

Legacy Leadership

Bruce Brown, CMAA, CIC
Executive Director, OIAAA



I have a confession to make: Back in my basketball coaching days, I never intended to become an athletic administrator. Nope, it was not even on the radar screen!

I had had my opportunity to coach at the college level, and, even though it was enjoyable, I felt a stronger calling at the interscholastic level. I was a “career” basketball coach, and someone was going to have to drag me off the court, kicking and screaming when I left!

When fate intervened and presented me an option of moving into athletic administration, I did so with reservation and, quite frankly, some trepidation. After all, I knew my craft well and still had the high level of energy needed to be effective as the head coach of a competitive program.

As I pursued input and perspective from colleagues and trusted friends, I was given two very good pieces of advice. One came from a former competitor coach who had made a similar transition; he said, “When you are an A.D., you are really a mentor to many of your coaches on staff. You may not see the ‘wins’ in the sports pages the next morning; instead, you’ll experience many ‘quiet victories’.....the ones that many will never see or know about.”

The other piece of advice came from a long-time athletic director who was familiar with my background and professional perspective. He shared, “As the athletic director, you can become the ‘coach of coaches’ for your staff”.

Initially, I felt the “coach of coaches” analogy was a little bit overblown and skewed toward the pompous side of things. How would I offer advice to a coach in another sport or area I may lack familiarity with? I even had one head coach who had been in two state championship games over his tenure.....did I really think I could tell him how to be a better coach?

Over time, I realized the message really was about my offering support and providing opportunities for our coaches to grow as people. The end result for our coaches was to insure they each delivered remarkable experiences for our students via athletic participation. My role wasn’t so much to offer my coaching philosophies or personal beliefs to my coaches. It was really about creating a culture where each coach strived to develop legacy-like environments for their students.

I was recently reminded of the power that quality coaches have on students. My own high school basketball coach, the man who was the most influential person on my

decision to go into teaching and coaching, passed away unexpectedly at the end of April. As we made our way down to North Carolina (where he had been a college coach before returning to the high school ranks), I couldn't help but reflect upon every little instance and story I know influenced my actions and directions over the past 50 years.

What I hadn't expected, however, was the overwhelming outpouring of feelings and reflections that his players, parents, fellow coaches and school community members offered during the memorial services. What especially struck me was that he had only gone back and coached at this North Carolina high school for nine years before retiring.....and it had been 20+ years since he last coached!

To a person, the stories that were recanted and memories shared of the person they knew as "Coach Bo" were the same stories and reflections we had all the way back from the '60s. My coach truly lived a life of helping people and using his sport as the medium to deliver life lessons to everyone he and his program touched.

As you wrap up another school year, you will certainly find a moment to reflect upon the numerous activities, events and challenges of this past year. Like all of us in this profession, we are confronted with a plethora of issues and details that are part of our ever-changing landscape. It is very easy to succumb to the "voices" and themes we hear over and over if we don't keep our eyes upon our true targets.

As you think about your role within your school and the expectations of what you are being asked to address, I would remind you to continually keep that "true north" uppermost in your mind. It's not being "Pollyanna" to maintain that higher goal as the athletic administrator for your school. In fact, I would counter and state that YOU are often the last bastion to insure that interscholastic athletics delivers what it has always purported to do: Provide some of the greatest educational and life lessons for our young people in the largest and safest laboratory in any school district!

Building your leadership tenure upon legacy-quality teaching may be the single greatest gift you can provide those within your influence. When they talk about you in the future, how will your leadership legacy be described?

Enjoy some break time in the summer and recharge the batteries. Your coaches, students and school community needs you ready to lead 'em come Fall!