

Betsy

FYC 13100

Prof. Clauss

April 1, 2005

Please note: All of the names (people and places) in this essay have been changed. –Prof. Clauss

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.

Dear Mr. Jones,

I recently heard that you are currently 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, and my senior year Kathy Martin and I served as co-captains on the team. For the last two years, I played under Coach Smith. While 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-80s, Coach Smith lacked the other skills that coaches should have. For this reason, many girls and their parents had many reservations about Coach Smith. You should terminate him from his job because he does not create meaningful relationships with his players, he was not and did not try to be understanding or sensitive to mid- to older-adolescent girl issues, he often acted as if athletics were more important than academics, and he "played favorites" to the point that it was a barrier for the girls that were not high on his list.

First, Smith should be terminated from his position as head girls' tennis coach, because he fails 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 both from 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. As a coach working with high school age girls, Coach Smith should be willing to teach, talk to, and work with his players. While this is not necessary to have a record-setting, title-winning tennis team, better coach-player relationships would help the program. Coach Smith had little interaction with his players outside of direct tennis instruction. Once, 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. Unfortunately, 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 think 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. Coach Smith’s lack of interest in our lives and unwillingness to every try to cultivate good coach-player relationships negatively affected our attitude on the tennis court.

Another disturbing problem with Coach Smith’s attitude toward the tennis team is that he was not and did not try to be understanding of the girls’ situations at home and in other areas of life. While I understand that what we take to the court shouldn’t have anything to do with what happened at home last night, I am completely convinced that mid- and older-adolescent girls are playing a whole different game sometimes. As a coach, Smith was oblivious to the issues that

adolescent girls face on a daily basis. It is common knowledge among teachers that when we understand where our students are coming from, we are better able to help them learn. Coaching is no different. It is one thing to be demanding and have high expectations, but it is another to be so critical and severe that the attitude and morale of your players takes a turn for the worse. This was the case playing under Coach Smith. 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.” Most of the time it seemed like Smith was running a military camp and not a high school girls’ tennis program. He typically treated his players coldly and without regard to their other plans, feelings, or priorities.

Additionally, Coach Smith often acted as if succeeding in tennis was more important than excelling in the classroom. As I am sure you agree, during high school, student-athletes are encouraged and often required to put academics first. To play a sport, Athena’s athletic department requires first that the student is passing their classes. However, Coach Smith was not a proponent of this “school-first, sport-second” approach. A specific example of this was during my senior year. Because I maintained a GPA above 3.66, I was invited to the Academic Awards Banquet every year. My senior year, I gave a speech at this banquet because I was in the top ten students of my class. Because you are a high-ranking employee at Athena High School, I’m sure you understand that this is the highest award anyone can achieve at Athena. So, as you can imagine, this banquet was a much-anticipated event for both me and my parents. However, when the time came to tell Coach Smith of the date and time of the banquet and my speech, he said 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 Athena system, as you know, always let their top ten students out of matches or games early or entirely in order to attend this 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. 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.

The final reason why Coach Smith should be terminated is his common practice of “playing favorites.” Girls that were favorites often came from families that were involved or even in charge of the summer tennis program that Smith set up or had been taking lessons from him since they were young. While it is understandable that he might know these players strengths and weaknesses better because he has more interaction with them, it is simply unacceptable for him to give those girls an unfair advantage that has little to do with the way they perform on the court during the season. Though I have been removed from the program now for two years, I still remember how it felt to be a girl that was not a favorite. It was almost as if I had an extra hurdle to jump over to get a varsity position. Another girl in the same situation came to Kathy and I extremely frustrated that she was placed in a lower spot than a girl that she beat during challenge matches. Though there is no real way to know, the assistant coach, Kathy, and I believed that she was placed in the lower position simply because the other girl was a “favorite.” His practice of “playing favorites” is unprofessional and unfair to the whole team.

I do not regret playing tennis in high school; however, Coach Smith’s approach to coaching often made the sport difficult to enjoy. Also, please understand that the examples I have used in this letter were not the only ones present, and I was not the only girl affected by his cold, impersonal coaching techniques. Coach Smith should be terminated on the grounds that he

does not know how to properly coach adolescent girls, does not respect the school-first principle, and holds some players in higher regard for irrelevant reasons.

Sincerely,

Betsy (last name deleted by Clauss)