

## But I Just Want to Coach!

So, how many times have you heard this statement from some coaches: “But I just want to coach, why do I have to do the paperwork—doesn’t the secretary do that, isn’t there someone to do the schedule, order everything, call the hotels, and call the umpires????”

**There is a misperception that all you have to do is coach a team on the field. Some think coaching—for example, a college team—is a very easy, glamorous job—that every school provides someone to do all of the paperwork and grunt work, and that the organizational skills needed to run a team must belong to someone else. But, in reality, most coaches have to do all of the administrative work themselves.**

Just as the younger athletes see the huge dollar signs that the Pro players are making (and then, in turn, think they are going to get the same), maybe some of the younger coaches, especially, see the success of some schools, the publicity and TV coverage some teams receive and think all programs are run the same way. The fact is, some head coaches do have a bunch of assistants, PR people, video people, a secretary that sets everything up for the year and others who do all of the paperwork, statistics and all of the off-the-field components of a program.

However, most programs do not have those luxuries. So, how does a younger coach learn what to do, be efficient at it and know how to produce a winning program? TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF EXPERIENCED COACHES WHO HAVE BEEN THROUGH IT AND HAVE HAD SUCCESS. There have been two situations, recently, that I am familiar with, that I will share as examples. The first is a first-time head coach of a college program, who came in and took over a nationally ranked program. The former coach handed over the files that contained a lot of information that could have been used as reference material, but the new coach lost the files. Instead of asking for guidance from the previous coach or any experienced coach, and, even though very overwhelmed with everything that needed to be done, the new coach did not seek any help. She quit after the second year. The next coach was also a first-year head coach who was better prepared but still did not realize everything that needed to be done off the field. Instead of asking for advice and sitting down with her first-year assistant to work together to come up with a workable plan, she kept telling everyone that things were OK. When asked if this was finished or that was done, her response was “Yes.” In reality, nothing had been done. In fairness to her, the school did not pay a lot and she had to have two other jobs plus taking care of a new house. However, not saying anything caused many more problems than if she would have just been honest enough to say, “No, I need help.” The new assistant did the same thing even after the head coach quit, saying that things were completed when in reality they were not. She sent work assignments to the players but never followed up with them to see if they received the letter or could even work at that time, since it was over Christmas break. You have to follow up and confirm things with your players.

**Coaches, please, ask for help or advice.** There are a lot of coaches who have retired that would love to help younger coaches succeed. Use the experience of others to form a plan for your team, watch those who have been successful, because they must be doing something right.

I started when I was 22 and fresh out of Graduate School. I was fortunate that the baseball team at school was going to Arizona for spring training and, because of Title IX, the softball team was also allowed to go. Remember, I started coaching softball in 1975 before equality was the norm. Anyway, in Arizona, I took the team to watch a four-year-school softball tournament so that the players at my junior college could learn from the older players at a Division I school. We watched the team from Cal Poly Pomona University. As soon as I saw them play, I knew that I wanted to pattern my team after them. The team was very enthusiastic and the players on the bench always went out to slap hands with the players every inning as they came in to bat. The coach constantly talked and encouraged her players. As it turns out, that coach was Carol Spanks, who is in numerous Halls of Fame. In 1978, my team went to our first National Tournament and played in the finals, versus Goldenwest College from Fullerton, CA. We beat them in the finals of the winner’s bracket and, as a young coach, I didn’t think anyone would beat us both games the next day in the finals. They came in the next day, beat us twice in close games and we went home as runners up. That coach taught me a very valuable lesson about taking things for granted. Her name is Judi Garman, who went on to coach at Cal State Fullerton and is also a Hall of Famer. In 1985, we took second in the Nation, losing to Central Arizona. The coach was Mike Candrea, who is now the USA Olympic Coach and the coach of the University of Arizona. We lost in the finals again because of a bunt. I should say, because we could not get the bunt down on a squeeze play. From that loss, I learned, as a young coach, that a

bunt is not a simple skill; so we practiced bunting, every day, the next season.

We didn't just work on sacrifice bunts, we always worked to be better and better on bunting for a base hit and bunting down the lines instead of to the center of the diamond. We worked on being faster and faster out of the batter's box, we worked on squeezing runners home and always with two outs and two strikes on the batter. We worked extremely hard on bunting, and it finally paid off in the finals of our 1995 Regional Tournament.

We were down to our last out in the seventh inning and we were losing by one run with the tying run on third. I love to keep the defense guessing what we will do next, so I called for the squeeze with two outs. The hitter at bat was not a strong hitter, so I knew the percentage was low for her to get a hit to tie the game. She had a strike on her already and fouled the next pitch off. Well, she fooled us all when she bunted with the count of two strikes. The runner scored and the defense threw the ball away. We went on to win the game, the Regional Tournament and placed third at Nationals. The player said that she saw the look on my face when she fouled the pitch off and knew that she had to get the next pitch down to score the run. Since we practiced it so much, she knew that she could do it. And she did.

We also learned that we cannot control the umpires. It is up to the players and coaching staff to do their jobs and keep on scoring so that the game doesn't come down to an umpire's call.

From all of these coaches, I learned things about the game. Every year, even though I have retired, I still go to clinics and the NFCA convention to learn.

My advice to younger coaches is to seek out and watch the top programs, especially in your area. Be humble enough as a new coach to realize that there is a lot to learn about the game. **When you think you know everything about it, you probably know very little.**

With more and more games on TV, it is easier to do this. If you can see the teams in person, that's even better. The pre-game practices are excellent learning situations. Watch everything that you can about those pre-game preparations—from the minute they walk off the bus until the game starts. Watch what goes on in the dugouts, on the field and how players and coaches react to each other. Watch both teams, if possible, and compare the preparation for the game to the outcome of the game.

Go to clinics conducted by the top coaches, to learn the sport. There are probably some, close to your area, who have been very successful. Go to the successful coaches at a program comparable to yours, to learn everything that the coaches themselves need to do off the field. **Call some of the experienced coaches, especially the retired ones, even if you do not know them.** Most of those coaches, even if they are retired, love to teach—whether it is a player or a coach.

Look for Celeste's article next month.