

Chicken Soup for *Friendswood ISD*

I was in my first season of coaching basketball at Friendswood Jr High. It was 2006. I had just left a Boys High School coaching job in Tennessee where I was the JV Coach and Varsity Assistant. To be honest, I was not very excited about coaching 7B Girls Basketball. But, I needed a job and since the math job I applied for was tied to coaching, I took the coaching position.

We had tryouts in November and I had my team. We won our first two regular-season games but had not really played up to my expectations. In our first tournament, we were down and were not playing well. I was getting frustrated and just coming from Boys High School ball, I started to “get on” to my kids, raising my voice and telling them all the things they were doing wrong. I made a substitution and when the girl I took out came to the bench, I continued to tell her all the things she did wrong. “Natalie,” I said. “What are you doing and why are you not running the play?” She looked up at me with tears in her eyes but did not say a word. Harshly I asked, “Why are you crying?” She looked at me and said, “I don’t respond well when you yell at me like that,” then sat down. I stopped in my tracks. I turned, walked back to the front of the bench, and kept coaching. We lost.

When I got home, my wife asked me how it went. “Not good,” I said. I needed some guidance so I called my grandmother. She listened intently and simply said, “Well, like your grandfather always says, you can lead more bees to the hive with honey than you can with vinegar,” then she hung up on me. Of course I called her right back, “What did you do that for?” She said, “I said all I needed to say,” and hung up again!

I knew right then, I was going to have to make a change. I started to understand not all kids can handle being yelled at and they need to hear the good things they are doing as well as the bad...actually, they need to hear the good things 5x as much as the bad.

Over the years at FJH, I became a totally different coach; a coach that encouraged kids and told them it was okay to mess up and to just fix it. I learned how to encourage kids way more than criticize them and I learned we could still be successful yelling to the kids but not at them.

That 2006 team finished the year 15 – 3 and made it to the district finals championship game. In that game, down by 8 with 50 seconds to go, I called a time out. I brought everyone in the huddle and said, “Hey, we are going to lose this game, but one game does not take away from what we accomplished this season.” Once again, tears came, but this time all the players were crying. The tears weren’t because we were going to lose but because we all knew the season was over and we had become like family. I told them it was ok and I was proud of them.

Since that first year, we have never had a losing season and are 208 – 28 with 8 District Championships as a program. I have had many great teams and have gotten to be a part of many great young ladies’ lives over the years. I have memories I would not trade for a million dollars. But let’s be clear about one thing, I have never scored one single bucket in those 14 seasons. Our success is because of the great, hard-working, girls we have here at FJH....and a girl named Natalie.

- Josh Fritts, FJH coach