A lot has changed in high school basketball

By Larry Pritchett

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I spent a long time as a high school coach, more than I ever thought I would, and I still miss it at times. The start of the season is one of those times, but I also can quickly slap myself back into reality and know that you tend to remember just the good times during those years.

The great thing about the career was that there were way more “good times” than “bad times.” There were some disappointing times, but actually really very few bad times. We were fortunate to have years and years of great students participating and that made it a great time.

I have always said that for the most part I would have been happy to have 99.9 percent of my players as a son. Maybe even a 100 percent but that last tenth and I would have probably had some rocky times. But it takes a lot of things to make a season a good one.

Sometimes too much is made of the wins and losses, but then wins, I have found, and the more of them that came, made almost everything else more fun and just a little easier.

A lot changed during those 38 years. The game went from being something that a coach and players did from November to March and then the good players would work during the off season usually on their own to improve. We actually had rules against having any team things in the summer.

That changed a lot. Towards the end of the career there were summers when we had a summer league, some individual camps and played at a couple of week-long team camps in Lincoln or Omaha.

It was easy then to take almost three weeks of the summer with just basketball. You would be able to play about 45-50 games I think basketball got better out here during that time because everyone was putting in the time.

My philosophy changed some during that time because I felt that although I thought it was good to play the games, we had a tendency to not really working on our weak points because when you went to team camp your “competitiveness” took over and you wanted to win.

When we were going to the week-long camps in Lincoln and Omaha, we always played “up” with the Class A and B teams and we had to do what we did well just to survive—and we still didn’t win much.

I remember two of those years I think we won two and lost 17 and the next year went three or four playing the “big boys,” but we were state champions both years. We did cut down a little and worked on having some camps where we could actually work on some fundamental things that would improve our overall play. Winning is still an ointment that heals a lot of things.

Another area that went under a lot of change was coach-parent communications. When I started coaching we didn't have parent meetings. Then later we had parent meetings at the first of the season and parent meeting at the end of the season to set up the summer activities.

That first meeting I think was crucial. We just kind of set some ground rules so that parents, players and coaches were hopefully all on the same page and everyone knew what was expected of them and what their role was to be.

Coaches and parents, when they get along, can make any kind of season be better. If there is conflict then it isn't so much fun for either group.

Again, in most cases, coaches like their players, even love their players, as do the parents. There is a difference in that love though. A coach doesn't usually have blinders on and tries to see what the best thing for the team might be for any given season. Parents, for the most part, see what is best for their child.

You can disagree with that statement if you want, but in this case 38 years of coaching says I am correct. I used to say in the first meeting of the year that we can discuss your son, but we will not discuss: 1) Playing time; 2) Basketball philosophy; or 3) Another player. That was rule number one. Rule number two was that I wouldn't take calls at home—call the school and get an appointment through the AD's office. Rule number three was that I wouldn't talk about anything right after the game, regardless if it was a win or a loss. That isn't a good time to visit.

One last thing was that in my mind just because a parent happened to coach their son's fifth grade or any other grade select team, didn't make them an experienced coaching peer of mine.

Everyone has an opinion and believe it or not I got more "unsigned" letters (those are the bad kind) when we were really pretty good than I did when we were not so good. No one wanted to help when we were struggling.

There was someone who said, "It is not if you win or lose but how you play the game." That was what sometimes got me upset, the way we played the game!!!

I love the game. It is just a game, but I tend sometimes to agree with the saying I heard once at a coaching clinic: "Basketball, it is said, is only a game and the Grand Canyon is only a hole in Arizona.

See you at the "games."