

Libby Toman

BC SCHOOL SPORTS COACH OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2009

School: Clearwater.
Years coaching: Approaching 30.
Currently coaching: Senior girls' volleyball.
Also coached: Girls' basketball and girls' soccer.
Subjects: Physical education and science.



Why did you decide to coach?

I made the decision so long ago. I find it is probably the most rewarding part of my job. I like working with a group of kids dedicated to something, and I try to make them better.

What's the most rewarding thing about being a teacher-coach?

Generally it's the relationship you establish with the students. You get to know them a lot better than you do as a teacher. You spend more time with them, you're away from the school, and sometimes you're the one who makes sure they go to bed at night. It becomes much more of a mentoring relationship than just a teacher who stands in the classroom.

Who would you identify as a role model or mentor in your life specific to coaching?

I had some colleagues who coached their entire career. Ken Ladd is one. There's also Lorne Wright and Rick Smith. They were all teachers and coaches in our school. Two of them were full-time science teachers and they coached their entire teaching career.

Unfortunately, our school has become quite small in the last few years... Rick Smith was our basketball coach here for 30 years and in that time he took five or six teams to boys' Provincials at the double A level for quite a few years, even though we were a really small school.

With economic downturns, and the closure of sawmills, the town has shrunk in size. There's a demographic shift. The school is half the size it used to be. When that happens you lose your numbers. Then Rick retired and there really hasn't been another person who stepped in to provide the energy it needs.

We had a year about seven or eight years ago when there were three boys on the basketball team that went onto the CIS Players of the Year and National All-Stars at the college level. It was kind of a freak for a school this small.

What do you believe would resonate with the teacher-coach of today in terms of recognition?

I think what you're doing is very nice. We have two young teachers who are taking on coaching as part of their duties and I think that they are finding their rewards the same place I found them - the relationships they have with the kids. I think there's a transfer to the classroom. It makes classroom management easier because the kids see you as a person.

What's the biggest challenge you face as a teacher-coach?

Well, time. The time that it takes to do a decent job and finding the energy to do it on top of your job and your family. The time you need out here. I figure I've logged more hours on a school bus than many coaches have ever even considered. A league night for us is routinely three hours on the bus and three hours playing volleyball. So, you get home at 10:30 or 11 on a school night. It kind of wears you down.

At this point in my career it's finding the energy to keep doing it. I plan to work this year and one more. I'm going to be the Athletic Director until I retire, but I'm sharing the duty with another woman so we can have a smoother transition. I'm trying to encourage some younger people to assume positions as commissioners of sports in our provincial and local associations because those jobs are very important. We've seen an upsurge in young people in the Okanagan Valley Athletic Association doing that. It's a good organization to be a part of.

What has coaching taught you about life?

It's actually taught me one of the true values of sport is to give it your best effort and get satisfaction out of it because the winning and losing is much less important. Not how you play the game, but the fact that you played and tried your hardest. And you have to help kids make up their self esteem. We have had a lot of teams in the school who have not had a lot of success in winning a lot of games and they need to learn to feel good about themselves for participating, playing ethically, and working hard as a team. Those are the things I try to get out of it.

What was your proudest moment as a teacher-coach?

One of my proudest moments was when my team qualified for the Provincials. We were single A sized and played in a double A league. We played hard to get there. Qualifying there, I don't think we played our best at the provincials but we probably played the best we'd ever done in the Okanagan. As a coach you experience games against teams you should have couldn't and didn't beat, but sometimes it's nice to play a team that you should have could have and beat them.

What do you do during your spare time?

I own a 160 acre farm where I ski, snowmobile and ride a four wheeler. I'm a redneck in the bush, I'm afraid. I have a barn cat that I never see and a dog named Buster.