EXTENDED INSIGHTS...

VALUABLE LESSONS IN BASEBALL

By Wayne Brock – West Ridge Baseball Coach
www.westridgeacademy.com

High school athletics at West Ridge Academy is valuable in so many ways. During this year's season our team learned many lessons both on and off the field. This is a great opportunity for us to incorporate sports and therapy together. Here at West Ridge we have a truly unique situation. When we start a new athletic season, very seldom do we ever get returning players from the pervious year so every season we get to start over. We compete against other 1A teams that have played together for years and can build their program.

We picked our baseball team on July 30th, had our first practice the next day and played our first game a week later. As you can imagine there was a lot of work to do with a brand new team, but we as a coaching staff could see a lot of promise within our new team and wanted to keep the expectations high.

At each practice or game we could sit back and observe each player and be able to tell how they were doing individually in their program because it reflected in their actions and attitude on the field. At the beginning of the season one of our starters "Sam" was not coachable. He would talk back to the coaches and wanted to do things "his" way. When he'd get up to bat he'd always swing for the fence, and would strike out with people in scoring position. He wanted to hit the home run instead of trying to just get a base hit and score those on base.

During our third game of the season we were losing and Sam's body language showed that he'd given up and didn't care any more. He was our most athletic player, a senior and a leader on the team; our younger players started to follow him.

Our fourth game was the turning point for Sam. We were losing again, 0-8, and while the coaching staff was talking to the team, Sam walked off. As one of the coaches approached him, he started to swear and yell at him, and then started to leave the dugout. He was told if he left the dugout he could turn in his uniform and gear and he'd be done for the season. He stayed and sat down on the bench and was emotionless the rest of the game. With some reluctance we decided to start him in the next game. We pulled him aside and let him know that we were giving him another chance and he needed to be a positive leader for his peers. We explained that a lot

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of the younger boys looked up to him and that he needed to think of what was best for the team and not just play to get glory for himself.

During that game Sam helped us win our second game of the season. His attitude was great and he seemed to process through a lot of negative actions from the game before. He wanted to prove to us that he was coachable and that he would do what was best for the team. That win was the first of nineteen straight wins. During one of those wins Sam was the first player to hit a home run on a brand new baseball field, and have everyone remember his name. During one of the games as he was going to the plate in the last inning, we pulled him to give a non-starter an at bat so he could get in the game. Sam smiled and told the other player to go get a hit, patted him on the back and cheered him on. He got a base hit and it was fun to watch Sam be excited for his team mate.

We won our Region 17 championship with a 12-0 record. During the quarter finals of the state playoffs we were the home team and were down 2-3 in the bottom of the seventh inning. This was our last at bat. We had the tying run on third base, and the winning run on second base. Sam was the next one up to bat. While he was coming up to the plate, he looked at us coaches smiled and said, "I know, a base hit wins it." With a full count he hit a single between the outfielders, which scored both runs to win the game and advance to the semi-finals.

We went on to win the semi-final game as well, but did not bring the state title home. In the championship game we lost to the reigning state champs the "Badgers" who were the number one ranked team in the state. We had four players make the All State team with Sam being one of them. Sam is very typical of the youth that we coach and teach at West Ridge Academy. He let himself trust and obey the authority of his coaches. He let it serve him in a positive manner and found success, and proved to himself that he could be a team player.

About the Author:

Wayne Brock has two years experience working with at-risk youth at Youth Developmental Enterprises in Maui, Hawaii, and is currently serving his 10th year at West Ridge Academy as Weekend Supervisor serving in several capacities including those in the departments of Recreation and School. Wayne has also served as Assistant Coach for the past five seasons in baseball and as Head J.V. Basketball Coach. For more information on West Ridge Academy, visit their website or call 801-282-1000.

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