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Everything That Glitters

I will never forget the feeling of ecstasy that raced across my body when I received that email. That moment surpassed the excitement of graduating from 8th grade and receiving an acceptance letter to my number one high school, St. Joe's Prep, because getting that email meant that I could finally do what I loved all year round: play basketball. Making the Sacramento Bulldogs basketball team was my number one priority that summer, and I was more than excited to finally play in the big leagues. Said excitement reached its apex when I was told who would be coaching my age group: Jason Kilgore. Jason was from intercity Sacramento, like most of us on the team were, and successfully ascended from the ghetto in which he was raised by earning the opportunity to play Division I basketball at West Virginia University. Jason was a Sacramento basketball legend, and he was going to be my basketball coach. Playing under Coach JK, however, was not all glitter and gold, and it soon became evident that Jason's marvelous skills on the basketball court did not transfer to high quality coaching on the sidelines.

I was not aware of this during my first few outings with the Bulldogs, but Coach JK was unnecessarily cruel. For example, during my second game, we were struggling to mesh as a team, and this lack of chemistry displayed itself on the scoreboard. We were getting crushed. Nobody likes to get blown out, especially on a large stage like that of a tournament hosted by the AAU—an amateur sports organization that gathers the country's best pre-college athletes. This losing effort caused the team's mood to go from buoyant to somber in a matter of minutes.

Coach JK, like the rest of us, was frustrated with our poor execution on the court. However, instead of bringing the team together in an attempt to save us from embarrassment, he merely shifted us further apart. JK called timeout and swiftly unleashed a diatribe upon his team of mere thirteen year olds: “Did y’all even come to play today? You’re wasting my damn time.” He especially attacked Will, the biggest soon-to-be freshman that I had ever met in my life, because of his missed layups throughout the contest. JK asserted that Will was “Big for nothing,” and concluded his medley of insults by screaming, “Will, you’re a waste of your dad’s sperm!” After the game, which we went on to lose, I saw something that I had never seen before: a 6’7” person crying. Will attempted to hide his tears on the sideline as we all moved our bags in preparation for our next game. I knew that coaches needed to be hard on their players at times, but seeing Will’s teary eyes made me realize that JK was simply cruel.

Not only did JK approach his players cruelly, but he also took losing very poorly. In one instance, around a year after JK’s tournament tirade, we were battling Philly Triple Threat in the semifinals of the Big Shots Tournament. Both teams were very talented and the game was tight throughout. A bit of a rivalry exists between the Bulldogs and Triple Threat because both teams battle in an attempt to reign supreme over Sacramento AAU basketball. So the game became rather chippy in its closing minutes. While losing by two points with less than a minute remaining in the game, Naseem fouled a Triple Threat player and the referee declared it intentional; thus, Triple Threat received two free throws and possession of the ball. JK was baffled by the call and immediately began scolding the referees with a rant of disapproval: “Are you kidding me, that’s some bullshit.” Once JK realized that his criticism wouldn’t change the ruling of the referees, he turned to us and told us to grab our bags and clear the bench. We all looked at him confusedly, but his demeanor did not change, and he once again told us to get off

of the bench. Bewildered, we listened to our coach and left the bench, and, because all of our players exited the court, we lost the game by forfeit. Our hopes of winning Big Shots and climbing the ladder of Sacramento basketball supremacy were ruined because JK reacted poorly when we were losing games.

While unnecessary cruelty and the mentality of a sore loser when things weren't going his way played a role in JK's diminished quality of coaching, his main fault came from the fact that he was not honest to his players. For example, at the end of one of our practices, after our team had become established in the AAU circuit, JK called us into a huddle at center court and relayed an important message. We had just been signed by Adidas. JK told us of all the wonders that would come as benefits of signing with such a large brand: shooting shirts, team shoes, Bulldog sweatshirts, and backpacks. It was a budding basketball player's paradise. Signing with a major brand excited me more than all of the championships that we had one as a team to that point; signing with Adidas made us into an official team, or at least it would have. We anxiously waited for our endorsement packages to come in like adolescents awaiting the arrival of Santa Claus on Christmas Day. However, they never came. Each practice we would ask when our shoes, or our backpacks, or our sweatshirts would come in, and each time we got the same response from JK: "The package will be here soon." To this day, nearly three years later, I have yet to receive any team items from an Adidas endorsement package, and I am positive that the same goes for my Bulldogs teammates. JK was not honest to my teammates and me about signing with Adidas, which broke the necessary circle of trust amongst our basketball team and further decreased JK's coaching quality.

In addition to lying to his players about endorsement deals, JK also lied to the parents of his players about the prices of tournaments. For instance, during a team meeting, JK told the

team parents that they would need to pay \$150 each for an upcoming tournament in Boston. All of the players who were able to participate in the tournament (there was a total of ten of us) paid the fee and travelled to Boston. After returning, Justin's mother, Mrs. Billups, checked the tournament's website to search for our team highlights and stumbled upon the single team entry fee. If a team wished to take part in the tournament, they had to pay \$500. In total, we accumulated \$1,500 for JK, but he only had to give \$500 to the tournament administrators. At the very beginning of our next team meeting, Mrs. Billups opened her laptop and immediately searched the tournament's website. She clicked on the "Registration" tab on the website's homepage and intensely pointed at the team registration fee. JK sat speechless for what seemed like an eternity before unconfidently uttering that the price listed on the website was incorrect. Mrs. Billups did not believe JK, however, and threatened to take legal action against him for stealing money from her and the rest of the parents. JK eventually convinced her not to do so, but, on account of all of the controversy, Justin, Tyshir, and Koddy departed from our team. JK's tendency to lie to the parents of his players further widened the gap between him and high quality coaching.

Playing under Jason Kilgore for the majority of my high school career taught me a valuable lesson about the game: a person's ability to play a sport has no correlation to his or her ability to coach it. I assumed that JK would be the greatest coach that I'd come across during my playing career, but that hypothesis was shot down soon after my first tournament under his command. In fact, JK proved to be the lowest quality coach that I would encounter over the span of my 18 year life. However, playing under JK taught me a plethora of valuable lessons, especially since I decided to hang up my basketball sneakers and have transitioned into the world of coaching myself. I currently coach the Bulldogs' sixth grade team, and, through my

experience with JK, I learned that players look at their coaches like role models; thus, I have to conduct myself like one. Although JK has a myriad of accolades and numerous wins under his belt as both a player and a coach, playing under his wing for three years has taught me that true coaching greatness cannot be found within a person who does not have a sense of morality.

Despite the fact that I dealt with JK's subpar coaching for almost four years, I did not let my negative experiences turn me away from the game that I love. Basketball will be my activity of choice for as long as my body can handle it.