

What is the Measure of a Coach?

How will you be remembered?

Every day as we watch the cable sports channels we see in high definition how coaches are measured by the sport culture and media. Below the coach's name is listed his or her career wins and losses. The graphic may include the winning percentage versus today's opponent. It may even include the number of post-season wins or the number of consecutive playoff wins or losses. The general culture of sport boils a coach's whole existence down to two sets of numerals on either side of a slash. Wins / Losses.

Others who desire to look more deeply into a coach's impact will point to the successes of players whom the coach has developed. They will point to All-Conference awards, All-American selections, All-Academic teams and similar indicators of success. Another set of observers will examine the "coaching tree" of this particular coach to see how he or she has developed and launched those who coached in his or her program. They will point to this coach or that and see the imprint of their mentor in their coaching style, their way of communicating or the organization of their program. Both are legitimate and deeper views of a coach's influence, but still not the defining mark of the coach.

Those of us who live within the world of sport know that the true measure of a coach is something much more than that. As important as winning and losing are as measurements of one's effectiveness, there are many more important and longer lasting areas of impact in a coach's life. As important as the personal and professional development of players and assistant coaches are to one's legacy as a coach, the central and most long-lasting effect of a coach who professes a faith in Christ Jesus is the eternal influence one has by living out his or her faith in the context of these relationships.

There are short-term effects of such influence. When a coach inspires a player to do his best, that's influence. When a coach challenges another coach to a new level of commitment, that is influence. When a coach directs a young player's life from foolishness to wisdom, that is life-changing influence. When a coach rescues a player from a destructive lifestyle through discipline, suspension and maintaining the player's relationship with the team, that is life-transforming influence.

There are also long-term effects of a coach's influence. When a coach helps restore broken relationships between teammates, that is life-long influence. When a coach helps restore a player's broken relationship with his family, that is influence which can change the course of generations. When a coach can bring healing to the broken relationship between a player and another coach, that heals not only those two but often the team as a whole. When a coach leads his coworkers to restored relationships, he makes them each better and the coaching staff as a whole becomes more effective. Even more than these long-term effects within the relationships within a team are the influence a coach can have from an eternal perspective.

When a coach lives out his or her faith in Christ genuinely and without pretense, the coach is making a life-transforming impact, often without even seeing immediate results. The Apostle Peter wrote to his friends in these words, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect," (1 Peter 3:15) As the coach lives with Christ as Lord of her heart, making decisions, speaking, leading, teaching as the Lord Jesus directs, she bears the marks of Christ's character. Such character will lead others to ask questions. Those questions enable the coach to share his or her faith in a very direct manner, always being characterized by gentleness and respect. Countless thousands of players and coaches have come into relationship with Christ through the personal influence of a coach. Whether expressed in public meetings, during a team chapel service, in private conversation, during a personal crisis or even in solitude, a coach's Christ-honoring influence has been used by the Holy Spirit to usher many into an eternal relationship with the living God.

A coach would be wise to regularly make time for quiet reflection and review of his or her coaching career and its influence. Use this time to inventory the lives of players and coaches from one's past. Ask some questions about each one.

- Where are they now?
- How did my influence make this player better?
- Did my relationship with this coach make him or her better?
- Did my life further this one's knowledge of Christ?
- What sort of impact did I make with this player, short-term?
- How did my influence impact these lives, long-term?
- What can I do now to further influence those who have moved on from our program?
- How can I be of greatest impact upon those I presently coach?
- How can I be of greatest impact upon those with whom I coach?

Coaches, "...in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect," Do this and you will make an eternal impact upon your players, your coaching staff and beyond.