

Coaches' Favorites

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By Scott Rosberg

Early in my coaching career, fellow coaches and teachers sometimes talked about the idea that we had to make sure we didn't play favorites. I totally understood and bought in. While everyone is unique and we could never treat all kids exactly the same way, we needed to make sure that we were consistent and fair in how we treated them all, and that we did not treat kids so differently from one another that it appeared we had favorites.

But a funny thing happened on my way through my teaching and coaching career. I realized that I was a human being. A human being with feelings. A human being that, like all human beings, likes certain types of people for the way they do things and how they treat others more than he likes other people for the way they do things and treat others. And I realized that I felt this way about my students and athletes, as well.

“WHAT!?!? The Horror! How could you, Scott? They are all to be treated the same, no matter what they do, and no matter how human you think you are!” But the more I tried to fit into that neat little package, the more I struggled with it. And the longer I taught, coached, and directed athletics, the more I came to realize that it was okay for me to feel that way. I realized that no matter how hard I tried not to, I was going to have favorites.

Once I realized that, I was able to honestly and openly assess what that meant. When I would discuss the concept with other teachers and coaches, they confided in me that they felt the same way, too. And then I came up with the line that has been my mantra on the subject for most of my career – “Because I am a human being, I have favorites. However, I don’t play favorites.” That idea has guided me for many years now. It freed me to be able to just teach and coach all kids to the best of my ability while at the same time recognizing that they are all different, and I am going to feel differently about each of them because of that.

When I say, “I have favorites,” I mean that there were players who had a combination of talent, skills, effort, attitude, and character that made me like them so much. When one has all of those things, they are going to be our favorites, and so they may get treated a little differently. This happens in all walks of life. I am not saying that they got special treatment, or they weren’t held accountable, or they got whatever they wanted, or anything else like that. But I am saying that, all things being equal (namely talent and skills), the kids who received more of my attention were the ones who I liked more because of the kind of players, workers, teammates, and most importantly, people that they were. And, yes, there were times these kids actually got the nod and played a bit more because of the kinds of attributes they possessed.

It actually makes complete sense. My favorites have always been the kids who did the following: gave great effort, studied the game, came to practice and games with their motors running, had a focused attention and effort, had a teachable spirit, put the needs of the team ahead of their own, were polite, were fun to be around, smiled and laughed a lot but were serious when they needed to be, handled themselves maturely, asked questions, carried on conversations with me about things outside of sports, were committed to and then lived our team’s standards, were respectful, pushed others while encouraging them at the same time, did whatever was needed, and were outstanding, unselfish teammates.

Look at that list of attributes and tell me you wouldn’t want people who embodied those characteristics on your team. Of course, you would. Then I ask you – “How could that person not be one of your favorites?!”

Let me close with three messages, one each for coaches, athletes, and parents.

Coaches – Don’t be afraid to have favorites, if your favorites are the kids described above, and don’t worry about playing them more than those who don’t fit the description above. Don’t fall into the trap of rewarding talented players who have poor work ethics, attitudes, and selfish behaviors over the kids in your program who do everything the right way, the way you want them done, with 100% heart, passion, and love for the game and the team.

Athletes – Work to become a coach’s favorite based on the description above, and start living those things. Don’t try to get by on your talent alone. Recognize that talent will only take you so far, but your effort, your attitude, and your commitment to your team will take you to places that are truly special.

Parents – Help your child understand what I have just explained about becoming a favorite. Make sure that you understand it, too. Don’t fight it; embrace it. Don’t you want your child to be that child, too? Don’t you want your child to be the kind of player and teammate that everyone wants to have on their

team? Don't you want your child to be someone's favorite because s/he has all the characteristics that make her or him an outstanding person of great character and integrity? Then keep in mind that your child's coach is looking for that, too.

Do you have "favorites"? How do you deal with them and this issue? I'd love to hear your thoughts! Go to my website – www.coachwithcharacter.com (<http://www.coachwithcharacter.com>)– and leave a comment. Also, when you are there, check out my new gift booklet **Senior Salute**. It is written for coaches to give to their senior athletes on their senior nights or end-of-season banquets. I have a Launch Special on it for the month of October!

Bio

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Teaching and Coaching have been two of my greatest passions since I began my career over 30 years ago. I have always believed that as coaches, we are teachers just like any classroom teacher. However, we are entrusted with so much more than just teaching skills and techniques of our specific sports. We are role models, counselors, and educators of the many life lessons that sports can teach young people. Find more articles like this at: <http://www.coachwithcharacter.com/>

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