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3Dimensional Coaching

Final Case Study

I chose to interview Ty Lain, head coach of the Cheyenne Post 6 legion baseball program for many reasons, one of them being my positive and friendly interactions I have always had with him since our teams have competed against each other starting in 2015. But, truthfully, the most important reason I chose Ty was because his program has been the most successful program in the region since I have lived here and I wanted to pick the brain of someone my age, who has taken over a program after a legend had retired, just like I had, and had been able to sustain the success of his predecessor.

To give some context into how I will write this final essay, I had been the head coach of the legion baseball coach in Scottsbluff, NE for the past four years; after two years as an assistant under a coach of 25 years that had amassed over 800 wins. In my first three years the program’s culture was building, individual players and teams were able to grow and achieve varying levels of success. But by the end of year three and in the middle of the fourth season, the bottom dropped out. I suddenly felt like I was at odds with the players, parents, and board of the program, constantly putting out fires, and in a situation where myself and the assistants where alone in our vision for the program.

Bottom line, I was dreading leaving my wife and son at home to go to the ballpark each day. All of this culminated with three players quitting the team before districts, another opting to play with the JV instead of traveling and playing a big role for the varsity per a parent request, and our team having to compete in districts with 9 players (one of who was a season long JV player) and no substitutes. A season that started with the opportunity to overachieve faded quietly into the fall.

With the birth of my son this past summer, the toll that being the head coach of the baseball program was taking on me mentally, and the realization of the disconnect between me, the board, and the parents (with not enough rock-solid player relationships to overcome this); I made the tough decision to step down as head coach, leading to a year which will be the first in 12 summers I will not be coaching high school baseball.

I did not start this course thinking it would be its own triage unit for my baseball coaching career. But as I began working through the class, I found myself jotting down ideas and thinking of ways “I could do it differently next time.” I really focused in on my need to improve coaching players in the 3rd dimension, which in turn I think would result in more team cohesion, more meaningful goals and a more confident, motivated team (better in 2nd dimension).

We would talk about slogans such as “We over ME” in our program, players would preach to me in player meetings about being more together or team-oriented, but when the chips were down most often in the four years in charge, my team folded. Now, I am not going to try to portray our talent level as something it was not. We were consistently the fourth best team in a five team district each year, and that wasn’t going to change any time soon. But why had we been so close in defeating four or five larger, more talented teams, and “found a way to lose” each time? I don’t believe I did enough to instill confidence in our team and that starts with coaching to the 3rd dimension, the heart, to develop that trust.

I brought up these points to Coach Lain in the interview and asked him how he addressed these own potential issues in his program. “There has been a culture and expectation established that has been passed down not from coach to new players, but from graduating seniors to the next set of seniors. Every spring training, each day, there is some piece of off the field development. We do team speeches, where each player is required to stand up in front of the team, share about themselves and explain what Post 6 baseball means to them.”

One idea that I had acquired from the class was meeting in the homes of new players in the program as well as all varsity players with their families at the start of each year. My past negative experiences, as well as my evaluation of the home lives of many players in our community, screamed at me the need to develop this trust between families and the coaching staff. Trying to create one community striving together for the betterment of all. A community that can withstand the angry, disgruntled parent or the player who does not want to be held accountable and persevere.

The second point of improvement in the 3rd dimension is to better care for and serve my players. Coach Lain said that baseball in our part of the country is great for developing positive relationships. “Players are on the road a lot and together for a really long time (5 months). When you are doing that, you are spending just as much time away from the field with the players as you do at the field. It is a huge opportunity to shape them into young men by setting standards for how they should treat others, dress at dinner, behave.” There are plenty of opportunities to instill some of your values as a man in your players, as well as helping players through their physical and mental struggles in baseball by validating that their performance is not tied to their worth as an individual.

I actually had a parent and player tell me in a meeting that I had “ruined the sport of baseball for their son.” As the anger and frustration has faded, misguided as that families attempt was to place blame on me for their shortcomings, I realized that I missed an opportunity not to “get that kid a scholarship” or “improve his batting average,” but to teach him how to handle failure, how to accept responsibility and persevere. Possibly, how to not quit on his marriage in the future because it becomes challenging, who knows?

More effort on my part to use my power not over players to get them to do what I want (which is successful 1st dimension, physical skill attributes), but use my power from under to serve my players needs as individuals. Making this a vital priority in whatever capacity I coach in the future will put courage in my players, give them hope for the future, and ultimately present them with a group and a person worth sacrificing their own selfish wants and hopes for (a TEAM).

When I accepted the head coaching position for the WESTCO legion baseball program, I was overjoyed at the opportunity to lead a Class A baseball program, something that professionally had been a goal of mine since college. But, I questioned whether or not I was ready to take on such a large undertaking. As it turns out, there were some areas, such as the 1st dimension, where I was well prepared for the job. Other areas, such as the 3rd dimension, I learned the hard way that I could improve upon. The experience did not turn out as I had imagined, but being able to reflect upon the positive and negatives of my four years at the helm, I have come to the conclusion and belief that they were a necessary learning experience that can help mold me into a coach in the future that can have a much greater impact than the one who ran the WESTCO legion baseball program the past four years.