

>> Article Date: November 4, 2009

Coaches Need Mentors

Coaches, all coaches, would do well to have a mentor. Young coaches just starting in the profession often make the mistake of trying to be like a coach they admire. That role model could be their middle school or high school coach, a college coach whose program the young coach admires, or a NBA coach. The problem is, the young coach is not being who he or she is. This almost always is to the detriment of the coach and the players.

Older coaches can stubbornly stick to a style of play that once worked well for them but the players that fit that style of play are not the players currently in the program. Other coaches jump from one trendy style of play to the latest trend to come along and in doing so harm their program through a lack of consistency from one season to the next.

Coaches, regardless of age, should seek out a mentor, one as a minimum and possibly two, to serve as a guide, a sounding board for ideas, a resource for information and when needed, a critic who can give wise and valuable, even if painful, criticism.

Too often it is difficult for a coach to see the forest for the trees. It takes an outside perspective sometimes to see the challenges that face a particular program. The coach is so caught up in just doing the daily tasks that consume so much of a coach's time and energy that often it is not possible to stop and think reflectively without the pressure of the moment dictating the entire process of examination.

This is when a mentor can be valuable. The mentor, who ideally would not be directly linked to the coach's program, has no vested interest except in providing sound counsel to the coach being mentored. This frees the mentor to look at things from a fresh and unbiased perspective, enabling the mentor to perform a needs assessment - what needs to be done minus the way things are now equals what must be done.

Guiding a coach in the process of discovering a style of coaching and play that fits the personality of the coach being mentored is another valuable role the mentor can play. Even if the style of play that best fits the coach being mentored is the exact opposite of the style the mentor plays, who better to tell a run and gun coach how to attack a disciplined, deliberate, slow tempo team than a coach who coaches that style of play? Who better to teach a coach who has trouble teaching players how to defeat a zone press than a great zone pressing coach? The coaches who coach those styles know better than anyone else what the weak points of those styles of play are.

A great way to create a mentor/coach relationship is to identify some small college coaches (the real innovators in the game) and work at their basketball camps during the summer. This kind of experience is one of the best ways to learn the game. It also gives the coach seeking to be mentored a chance to see the college coach in action and determine if this is someone that they could bond with in a mentoring relationship.

Experienced high school coaches are another source of mentors that coaches should take advantage of. Not only do these coaches have a vast pool of experience and knowledge, they know what will work on the high school level and what won't. Unlike college coaches, who can

recruit players who fit their system, high school coaches must coach the players who attend their school and adapt to the players they have.

My last piece of advice is don't be afraid to seek out a mentor of a coach who coaches the opposite gender of player than you do, or for that matter is a member of the opposite gender. My experience has been that the good coaches, who you would want to have as a mentor, are flattered when you ask them to mentor you, and if they feel they are not a good fit, they will often find you a mentor. The ones who simply blow you off, thank your good fortune, they would not have made a good mentor.

As always, thanks for dropping by!

Coach Sivils



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