



By Jim Hulsman

### The Key To Successful Coaching: Personal Philosophy

**H**igh school sports programs reflect the character and attitude of the head coach, and the team on the court reflects the training and development it has been given by the coaching staff.

The staff must understand the desires of the head coach, and this type of understanding is developed only after long hours of discussion and communication between the head coach and the assistant coaches. The staff must be together on issues such as training, philosophy, understanding and development of team goals.

Before the season starts, the coach should establish beliefs and expectations – and a successful coach does not change his beliefs on a year-to-year basis. He or she may develop new methods and a better understanding of people and the game, but the coach should remain strongly tied to his original philosophies and personal expectations, as well as the program.

Coaches should guard against setting impossible expectations and goals – for themselves or the team. Some coaches predict state championships and state that the season would be a failure if they did not win all of their games. What a burden this places on a team and coach. Using this philosophy, if a team wins 19 or 20 games and loses in the state tournament, the team thinks of itself as a failure because it did not win the state title. The players forget about the 20 they won, only remembering the one they lost.

Contrast that thinking with another philosophy. A coach should not work and strive for individual honors or acclaim. He or she should work hard and leave no stones uncovered in the quest to develop and coach his or her team. The coach should work to achieve the team's potential. With a total effort to develop potential, many things will naturally fall into place. The coach should strive for the team to do its best every year, not setting goals of winning two or three state championships in a row. If the team does the best job possible, the coach should be satisfied with the results. If the coach gives a 100 percent effort, he or she can always look back with personal satisfaction and no regrets.

Potential is existing in possibility, capable of development into actuality, expressing possibility, something that can develop or become actual. Potential is meaningless if you do not have the desire to work and make it become real. Attitude is what develops potential. This is the single most important thing you have going for you.

Attitude and individual commitment are the most important contributions that a head coach can give his assistants and players. Coaches and players can achieve their potential if they are strong in their philosophical beliefs and goals. They must be realistic.

The key to successful coaching is proper organization, and it all starts with the head coach. Organization demands much time and thought well in advance of the season. Assistants expect to be told how the program will work, what offenses and defenses will be used, and what their specific duties will be within the program. If everyone on the staff is well-informed of the expectations of the program, then better teaching will result, the team will be more enthusiastic, and a better overall program will exist.

### The Secret of Good Staff Work is Prior Planning

Coaches must have in mind what they are going to do long before the season starts. Having a well-qualified staff is most important. These assistants must be well-oriented in the game itself and must be willing to teach the game as the head coach wants it taught. They must carry out the philosophy of the head coach and develop their minds into the thinking and character of the head coach. It is important for the head coach to coach the assistants. In turn, the assistant coaches will coach the players. In this modern era of larger staffs, the head coach can no longer reach all of the players on a daily basis. With this in mind, he must use the abilities of his staff in the best manner possible.

In this regard, the development of staff loyalty is paramount. Loyalty is a two-way street. The head coach must respect his assistants and, in turn, he or she must receive the same courtesy from the assistants. The staff must be able to work together and the assistants must be heard. An assistant who cannot give his opinions cannot contribute to the overall program. The head coach must be able to listen to the feelings and theories of his aides. A wise head coach will use the abilities of his assistants and will listen to their ideas and sug-

gestions. Though the final decision-making must come from the head coach, he or she will find his decision-making ability improves with good input from the staff. The assistants must understand the mannerisms and behavior of the head coach and must know where they stand in relation to the total program.

Any assistant who enters the coaching field for the first time wants to know how many hours he will work, what his authority is, will he be backed by his superiors, what are his practice duties, scouting responsibility, and many other items or organization.

### First Staff Meeting – Most Important

The first meeting gives the head coach the opportunity to inform his assistants about the policies of the program. It will provide an opportunity for the head coach to communicate his or her personal thoughts about the off-season and summer months, feelings about the team and the potential of the players. It also gives the assistants a chance to ask questions, and discuss as a group any changes in policy that might be made.

### Communications

Communication, understanding, tact and diplomacy are quite possibly more important than all of the knowledge of offense and defense. Many coaches are walking textbooks when it comes to knowledge of the game, but they are last in the league when it comes to organization and communication. It is up to the head coach to make sure this important phase of the game is set into operation. Remember, the secret of good staff work is prior planning.

### Head Coach Cannot Do It Alone

If the head coach thinks he is the only one who counts and that he knows all the answers, he or she is an egomaniac of the highest degree.

One person cannot do it all – it takes an efficient staff to be a winner. The head coach must surround himself/herself with people of considerable knowledge and must be willing to listen to them. This coach will be the eventual winner. The rewards will be many individual honors, television and radio interviews, quotes in newspapers and magazines, and many opportunities to speak at clinics and banquets. The head coach will get the credit for the wins and losses, but without the staff, these things will never take place.

Coaches who have had the pleasure of winning over a period of years ultimately find that the winner never stops proving it. The challenge is to stay at the top. The public usually fails to see the ultimate success of young men and women developing as students and scholars, and very seldom challenges the question of character or discipline. They see the wins and losses.

Coaches must always be aware of the total contributions of the program and the development of students within the program. Coaches must have a balanced program to be successful and must not let public pressure for winning make them forget that they are educators.

Head coaches must be organizers if they are to remain at the top of the profession. They must be aware of strengths and weaknesses and constantly work toward the strengths. **CQ**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Jim Hulsman was head basketball coach at Albuquerque (New Mexico) High School from 1968 to 2002, compiling a 660-223 record. He led his teams to seven New Mexico Activities Association state championships. Hulsman was inducted into the National High School Hall of Fame in 2003.



## Organizational Checklist

1. Development of spirit
2. Conditioning – mental
3. Checking of grades and attendance
4. Parent permission cards
5. Physicals
6. Equipment order
7. Conditioning – physical
8. Preseason conditioning
9. Summer program
10. Game schedule
11. Officiating, rules
12. Scouting – how and what to look for
13. Budget organization
14. Use of gym
15. Locker-room facilities
16. Training-room facilities
17. Eligibility
18. Team rules
19. Dress
20. Haircuts
21. Conduct
22. Trip planning
  - a. hotel reservations
  - b. transportation
  - c. routes
  - d. meals
23. Statistics
24. System
25. Patterns
26. Drills
27. Practice schedule
28. Substitute teachers
29. What is expected of the coach
  - a. Appearance
  - b. Personal habits
  - c. Association with students
30. Duties of the assistant
31. Selection of personnel
32. Individual and team discipline
33. Games procedures
34. Crowd control
35. Officials locker room
36. Visiting team locker room
37. News media – interviews, radio broadcast of home games, information
38. Visiting coaches
39. Scholarships
40. Injuries
41. Player communication
42. Parent communication
43. Coaches communication