

Letter From The Editor - Focusing on the "Win" that Matters
Chris Miller, Editor - Grandview (Hillsboro) High School

Another new basketball season is on the horizon, starting at the end of the month. As the leaves change color and the season approaches, I want to share some thoughts to keep in mind with our seasoned and newer basketball coaches...

Coaching high school sports will always be a difficult profession for those who have chosen to be in such a thankless job. Even with all of the hard work (countless hours spent studying film, making practice plans, running practice, scouting, and being away from family), coaching doesn't always pay off with a win, making the job itself tough. For the better part of the last fifteen years, I have lived that life of coaching basketball. I watched many of my colleagues get out of coaching during that time span. They would become administrators or get out of teaching altogether. Maybe some have stayed in it too long, and were being forced out by angry school board members and/or parents.

With all of that adversity and hardship, a coach might not reach their ultimate goal of winning a state championship or racking up the wins as a coach. Only a few basketball coaches have. Besides having to be in the right place, at the right time, and having a little luck on your side, it certainly doesn't hurt to have talent...but not everyone has the best talent or sustained levels of talent for a period of time. So when that happens, wins can come at a premium for program and a coach. They become what the coach is measured with. Those angry board members and parents use the numbers in the wins column to attack coaches and discredit their success. Even a coach might measure himself based on his own win total. In this world of instant gratification, it is easy to focus, fixate, and measure a coach's success based on the number of wins they achieve.

For this next generation of high school basketball coaches, and even the veteran coaches in the trenches, remember to avoid focusing on the wins column and focus on the only win that should matter: building a positive connection and relationship in your players and students to instill values that will help them in life after high school and beyond sports. Seems like an obvious responsibility of a coach...but are you connecting with as many kids in your program and in the classroom? Are you reaching the all-conference player or honors student only and not the kid who sits at the end of the freshmen team bench or the kid that sits in the back of the class who desires to drop out? Even if that kid is a player you coach that can't "hit the ocean with a basketball while sitting in a boat" or a student you teach that spends more time in ISS than in your classroom, your influence might be the only positive one they receive. When that former player or former student achieves higher levels in life after high school because of your teachings and coaching, that counts as a win...a win that matters. That kid does not have to be an all-star in that sport or in the classroom to be an all-star in life. More coaches will have opportunities to pick up these types of wins than coaching wins and championships.

Because most coaches do not "toot their own horn" and announce their impact on these areas, they will usually go unnoticed by a coach's detractors and critics. While impacting a student's life positively this type of win will not go into the win column where everyone can see, there will be gratification as a coach to see your former players achieve success. For example: I was reminded of this aspect of the job during a recent text conversation with a former player. When I took the job as head coach at the school 6 years ago, he was a senior. He didn't play much the

year before, had a history of quitting sports, was a troubled youth, and was a sub-average student in the classroom who did not apply himself. During that basketball season, we had a miserable season record-wise, winning only 3 games that year. The kid played every game, worked hard even when I challenged him, and finished the season. He went on to attend the local junior college and then Missouri State, an achievement he never thought possible during conversations we had during that senior year. In the middle of our text conversation, this young man, changes the subject, and tells me "Thank you, Coach. You changed my life. I owe you everything. I wouldn't be here without you. Thank you for not giving up on me" He didn't have to tell me that. I didn't lead him to do it. All I could do was humbly thank him for the kind words and applaud his successes so far. But those words alone made up for the losses, the meetings with angry parents, the late nights pouring over game film after a tough loss, and the seemingly empty wallet I carry for having chosen to take on this job. Knowing that this kid made it despite all his adversities and hardships because of a positive connection I built with him 5 years ago is the reason I teach and coach.

Those words drown out the detractors.

Those words might not measure my coaching success to the local school board and might not save my job.

Those words meant I did my job.

Those words gave me a win.

Not the kind of win that measures coaching success for Hall of Fame speeches.

But it's the kind of win that matters.

Coaches, make this the kind of win you chase in your careers. The other wins might change the way people look at your program; the wins that count will change the kids in your program... for life.

Chris

Skills vs. Play - A Call to Coaches

In an era where it seems like every kid has their own skills coach, why are kids worse basketball players? My answer to that would be, a lot of kids are getting really, really bad advice by some awful "coaches." Even worse? Parents are paying for this bad coaching. They're actually paying hard earned money to make their kid worse.

Let me stop right here and say that not every AAU Coach or Skills Trainer is a clown. Some of them are really good, most notably renowned skills trainer Drew Hanlen, a Webster Groves graduate. He's made an entire business out of making the best players in the world better. I also

know several AAU coaches that do a great job and have the right intentions. But every skills trainer ain't Drew Hanlen, and every AAU coach does not have kids' best intentions in mind.

If I had a nickel for every time I heard a story about some "coach" who told a player "you're D-1," I'd have a whole lot of nickels. How many times have I heard stories about an AAU coach or skills trainer telling a kid "your high school coach just ain't using you right" or something like that? Too many to count. How many times have we seen a really good player, maybe the best at his/her high school, go play for an AAU team, and then mysteriously transfer schools? Too many to count.

The whole system needs an overhaul, but the whole system is only in place because the high school coaches, MSHSAA, and local school districts allow it.

FACT: For 99% of high school coaches that I know, coaching is their livelihood. It's how they feed their families. It's how they pay their bills.

FACT: The only reason the entire "skills training industry" and "AAU circuit" exists is because of the rules at the state (MSHSAA) level that prevent high school coaches from working with their own players in the offseason.

So to recap: (1) A player wants to get better in the offseason. (2) His/her coach can't work with said player. (3) Player goes out and pays for skills training or pays to be on an AAU team. (4) There is a roughly 82.4% chance said player will get horrible, awful, bad advice from a "coach" who is not a certified educator, hasn't passed a background check, has no training working with kids, and might not even know that much about basketball.

How do we fix this problem? I think basketball coaches in the state of Missouri need to take a stand. I mean, if it's okay for "skills trainers" to make six figure salaries training kids, why can't high school coaches do the same thing? Why should MSHSAA put a limit on high school coaches' ability to make a living?

And bigger picture, if we're trying to do what is right for the game of basketball, we need the right people teaching kids how to play. Basketball is not a "series of moves." It's not a "hesi, crossover, step-back, fade-away." Basketball, when played the right way, is played with vision, by kids who see the game together, in a collective way, passing and cutting and moving and driving. When played the right way, basketball is a beautiful game, a game where the ball moves, where there is anticipation and "a flow" to the game. It's a game where "moves" happen in the middle of that "flow," not by a kid who takes 13 dribbles trying to manufacture a "move."

Years ago, if you looked at the traditional powerhouse programs around the state, they were all built the same way... awesome feeder program, good junior high coaching, and then that feeds right into the high school program.

Compare that to what we're seeing now in certain parts of the state... player joins "Shoe Company Red" AAU team, which means they get to train with "Skills Trainer Mike" for free, and lo and behold, most of the kids on Shoe Company Red that train with Skills Trainer Mike end up at the same private school together. Coincidence? I don't think so.

I think high school coaches need to make a stand, TOGETHER. If we don't, I believe in 5-10 years we're going to see some really drastic changes to the game. I think it's time to demand that MSHSAA take the handcuffs off of high school coaches, REAL COACHES, and let us work with our own kids. Because it's not a matter of "if" these kids are going to keep playing in the offseason. It's just a matter of "who is going to be coaching them?"

My vote is for high school coaches. I think it's time we put the power back in our own hands.

Article by David Heeb, Delta High School and Just Win Today

The Struggle to Juggle: Tips for Staying Organized Throughout the Season

The beginning of the season can be a little overwhelming if you begin to think about all of the things you need to put into a practice plan. There is skill development, culture development, strength training, offensive concepts, defensive concepts, conditioning and mental toughness. Then there can be the administrative things to cover along with this. Making sure physicals are on file, parent meeting planned, how am I going to communicate with my parents, fundraising and possible community outreach situations. When the first actual game happens and the fans are sitting in the seats to watch our teams perform, the vast majority of them will have no idea of the many steps it takes along this journey to actually arrive at the first game.

In this edition we are going to look at a few ideas to help with the overall planning of a practice schedule. I believe that you need to have a clear plan in place of what you want to happen over the first 3 weeks of practice. Like all plans, they will change but having an overall plan in place gives you structure and helps you hold yourself accountable to make sure your practices have not become an emotional process of each day and you are following your core values of what you want your team to become.

This practice planning outline give you a format to think about the different aspects of each part of practice. It is broken up into sections of Culture/Team Activities, Individual Development, Defensive Development and Offensive Development. This could be tweaked into different forms, but I hope it gives you something you could use in planning your first 3 weeks of practice.

Also, a checklist of important items and events to remember as you start the season. Make a copy and use with your own program.

Hope these help and good luck to all the coaches!

Article by Darrin Scott, Jackson High School

Q&A With the Difference Makers

Luke Floyd - Rolla High School

Luke Floyd is currently the head girls basketball coach at Rolla High School. In 2014, Coach Floyd was hired to be the Head Girls Basketball Coach of the Lady Bulldogs, who were coming off a 2-24 season a year before. Since taking helm at Rolla, Coach Floyd has guided the Lady Bulldogs to an improvement in wins every year, finishing the 2017-18 season with a second place finish in the district tournament. This sort of transformation is not unusual to Floyd, who has turned around two other schools' programs during his coaching career. In 2001, Coach Floyd began his coaching career when he was hired to be the Head Boys Basketball Coach at his alma mater, Hale High School. After posted a 127-86 record at Hale and turning around the program there, Floyd took his talents east to Sturgeon High School. There, now as the Head Girls Basketball Coach, Coach Floyd led the Lady Bulldogs to new heights. During his tenure at Sturgeon, the Lady Bulldogs rolled to a 111-27 record and made a trip to the Class 2 Quarterfinals.

Entering his 18th season in coaching both boys and girls basketball, Floyd has posted a combined 265-187 record at Hale, Sturgeon, and Rolla. His teams have collected 6 conference championships, 2 district championships, and a state quarterfinals trip. *The Hard Court Herald* caught up with Coach Luke Floyd, who is often very modest about his own accomplishments, and talked a little hoops and a little life with the Rolla coach.

Hard Court Herald: Coach, your 2017-18 team wrapped up a season where they finished second in the Class 4 District 11 championship game to state quarterfinalist School of the Osage. Thinking about your expectations of your team coming into the season, how do they measure up when comparing them with your results and accomplishments?

Coach Luke Floyd: Going into the season, we were very optimistic about it's possibilities. We started 4 freshmen the 16-17 season and took our lumps in hopes of gaining the experience, practice habits, and work ethic to take the next step in our program. From day one, the girls really practiced hard and competed in everything that we did. We started the season slow (1-6), but really started to play well around Christmas and continued that trend throughout the rest of the season. We won 3rd Place in both our Holiday Tournament and the Smith-Cotton Tournament. We upset Camdenton at home and played Kickapoo very tough heading into Districts, so I knew we had a chance to make some noise. In the District semifinals, we were able to avenge an earlier loss to Helias who took us to the woodshed a month earlier. I think at that point, the girls really bought into our program and realized that they were capable of playing at a very high level.

HCH: You have been the Head Coach of the Rolla Lady Bulldogs for four years. During the last four years, what sort of difficulties have you faced after taking over a program that went 2-23 the year before you arrived? How have those difficulties been addressed and changed in the last four years?

LF: It started by trying to build interest in our program. The first year here we went winless and finished the season with I believe 13 girls in our entire program (9th through 12th grade). That first year was rough, but our girls worked hard every day and never quit on me. In the

off-season, we held camps at our elementaries, had youth league coaching clinics, and did everything we could think of to get interest in our program. We brought in our junior high teams at the end of their seasons, had a pizza party and recognized them at a home game. We also have games each year where we bring in our youth teams and recognize them as well. Because of these things, each year our numbers have improved, and now we have girls that are excited to become Rolla Lady Bulldogs.

We are also blessed with local media (newspapers and radio) that have done a tremendous job of giving us coverage and accentuating the things that we are doing well as a team, even when we lose. I've been blessed with great assistant coaches and a great administration that understands it takes time to turn this thing around. They've been very supportive and patient during my time here. Lastly, we have great kids that work hard and take pride in our program. As we've started to have success, girls from the first couple of years show up and are excited to see us have success. The girls playing now want to win and honor those that laid the foundation of our program.

HCH: Coach, you spent the first eight years of your coaching career coaching boys basketball before taking the girls basketball coaching job at Sturgeon in 2009-10. What was the adjustment like for you making the switch from coaching boys to coaching girls?

LF: I'm sure most of our girls would disagree, but I've worked very hard (and continue to work on) a calmer demeanor when coaching. I have extremely high expectations of our players and I'm an ultra-competitive person. I don't always compress those things like I should. In my experience, girls tend to listen a little better than boys and are usually not as stubborn about things. Coaching girls has made me a better teacher of the game. I try to spend more time really breaking down how we do things instead of running through it very quickly and moving on. Most of all though, coaching girls has made me take more time to get to know my players. I knew my boys and cared about them too (and still keep in touch with several of them), but I make it a point to try and get to know little things about the girls. This year before every practice we had a question of the day. Some would be serious, some would be fun, but it was very interesting to get to know little things about each of them. It was something I looked forward to every day and I think they did as well.

HCH: You've coached in schools with small enrollment numbers and now coach at a Class 4 school. What differences or similarities do you see in student-athlete numbers that come out to play basketball? The same in other sports?

LF: I was very surprised at our low numbers my first year at Rolla. I couldn't believe that there weren't more girls that wanted to play basketball. It didn't take long to realize that it's because there are so many clubs, sports, and activities. At Hale and Sturgeon, for the most part, the same kids participated in everything that was offered. At Rolla, there are often multiple sports and activities going on within the same season so kids have to choose at an early age what they want to participate in. The numbers in our program are increasing, but just like in the smaller schools, it goes in cycles. We graduated 1 senior this year after graduating 2 the previous year. However, we will have 6-8 seniors in the upcoming classes.

HCH: Your teams have a reputation for how well they play defense. What has been your approach to developing this type of culture in your programs?

LF: I've been blessed with great kids. They make me look a lot better as a coach than what I really am. I'm a defensive guy. We spend a lot of time talking about how defense is effort. There are nights that you can't throw the ball in the ocean, but you should always be able to defend. We also stress that if you want playing time, show us that you can defend. It's no coincidence that our success as a program has increased as our kids have bought into playing defense.

I'm a man to man coach, but over the years we've played more and more zone. That being said, we spend our off-season and summers playing man. Our junior high teams play man and we encourage our youth coaches to play man. I believe that if you can get kids to buy into playing defense, guard your man, trust that your teammates will help you when you need it, and rebound, the offense will come along. Most players and their parents want to see their names in the paper and offense is usually how that happens, so we tell our kids "Get steals, and shoot layups". Once our kids start seeing the success they have with good defense and how it opens up our offense, it becomes contagious within the program and eventually becomes the expectation.

HCH: Your three stops as a head coach have yielded turnarounds in the programs and increases in wins. What type of characteristics and values do you instill in your teams that create that success.

LF: As I mentioned earlier, we try to instill a defensive mentality. We also really try to create a family atmosphere. The high school basketball season is a long, grinding season. You spend a lot of time with your teammates and coaches. We try to emphasize that we are a family. When you spend that much time with the same people, you're going to have disagreements and bad days. We try to emphasize that at the end of the day, we are all striving for the same goals and care about each other. It's not always easy and there are seasons when that chemistry just isn't there, but we try to do things outside of basketball throughout the season that makes it enjoyable to be around one another. We'll occasionally start practice with a game like PacMan tag or go to a movie as a team. Just find ways to enjoy one another off the court.

HCH: Between your coaching schedule and your family schedule, you lead a pretty busy life. How do you feel you have grown, as a coach, and more importantly, as a husband and father, to ensure there is balance for both?

LF: I have the greatest wife in the world. She is the reason that I am able to coach. She manages our schedules and gets everyone (our kids) where they need to be. She's my biggest supporter and sometimes the only one in the stands cheering for some of the kids. Every season, our team becomes "our" kids and she's completely happy with that. Our own kids have grown up in gyms and at ballfields. It's all they've ever known. My kids have been blessed to have had hundreds of big brothers and sisters to look up to. They've had tremendous role models and have learned so much from many of them. My family is a part of our program. We are a coaching family. That's the only life we know. When we have time away from basketball,

we try to spend it as a family. I also try to be at as much of my kids stuff as I can and when I can't be there, my wife supports them double.

As I've gotten older, I've learned to leave coaching at school and try not to bring it home with me. I've also tried very hard as my girls started playing sports to just be Dad and not a coach. There are times when I'm better at that than others, but I'm finding that balance. I've also made it a point to let them come to me if they want to work on their game. I don't ask them to go to the gym and shoot, but if they come to me and ask, I find time to get them there. I want them to love the game as much as I do and would hate to make it a "job" by asking them to go shoot.

HCH: After 17 years of coaching basketball, some might say you are bound to be a "lifer" in the coaching profession. How have you not been tempted to make the change from coaching and teaching into other school roles such as administration, as many of your other coaching peers have done?

LF: I love coaching. I love teaching the game. I love practice and game planning. Administrators have to deal with all the "other stuff" that I don't enjoy about coaching. I don't have the temperament or patience for that. I've been blessed to have great administrators and I'm grateful they've done their job so that I can do mine.

HCH: Coaches coming into the profession nowadays face a different set of challenges than the ones that you faced when you first started coaching. What advice do you (or would you) give young people who want to get into coaching or young coaches, who are new to being head coaches in high school sports?

LF: I'd encourage anyone that feels the calling to coach to pursue it. It's a great occupation. I'd advise them to remember that we do this to help kids. It's not about you, but about them. I'd also advise them that there will always be people that you're going to make mad, and you will be called everything you can think of. Do what's right. Your decisions won't always be popular, but as long as you know it is the right one, you'll be fine. And typically, for every person that complains, there are several people that support and appreciate you. Don't let the "haters" drive you away. Winning is great and is how coaches are measured, but it's the relationships you build that make this job great. Enjoy those little moments. Lastly, as you are building your program, I'd give you the same advice we teach our players: "Little things done right make big things happen."