost to other sports, where there has been an emphasis on just one sport. Sometimes, these kids feel that they have a legitimate shot at playing at the next level, and want to keep that hope alive by avoiding injury. Sometimes it's the parents that have those hopes of college and fear of injury. Other times, it's the coaches. Yes, the coaches. We are all guilty of wanting that player to choose basketball, or whichever sport we coach, above all others. As coaches, we must recruit our players for other coaches to play other sports in the school. Whether we like it or not, whether other coaches are promoting basketball or not, we have to do our part to move our players and parents away from the idea that they need to be specialized, playing only one sport. Even if it means us, as coaches, swallowing some pride when doing it.

The fact is we actually need these players to be diversified in their sports participation. Basketball is a long, grueling sport that covers four months of the school year from November to February... and that's not counting pre-season and off-season activities. As coaches, basketball is 24 hours a day, 365 days a year mindset. Even on summer family vacations, a basketball coach's mind can drift off into offensive sets against man-to-man defense with 10 seconds left in the quarter (well, maybe that's just me). But our players will most likely not share the same mindset. Some might, but those are few and far between. The main reason we shouldn't want our players to specialize in any sport is to prevent athlete burnout. Again, basketball is a long season, with a long off-season. I'm not saying that you should end your February/March post-season speech with, “Good job this year, guys. I'll see you this November.” Even though a player diversifies his sports participation, the goal is to have the player still make as many of the off-season activities as possible. You don't want to burn the kid out on playing basketball, but if they are participating in other sports' off-season activities, as well as basketball, they are getting a diverse taste of athletic competition and skill development, which will keep them from being slammed with the same sport over and over from season to off-season. High school athletes who specialize in a single sport are 70 percent more likely to suffer an injury during their playing season than those who play multiple sports, according to a study released by a study from the National Federation of High School Associations. So not only can these players get burnt out psychologically, they are at greater risk of jeopardizing their futures physically.

Fact is the idea that young athletes need to focus on one sport is a mislead ideology that has grown in the minds of parents and athletes in the last several years. Whether it's the selfish high school coach, or the 500 select baseball coaches who play 950

games over the course of the year, somewhere along the way, the idea that has spread like a disease in our youth. Now, it seems to be trickling down into our middle schools.

As basketball coaches, we must continually promote multi-sport participation from our players. It is easy to be selfish, wanting that player to be all-in for basketball. But selfishness for our sport cannot come before the welfare of our players. Studies have proven it. We, as basketball coaches, know the facts. We have to strive to educate our players and parents so they are not uninformed on the issue. If there is a chance at playing at the next level, or for even the sake of injury risk, we must continue to promote sports diversification in all of our students and athletes. If we don't make the effort for this cause, we will soon have T-ball players telling us they need to focus on their hitting. Let's help kids be kids and get the most out of their once-in-a-lifetime experience of youth.

## **Q&A With the Difference Makers**

### **Pete McBride - Eminence High School**

**Pete McBride is currently the head boys basketball coach at Eminence High School. In 1997, Coach McBride was hired at his alma mater to man the helm of the Eminence boys basketball program that had only had one winning season in the 90's; which was McBride's senior year of high school in 1991. Before coming home to Eminence, McBride served as an 8th grade assistant coach at Pershing Middle School and another year at Fair Grove as a varsity assistant and head JV coach. After a tough 4-16 record in his first season as the Redwings coach, Eminence's basketball program began to flourish under McBride's leadership, becoming a perennial Class 1 powerhouse, with only one losing season since his tenure began. Coach McBride has compiled a record of 342-230 in his head coaching career, all at Eminence. In his 21 years at Eminence, the Redwings have captured 6 Big Spring Conference championships, 9 district championships, 4 quarterfinal finishes, and the Class 1 State Championship in 2013. The 6-time Big Spring Conference and 2013 MBCA Richard Fairchild Coach of the Year recipient, and Missouri State alum now serves as the high school principal at Eminence but still has the reigns of his high-powered program. Coach McBride's teams have a reputation of tenacity, which is a mirror image of how he coaches. The Hard Court Herald caught up to McBride to get his insights on coaching, the state of the game, and family.**

***Hard Court Herald: Coach, you're entering your 22nd year of being the head coach boys' basketball coach at Eminence. In this day and age, not many coaches stay in the same place very long, even when that school is their alma mater. What has been the reason(s) for your longevity at Eminence and what keeps you motivated to coach every year?***

Pete McBride: I think first off and maybe most importantly is that I had people early on that stuck with me when times were tough. Many young coaches don't get the opportunity to stick around and build after losing seasons, but I was given time to change the culture here. Eminence is my alma mater and I always had the dream of building a proud and successful program in this community. I have a great passion for coaching and really enjoy watching my players grow into

successful men.

***HCH: You came back home to Eminence in 1997 to coach. What sort of difficulties did you face in taking the job at your alma mater back then? How did you change the culture from where it was to the Class 1 contender it is today, despite those difficulties?***

PM: I came back home and started my head coaching career when I was 23 years old. At that age and in your home town people view you as the kid that just graduated from college and rightfully so. When I had to train the players to call me coach instead of Pete that kind of says it all. Changing the culture of a program is probably the most difficult thing to do in the building process. When I took the job, Eminence had had 5 losing seasons in a row and virtually no building blocks in place to change that. I actually coached baseball also at that time and had some really good players, but the basketball program just had no momentum. I worked hard with the high school kids but really put a big emphasis on developing the elementary programs. It takes a lot of time but can really be rewarding when it all comes together.

***HCH: Your teams have a distinct reputation for tenacity, grit, and hustle. Even when they have lacked more talent than their opponents, they make up for it with these characteristics. What has been your philosophy and tactics on developing these critical aspects of a successful program in the young men you've coached?***

PM: First off that is a great compliment and I am proud of the fact that people might think of those attributes of our program. In a small school, you must take great pride in the area's you can control, because the talent level will always fluctuate. We haven't had a losing season here since 2002 and I believe without that mentality, it wouldn't have been possible. Then in the years the talent level is high you can accomplish great things because you still have those intangibles of toughness. As far as tactics to develop these characteristics I think a lot of it comes down to what you demand. The attitude of the kids should reflect what you as a coach think is important.

***HCH: Being a coach in a small school, fielding numbers of players is a constant challenge. Eminence's enrollment of approximately 129 between grades 7-12 is an example of such a challenge, yet your program yields a full JV and varsity team each year, with underclassmen ready to contribute, if necessary, on the varsity team, sometimes at a high level. How do you ensure quality numbers year after year? How do you prepare your underclassmen for the grind of playing varsity basketball?***

PM: Having good numbers is something you can't really control. We've been fortunate here to have kids come out that knew what to expect and were ready to work. I've tried to always have a good idea of where my kids are mentally. This goes against the grain but I might give them days off when others might not. We could come in after a poor performance that would dictate a very tough practice or I might send them home depending how I felt their mentality was. If kids are working hard but struggling, I might try to take some pressure off of them if they're not performing up to their potential. Really being in touch with the mental side of what your team needs is vital. I think with young players this is even more important. We have been fortunate

enough to have won 9 district titles since 2004. Being fresh and hungry at the right time has been a big key to that post season success.

***HCH: In 2013, you and the Redwings capped off a “dream season” by knocking off the defending Class 1 state-champion and perennial powerhouse, Scott County Central, and advancing to the Final Four. In Columbia, the Redwing’s played two games for the ages, with an impressive overtime comeback win against 2012 Class 1 runner-up, Drexel, and a thrilling state championship-clinching game against a tough Stanberry team, winning the school’s first ever boys’ basketball state championship. Describe that experience and how special that season was to you as a coach.***

PM: I’m not sure if I can fairly put it into words. It was everything you might think of and more for all of us. We had a group of players that had been major contributors since their freshman season. They had developed as players and more importantly teammates over the years. The run they made through the playoffs was nothing that we hadn’t been preparing for and talking about throughout their careers. It was an experience that we not only shared as a team, it was so special to me because we shared it as a program that had been building towards that moment for many years. All of our former players had an impact on what that team was able to accomplish and shared in that experience.

***HCH: Winning a state championship is every coach’s dream and many times, coaches spend their entire career never getting to experience it. You have had the great fortune to do so... but you’re not the only state-championship-winning coach living under your roof. Your wife, Francie McBride, is the head volleyball coach at BSC conference rival, Winona High School, and has captured 5 state championships of her own, and was recently inducted into the Missouri High School Volleyball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2017. I’m sure you’ve been asked before, but what’s it like seeing your spouse achieve the highest level of success and how does that help you on and off the court to have someone who understands the “coaching life”?***

PM: When she broke through and won her first state title in 2001 it was such a dream come true for both of us. Not only was I extremely proud of her, but it opened the door for us both. At that point we knew that it was an achievable goal. Her success has been something that no one could ever predict. She took over a program that hadn’t had much success and has guided it to 13 final 4’s and 5 state championships. It’s not easy being at a rival school that usually decides the fate of the other. I think most people can understand that you can be loyal to your school and the students there, while also wanting your spouse to be successful as well. Coaching is a very difficult profession and during difficult times you can feel alone. It’s been important for both of us to be able to have each other during those tough times. To be with her when she was inducted this spring was very special. I knew she was a hall of fame coach, but we were both taken back by the timing of it. Usually this recognition is for coaches that have already retired, but I know she has many years left and on her way to the 1000 win mark.

***HCH: Not only is your wife a fellow coach, but your son is a standout basketball player and, entering his junior year, is considered one of the top players in the area and,***

***arguably, in the state. Describe your experience of coaching your son and any benefits or challenges it presents.***

PM: I'll start out by saying that Trent has outstanding teammates who are really good players in their own right. His relationships with them makes the coaching situation easy on our end. The benefits of the experience is probably the most important thing in life and that is "time". As a coach, you miss so much time with your family it can make things very difficult. Trent has been a part of our team since he was 5 years old. He was the first person I embraced when we won our State Title in 2013 and I can't tell you what that moment was like. Now watching him developing into such an outstanding player and the program in such a strong position during his final few years is very special. We are very close and at the end of the day basketball is just another way that we can enjoy each other.

***HCH: By years, it's safe to say you are a "seasoned" coach, who has experienced a high level of success in their coaching career and have witnessed many changes in that time. In your opinion, how has the game of basketball changed during your career? Do you see a difference in the players who come out compared to the beginning of your career until now?***

PM: The game has changed and in my opinion keeps improving. Players can do things now that they couldn't or wouldn't even think about when I got started. The opportunities that these players have to compete against other players across the nation is something that keeps evolving the game. Granted there are kids that need to spend more time practicing in the gym, but those players that can find the balance of skill development and elite competition can really excel in today's game. I hear people say that kids are different than they were 10-20 years ago, but I really think that kids are kids and they just need people in their lives that love them and want to help them be successful.

***HCH: Sticking with the same theme, and with a similar question we give to coaches during these interviews, what pieces of advice do you give young people who want to get into coaching or young coaches, who are new to being head coaches in high school sports?***

PM: The best advice I could give to young coaches would be to surround yourself with great people. Find coaching mentors that want you to be successful and can help you through tough times in your career. Many times, young coaches are afraid to ask for help and really miss out on great resources from coaches that have been successful. Most importantly, get yourself in the best environment you can. Get yourself in a program that wants to be successful and will support you through the process to make it successful. And don't be afraid to go through the process it takes to build a strong program, so many people in life are always looking for the "next" move when the "best" move might be staying put.

***HCH: Finally, in your position as high school principal at Eminence, some might say that you have started to move closer to the end of your coaching career by taking on a role of a school administrator. How much thought have you given to "hanging up the whistle"?***

## ***Or do you believe that when the time is right, you'll know?***

PM: Being a coach and administrator no doubt has its challenges, but, honestly, right now I'm just focusing on continuing the tradition we have built. I have a couple great assistant coaches so I'm able to focus on my administrator duties if something arises that needs to be attended to. Maybe when the time is right I will know, but at this point, I'm just ready for November!

## **Positive Coaching Alliance The Positive Coaching Alliance**

This month we are sharing a website that could be very beneficial to anyone who coaches Youth Sports. The Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) develops through resources for youth and high school sports coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes. In addition to 1,500+ free audio-video and printable tips and tools at [www.PCDevZone.org](http://www.PCDevZone.org), PCA has partnered with roughly 3,500 schools and youth sports organizations nationwide to deliver live group workshops, online courses and books by PCA Founder Jim Thompson that help those involved in youth and high school sports create a positive, character-building youth sports culture.

PCA resources, which have reached more than 8.6 million youth, strive to transform high school and youth sports into a Development Zone® culture, where the goal is to develop Better Athletes, Better People and the following become the prevailing models in youth and high school sports:

The Double-Goal Coach®, who strives to win while also pursuing the more important goal of teaching life lessons through sports

The Second-Goal Parent®, who concentrates on life lessons, while letting coaches and athletes focus on competing

The Triple-Impact Competitor®, who strives to impact sport on three levels by improving oneself, teammates and the game as a whole.

PCA gains support from a National Advisory Board, including National Spokesperson and 11-time NBA Champion Coach Phil Jackson, and many other top coaches, athletes, organization leaders and academics who share PCA's mission.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Positive Coaching Alliance mission is to transform the youth sports culture into a Development Zone® where all youth and high school athletes have a positive, character-building experience that results in .

### **THE PCA WAY**

The PCA Way is a document that establishes and helps maintain cultural norms at Positive Coaching Alliance. PCA Founder Jim Thompson -- who defines "culture" as "The way WE do things HERE" -- was inspired to create this document by his time at Hewlett-Packard, where he experienced The HP Way. You can download the document as a PDF by clicking the image below.