

March 12, 2008 – Basketball Awards Night – Northridge Prep

I would like to begin this evening with a few words about our basketball program and about what we strive to accomplish with your sons...

Let's face it ... your sons devote countless hours to basketball over the course of their careers... so, what exactly is it that he derives from this experience?

Is it simply about becoming a better basketball player or winning a championship? Or is there more?

I guess I can begin to answer such questions by sharing a brief story with you.

On the night when our team won the Regional Championship and our fans stormed the court, a friend of mine said to me afterwards: *"Well, I now understand why you coach. That had to be the one of the most electric moments I have ever witnessed. It has to be deeply satisfying for you."*

Now, I don't disagree that it was quite a special moment and a memory I will carry with me into eternity, but I had to correct my friend – that moment is not the reason that I coach.

The sole reason that I coach is because I believe that basketball is a microcosm of life and as such it affords an opportunity for young men to learn life lessons.

I believe I speak on behalf of our entire coaching staff when I say this. Basketball is not an end in and of itself – rather, it is a means to an end here at Northridge.

Although winning on the scoreboard is important and we certainly strive to win, our basketball program is NOT about the scoreboard. Rather, it is about growing up.

Specifically, it is about us coaches helping your son make a successful transition from boyhood into manhood.

Winning on the scoreboard is a by-product – a side benefit if you will – of a much greater overarching purpose. Wins on the scoreboard are not our primary goal; first and foremost, we are after victories in your son's heart.

Coach Kestler and I spend many hours talking about our profession – he rightly pointed out on one occasion that sports is the moral equivalent of war – with one exception, of course, because the price of war might be one's life – and that is not the case with sports.

The point is that a young man has an opportunity to develop virtue through competitive athletics – he can acquire those "good habits" that will remain with him for a lifetime.

Among the many important habits that we teach in our program, three seem to stand out above the others – they are commitment, responsibility and working hard.

Commitment is realizing that when you say yes to someone, you enter into a relationship with that person. In this case, it is a relationship with your teammates and coaches.

Commitment means that you are faithful, loyal and dependable because others are counting on you...

...It also means that you will make the necessary sacrifices to be present when the team is there.

Someone once asked me: If there was one and only one quality that I would like to see our players develop during their time in our program, what would it be?

The answer is simple: Commitment.

The reason COMMITMENT is so important in developing the character of young men is because this generation is growing up at a time where NOT being committed is an acceptable part of our culture.

For many, keeping “options open” seems to have replaced commitment...we see it in families, in marriages, in the Church, in the work place and in sports...

...With commitment comes responsibility. It isn't enough to say, “I'll show up” or “I'll be there” – that's a good starting point, of course – but, the next step is our players doing their best – it is about pursuing excellence – it's about understanding that others are counting on you to give your best shot – not once and not once in a while, but every day.

Responsibility ALSO means that once a young man says ‘yes’ to his teammates and coaches, he MUST learn to function as a part of the whole. His contribution – whether big or small – is significant...

As we often remind our players – they will be working in teams the rest of their lives – whether that team is the family they will one day lead or the business they will one day be a part of or own...

Working well with others is an essential skill in personal success...

...Once commitment and responsibility are understood then it is a matter of simply working hard at what you do.

Working hard begins with setting goals and executing a plan to achieve those goals – all the while realizing that no one is a finished product – we are all works in progress.

It is about perseverance and staying with the task ... It is also about dealing with disappointment like a man ... about learning how to begin again when we fall short of our goals.

It is also about being tough-minded and having courage when facing seemingly insurmountable odds. It is about giving of oneself to others in a spirit of unity and service.

This is what the Northridge Basketball Program is really about.

If we can accomplish these things each year, then our season has been a success. And the championships – frankly – are nothing more than icing on the cake.

Your son's participation in our program exposes him to countless opportunities to grow in virtue. Our aim is to be an extension of what you do with him at home.

As our players have heard me say repeatedly, we can win every game in a given season, but if they are not better men for having been in our program, then, at least in my estimation, our season has not been a complete success.

Let me close by sharing with you what I received from a parent of a player who recently played for us here at Northridge – perhaps it's the best way to summarize what our basketball program is truly about...

“...in addition to teaching sacrifice and commitment, the basketball program teaches much more. By example and instruction, you and your coaches teach leadership, organization, preparation, problem-solving, strategic planning, interpersonal communications under extreme stress, bouncing back from defeat, staying sharp after victory, supporting others when they are down, making adjustments when things aren't working, accepting support from others, and making a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. It's your coaching staff's ability to teach these skills that makes your program so valuable.”

So...with those thoughts in mind...I would like to thank you, the parents, for choosing Northridge and for allowing us coaches to help form your sons.

We appreciate your support. Knowing that you are behind us is what makes for a truly successful program...