

Donovan
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Note: I have changed this essay's line spacing to save paper. Also, I numbered the paragraphs to facilitate discussion. --PClauss

Coach Ritter

(1) In a life characterized by constant relocation due to my father's erratic job as the VP of Marketing for Eaton Corporation, I have seldom encountered an adult who I've known long enough to solidify them as a particularly influential figure. Teachers have come and gone each year. Inspirational movie characters have shared my presence for a maximum of two hours. And religious leaders make an appearance just once a week. However, my search for an adequate role model came to a successful end when I joined the Eden Prairie High School varsity football team my Junior year and was put under the direction of Coach Ritter. Over the next two years, I had continued contact with Coach because of his position as the inside linebackers coach and defensive coordinator. My numerous positive experiences with Coach Ritter's incredible coaching abilities and wonderful personality cemented him as one of the most prominent figures in my life so far.

(2) With extensive football experience, Coach Ritter was an impressive, proficient coach. I still remember the stories Coach would tell the inside linebackers between sprints about his high school glory days as the star running back, #28 for the "unstoppable" Edina Hornets. Of course we all knew the amount of historical accuracy in his tales was questionable at best. However, his level of performance in high school eventually led him to play division III college ball as a St. John's Johnnie. There he played under the former head coach John Gagliardi, the winningest college football head coach ever. After four years of invaluable instruction from one of the greatest college coaches of all time, Coach Ritter received his initial coaching position at Eden Prairie as the Special Teams coordinator under the current head coach Mike Grant. Coach Grant is a very accomplished head coach himself, having racked up over 260 career victories and seven state championship titles at Eden Prairie. Over the next five years Coach Ritter worked his way up from Special Teams coordinator to inside linebackers position coach and then eventually to his present status as the defensive coordinator, all while learning valuable lessons from Coach Grant. Since taking the defensive reigns, Coach Ritter has contributed to four of those aforementioned state titles. In addition, his expert leadership has helped launch The Eden Prairie

defense to the top ranking in the state for each of the last three years. One instance where Coach Ritter really showcased his coaching prowess came in our game against the Minnetonka Skippers during my senior season. Coach's brilliant play calling and split-second coverage adjustments allowed our defense to shut down the greatest receiver in the state, Andre McDonald. For a 5-star athlete who consistently posts multiple-touchdown, hundred-yard performances, Andre's meager seventy yards without a score against Coach Ritter's staunch defensive scheme made him look average at best. Extended connection to the sport of football coupled with his impressive instruction from some of the most successful coaches in the business has enabled Coach Ritter to master the art of coaching defense.

(3) Fortunately, Coach Ritter's pursuit of success never diminished his outstanding sense of humor that he often used to lighten the mood during tough practices. A favorite prank of Coach's was to slyly keep an eye on Coach Griffin, the Special Teams coordinator during my senior year, and then send us linebackers to steal all of his tackle dummies once his back was turned. I especially remember one time we attempted such a prank a Junior linebacker name John Christensen stumbled on one of the bright red blocking pads Coach Griffin had laid out in anticipation of such a raid. Before John had time to recover, he found himself pummeled by eleven frenzied members of the kick-return team. Our entire group of linebackers could hardly contain our laughter at the sight of poor John's predicament. Another one of Coach Ritter's shenanigans involved sending us all to give unbearably sweaty group hugs to some of the fellow coaches at the end of practice. One of the most memorable embraces came when our target, Coach O'Toole, spied us advancing before we could get close, and began galloping away while belting choice curse words at Coach Ritter. The sound of the team's cheers echoed throughout the stadium as we gained ground and finally pinned Coach O'Toole to the field beneath our soaking bodies. One last hilarious instance with Coach Ritter came when he displayed game film from when the Eden Prairie Eagles played the Wayzata Trojans back when Coach Hall was on the team. Coach Ritter's priceless commentary for the touchdown run on which scrawny Coach Hall got leveled by a 250-pound offensive lineman left the entire defensive unit roaring with laughter for a good five minutes. Coach Ritter's hysterical antics lightened the mood of every practice.

(4) Most importantly, Coach Ritter showed a true interest in me as a person. From the very beginning of my relationship with Coach Ritter, he stressed the importance of education

over all else and continuously repeated the message that football was only temporary. He best displayed this belief during the week of practice leading up to our showdown with the third-ranked Minnetonka Skippers. Long in advance my parents and I had scheduled a visit to the Notre Dame campus during the beginning of the week, which directly conflicted with the most important practices of the week when coaches would introduce the primary plays and formations for the approaching game. Instead of threatening to decrease my amount of playing time for that game, as was the policy for other coaches, Coach Ritter actually expressed his support for my decision to visit schools and take the college application process seriously. In fact, Coach assembled a binder with the assignments for cover 3 along with the proper run-block reads and pass zone illustrations for me to study on the plane so I wouldn't fall behind. In addition, Coach Ritter would frequently check up on my academic progress. The football coaches had access to each of the players' schedules along with their grades in each class, and Coach Ritter used that to motivate the players to excel in their studies. He would often ask me questions like "Donovan, how's calculus going?" or "How was that history test you took yesterday?" and would express genuine interest in my current school affairs. During the team banquet at the end of my senior season, Coach pulled my parents aside along with me and expressed how much he appreciated both my drive to succeed in football and school as well as my consistently positive attitude and overall pleasant personality. Those personal compliments and his real enthusiasm for my academic wellbeing showed me how much he cared for me as a person.

(5) As time has passed since my senior year of high school football at Eden Prairie, I've most missed spending every day with Coach Ritter, not making a big hit or playing in a big game. Coach is truly an inspiring man for numerous reasons. His coaching abilities are extremely impressive because of his extensive experience with football and his tutelage under some of the greatest coaches ever at their level of competition. The way he balances his search for success with humor in the form of harmless pranks during practice and hilarious stories is inspiring as well. In addition, I truly appreciate the way Coach cares for his players and displays genuine interest in all that they do whether it's on the subject of grades in their classes or their progress in applying for colleges. After having moved a lot, I was fortunate to encounter Coach Ritter, a valuable authority figure outside of my family, a man who I could look up to and admire. Coach Ritter is an outstanding man, and he is definitely one of the most prominent figures in my life to date.