

0-19: Winning through Losing

By: Steve Throne

When I took the job at Millard South HS I thought it would be a rebuilding year but I didn't realize we'd have to start with a whole new foundation. We lost every game during the 2003-4 season and finished with a 19 game losing streak. The players and coaches were obviously frustrated by the results of the season but we never gave up on each other. The season had its share of adversities, obstacles and challenges. Our goal as a coaching staff was to teach our young inexperienced squad how to compete and persevere through any situation.

Here's a few of the adversities that we faced during the 2003-04 season:

- No Returning Starters
- No Returning Letter-winners who played regularly (1 Freshman who played sparingly)
- Returning points: 1.8 per game
- No Varsity experience...Taking a JV team into battle against Varsity teams in the Metro Conference - Good Luck.
- Lose a 6'5 starting 5 man to a shoulder injury in football.
- Lose another guard to a punctured lung in football, never comes back to full strength.
- Best athlete in the school decides not to come out for basketball, too much running. Point guard with a 37" vertical and 0 to 60 in 2 seconds type speed.
- Starting Senior guard fails 3 out of 6 classes and is ineligible after 3 games.
- Your starting power forward breaks his foot after first game of the season in scout drill 5 on 0.
- Your starting shooting guard played intramurals the year before...is your leading scorer most of the season.
- You're commuting 2 hours round trip everyday.

When you start losing games its like anything else....it's habit forming. Our kids did a great job of coming to practice ready to learn each day and showed the willingness to stay positive. A key moment of the season for us was late in the season when we were 0-16 but we had a chance to beat Benson HS. There was 2.8 seconds on the clock and we just made a free throw to go ahead by 1 point. The player at the line missed the 2nd free throw on purpose and our opponent was regulated to a $\frac{3}{4}$ court shot as time ran out. As the story goes....he banked it in to win the game. Now that's about as low as a team can get. The true test is how your respond to adversity of this nature. Our kids were devastated but we needed to find a way to come back and compete the next night.

Here's how we tried to overcome these obstacles:

- Keep a Positive Attitude about all situations.
- Have a wait-and-see attitude when handling adversity.
- Coach the kids that come everyday - not the ones that you wish were there....
- Utilize the knowledge of your coaching staff
- Teach - Teach - Teach
- Never get lower than low.....
- Have a vision for your program....What's the VISION and who else can see it?
- Be brutally honest about your situation....We can't physically guard anyone....How can we find a way to be competitive and give ourselves a chance to succeed...
- Never give up on your kids....
- Tell your kids you appreciate them...as much as possible.
- Your kids have to know you care about them...
- Your goal has to be that you want to make an impact in a kids life...not just teach him how to pick for the picker.
- Never settle for being good...Play to win...not play to play...
- Make your practices "Controlled Chaos"...
- Make everything a competition...Kids need consequences...
- Have confidence in your staff...JV coach is in charge of subbing.
- Never stop promoting your program no matter what the scoreboard says.

As a coach, we must understand that this is a cycle and there will be better days to come. We finished our second year with a 5-16 record and things have improved drastically from the first year. Our kids continue to compete and in the end we have taught them a lot more than just the game of basketball.