

Betsy

FYC 13100

Prof. Clauss

April 4, 2005

Please note: All of the names in this essay have been changed. –Prof. Clauss
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### Local Argument Essay

Situation: For four years, I played tennis at Athena High School in Rochester, New York and was named co-captain my senior year. During my last two years at Athena, I played under Coach Tom Smith. I am writing a letter to the athletic director of Athena, Mr. Jones, to try to get him to reconsider rehiring Smith for next year's season. Mr. Jones is currently in the process of negotiating contracts and hiring new people for next year, and I think his mind is open to the ideas and thoughts of people who know Athena's tennis program. (Mr. Jones did not hire Coach Smith, but took the position of athletic director just two years ago.)

Dear Mr. Jones,

Recently I heard that you are in the process of deciding whether the girls' tennis coach, Tom Smith, should be rehired for next year. I played tennis at Athena for all four years of high school. My senior year, Kathy Martin and I served as co-captains on the team. Like you, I value the improvement and success of Athena's tennis program. My four years playing tennis has helped me understand that in addition to being effective teachers of athletics, good coaches display sensitivity to issues outside the sport, realize that academics are more important than athletics for high school students, create meaningful relationships with their players, and develop a program that treats all players equally and fairly. For the last two years of my career, I played under Coach Smith. He greatly improved the way our team looked in the record-books, and we had more wins in those two years than the team had experienced since the mid-1980s. However, I have a number of concerns that I would like to share with you about Coach Smith's approach to coaching.

As I'm sure you agree, coaches should be willing to teach, talk to, and work with their players to create good coach-player relationships. I am not an expert in the coaching field and have never been a coach myself; however, I do know from both experience and classroom learning—I am an education major, and am slowly but surely learning the value of teacher-student relationships—that the environment a teacher or coach creates for his students or players can greatly affect the attitudes of the students involved. In many cases, coaches provide a positive role model for adolescent players and become someone that players can talk to in times of need. Unfortunately, however, Athena girls tennis players are not given the opportunity to create such a relationship with Coach Smith. He had little interaction with his players outside of direct tennis instruction. For example, when practices and matches ended, and it was time to go home, Coach Smith would simply wave his hand toward the parking lot and say “see you tomorrow.” Very few words of encouragement, understanding, or congratulations ever left his mouth. After becoming increasingly more frustrated by this, an assistant coach, Jen South, spoke with him about this lack of meaningful interaction with the players after Kathy Martin and I had expressed a deep concern about his unwillingness to interact on any level besides tennis instruction. We were very disappointed when Jen came back to us after talking with him with a defeated look on her face. She said to us, “I'm not sure what to do. He doesn't seem to think it's a problem and thinks that his only focus is tennis. I'm sorry, girls, but we'll just have to keep trying.” She hugged us both, but Kathy and I still left practice that night feeling frustrated about the program we were working so hard to develop. I truly believe that if we had played under a coach that we could trust, the numbers in our record-books might have been even more impressive.

Another quality of good girls' tennis coaches is their ability to teach more than just how to hit the ball, but how to react on the court. When a tennis player makes a bad choice and loses a point, she has two options: she can get angry and let the one lost point affect the rest of her game, or she can turn around, take a deep breath, and start the next point calmly. By understanding that high school age girls may have trouble choosing the second option, good coaches can directly teach girls how to monitor their attitude while on the court. As co-captains, Kathy and I assumed the role of helping girls work through this dilemma, but we could not do it alone. We expected the support and backing of our coach. Unfortunately, we did not receive the support we needed. The consequences of this were destructive to our team's record. For example, a sophomore was having problems with being able to remain calm and collected during her matches. When she would hit bad shots or double fault, she would get angry. Her anger negatively affected the remainder of that game, set, or even match, because she was still concentrating on the point she lost rather than the one she was playing. Eventually, this problem got so bad that in the middle of a match, she began crying. She couldn't concentrate enough to even keep the ball in play, let alone win points. Had Coach Smith taught this girl (and the rest of her teammates) how to properly handle herself and monitor her emotions and attitude on the court, she might have won her match. As you can see, teaching only how to hit the ball is not enough to win a match. Coaches must directly teach tennis players how to bounce back after losing tough points to win matches.

Also, having high expectations for players can be beneficial for athletic programs. Athletes at any level will excel more when they are challenged with difficult tasks. Coach Smith was successful in improving the way we appeared to the community and other teams. From this standpoint, he was a great coach. However, winning is not the only concern of high school

athletics. When winning becomes everything, the morale of the team goes down because athletes feel like they are treated as machines rather than human beings. Coach Smith was very controlling of us. Once during drills at practice, a few girls were in the back of the line talking while they waited their turn. Coach Smith suddenly became infuriated. The whole team ended up running so many laps and wind-sprints that some girls even felt ill and vomited. Sadly, this was not an isolated case; there were many other instances in my four years of tennis very similar to this one. Eventually, after seeing their daughters playing in these conditions under Coach Smith, many parents began to criticize his approach to coaching. I hate to sound vulgar, but I must mention that once while in a discussion with a mother of a player, she said to me: “If they let him go any farther, the girls won’t be able to leave practice to change their tampons. It’s like he expects them to leave literally everything in the parking lot, and that *can’t* happen.” I believe what this mother was trying to say was that it is one thing to be demanding and have high expectations, but it is another to be so critical and severe that players vomit during practices and frustrated parents criticize his controlling attitude.

Additionally, Athena prides itself on having student-athletes that truly are first students, then athletes. I am sure that as an athletic director and a former teacher, you value student-athletes’ success both in the game and in the classroom. To play a sport, Athena athletes must pass their classes and maintain a specific GPA before stepping onto the court or field. However, Coach Smith’s approach to coaching does not coincide with this “school-first, sport-second” priority held by the rest of the athletic department. For example, I was invited to the Academic Awards Banquet every year, because I maintained a GPA above 3.66. My senior year, I gave a speech at this banquet for being one of the top ten students of my class. Since you are a high-ranking employee at Athena High School, I’m sure you understand that this is the highest award

anyone can receive at Athena. As you can imagine, this banquet was a much-anticipated event for both my parents and me. However, when I told Coach Smith of the date and time of the banquet and my speech, he coldly responded that if my match was not over, I would not be able to attend. I left practice that day furious and immediately told my parents upon arriving home. While this could have been an easy situation to handle for Coach Smith (other coaches in the system, as you know, always let their top ten students out of matches or games early or entirely if they are giving a speech at the banquet), he placed tennis above academics. My parents spent a great deal of time on the phone with him, and in the end were forced to simply tell him that I would be leaving even if my match had not finished. Luckily my match ran only a quick two sets, and I was able to both attend the banquet and finish my tennis match. But, by placing athletics over academics, Coach Smith unnecessarily created stress for my family and tried to take away the main goal I had been working toward for four years.

Furthermore, you probably agree that coaches have a responsibility to their players to create a fair and equal opportunity for each individual. Players who make varsity should also be those that earn—through athletic ability and performance alone—that spot. Unfortunately, Coach Smith made it common practice to “play favorites.” It seemed as if girls that were “favorites” came from families that were involved with or even in charge of the summer tennis program that Smith set up or had been taking lessons with him since they were young. While it is understandable that he might know these players’ strengths and weaknesses better because he had more interaction with them, Coach Smith gave those girls an unfair advantage that has little to do with the way they perform on the court during the season. One girl, a “favorite,” lost a challenge match at the beginning of the year. However, she still ended up playing above the girl she lost to despite having lower scores overall and losing to her. Although I have been removed

from the program for two years, I still remember how much it hurt the girl that won to play beneath a girl that she clearly should not have. She came to Kathy and me extremely frustrated that she was placed in a lower spot than a girl she beat during challenge matches. Though there is no real way to know, the assistant coach, Kathy, and I believe that she was placed in the lower position simply because the other girl was a “favorite.” I hope you agree that Smith’s practice of “playing favorites” is unprofessional and unfair to the whole team.

I loved tennis, and I certainly don’t regret playing. While I was in high school, I worked very hard to be successful in the tennis program. Thus, I continue to value the success and improvement of the Athena tennis program. From both experience playing high school tennis and learning about the qualities of good teachers and coaches in my education curriculum, I, like you, understand that a coach that is willing to work with the girls as not only their coach but as a member of the team—willing to level with them and understand where they are coming from, as well as respect Athena’s “school-first, sport-second” principle—would be very beneficial to the program. I genuinely hope that this letter has been helpful to you, and that you take my concerns into consideration while you are making your decision.

Sincerely,

Betsy (last name deleted by Clauss)