

MY COACH

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Almost 18 years ago, I played my last season of high school basketball for Ron Boyett at White Oak.

Up to that point, I had known coach for most of my life. My dad was a coach on the same staff, and the whole group was very close. Everyone knew each other's families, and all of the coaches helped raise each other's kids. Coach Boyett and I clicked in a different way though. He was the young, cool coach on staff when I was a kid, and he always made me feel good about myself. I attended his camps, played in his youth league program and always begged my dad to take me to the high school basketball games.

I loved watching his teams' style of play — it was a show. Guys with last names like Putnam and Noll launched 3-pointers, while other guys like Harris and Smith played sweltering man-to-man defense. In a way, coach's style of play kind of matched the ethos of the town's blue-collar confidence.

There was no entitlement. You were going to have to work for everything you got. But you were going to be the most prepared team on the floor.

In the 1990's, White Oak was a wonderful place to grow up, but the district layout was very different than it is today. At the time, only two teams were awarded entry into the playoffs, and we were one of the smallest teams in Class 3A (on a 5A scale). Every year Gilmer, Gladewater and Spring Hill seemed to have more firepower, but somehow coach's teams always ended up in the hunt for the playoffs at the end of district. Sometimes they got in and sometimes they narrowly missed the cut. Regardless, he was building a reputation as one of the most consistent, talented coaches in the region.

In the process, certain rhythms were embedded into the fabric of his basketball program. You were going to run miles and bleachers in the fall. You were going to hear his

"I Believe" speech that served as the foundation for his program. You were going to understand why you give a fist-bump to your teammate. You were going to have one hand in the passing lane if you were one pass away.

And then I can remember entering high school as a freshman, and the tide starting to turn. He won three straight district championships (98-00), with the third championship team advancing all the way to the Regional Finals. I was a junior on that team. I thought that was the best coaching job I'd ever seen. We were a bunch of homegrown overachievers that almost ended up playing in Austin, and coach was named East Texas Coach of the Year. It was validation for what all of his players already knew. Our coach was as good as any of the premiere coaches in our area.



Around the same time period, I wondered if White Oak basketball could ever be a household name across the state. Growing up, my dad took me every year to the state tournament in Austin, and he allowed me to play in different basketball camps in the summer. One of the best ones at the time was the TABC Team Camp in Georgetown, Texas. Many of

the best small school programs (1A-3A) would bring their teams to compete in the event, and all of the best HS coaches would work the camp. Krum, Ponder and Peaster were the blue bloods that attended. They were consistently in Austin every March, and their coaches would bring their entire teams to Georgetown every summer to dominate the competition. One summer, I remember being on the same team as the kids from Krum. It was right after they had won one of their many state championships, and I remember thinking how they just seemed different than all of the other teams at the event. They carried themselves with a professionalism and confidence that I greatly envied. I wanted what they had, but I wanted it for White Oak.

Fast forward another 10 years, and I found myself back in East Texas as the head boys basketball coach at Spring Hill. Coach Boyett was my biggest reference to get the job, and my first task was to evaluate how the current Spring

Hill program measured up to the rest of the area. While we were good, the best program in East Texas by a long shot was White Oak. It was crazy. Coach and his program were now viewed as the boogeyman. After dropping to 2A (still on a 5A scale), White Oak was now one of the largest schools in its classification. And while their competition changed, Coach Boyett's standards remained the same.

There were still those constant rhythms that we saw and heard from inside the old E.B. Carrington Gymnasium as players. You were going to run miles and bleachers in the fall. You were going to hear his "I Believe" speech that served as the foundation for his program. You were going to understand why you give a fist-bump to your teammate. You were going to have one hand in the passing lane if you were one pass away.

In March of 2012, several of my teammates and I watched firsthand as White Oak won its first state championship in the Ron Boyett era. The final game wasn't even close. To this day, I really don't remember player highlights from that game, but I do remember seeing my coach cry. He had spent his entire professional life up to that point laboring on a high school basketball program, and now it was being recognized as the best in the state.

What a picture of faithfulness.

The only way he could top it was to do it again. And he did. White Oak won it again the following year, and he was recognized at mid-court during one of the other state championship games as the state's Coach of the Year.

If the story ended there, I think you would call it a successful, Hall of Fame career. But it didn't. A few years later, not even close to retirement age, coach did something that I've never seen before. After maximizing the program's potential, he knew he was ready for a new challenge in his coaching journey. And while I'm sure opportunities were there to settle into a higher-paying administrative job or coach at a larger school, coach chose to resign from the head basketball position and go back

down to the middle school to teach and coach basketball. He's been there ever since.

I remember talking with a former teammate and saying, "I just don't get it. He's going to miss the competition. He's going to hate it."

But then I reflected on the man that taught me and my teammates so much about work ethic, integrity, and craftsmanship, and I understand. At his inner core, coach is a teacher and molder of young men. He never coached for money or fame. He coached to make a difference, and I

know he felt God leading him to his next platform.

This has caused me to intently reflect on how I view my job as a man now. And I think that's what a true coach does. He teaches and models a way of life that serves his players long beyond their playing careers.

And if I know coach, I have a feeling that he's slowly but surely embedding a new set of rhythms tailored just to that age group that will be sketched in those boys' minds long after they leave his locker room just as he did for me.

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