

DEAR EDITOR:

I was so sorry to hear of the passing of former Delphos St. John's Coach Bob Arnzen Wednesday.

I first met Bob in 1987 when I was coaching 7th-grade basketball for Van Wert. We had an undefeated team that year and we were playing the Blue Jays at their place. I remember it being a good game with us winning by 5 or 6. After the game, I stayed in the gym to talk to the St. John's 7th-grade coach while my team went to get changed and get on the bus. It must have been at least 10 minutes before I finally made my way to the locker room. I expected to find my players dressed and headed to the bus but what I found was that they were all still gathered outside the locker room talking to Coach Arnzen. Bob was telling them how good he thought they were and how great he thought they could be if they all stuck together and continued to work hard. When I walked up, he shook my hand and said "Jim, you sure have a nice bunch of fellows here." I had never met Bob prior to that day but was so impressed that he had taken the time to know who I was and I never forgot that.

I remember watching one of his games on TV once. It was a tournament game against a very good team. It was one of those games where every possession seemed critical. Early in the second half, one of Bob's kids committed a really dumb turnover right when the momentum was starting to go St. John's way. I watched as Bob called him over to the bench. I remember thinking that Coach Arnzen was really going to let him have it but instead, he held out both hands. The kid slapped them and then Bob slapped his. Then he pushed him back out onto the court and said, "Great job kid, keep playing hard!"

With less than a minute to play and the Blue Jays trailing by a point or two, one of their players pulled up for a 20-footer that they absolutely positively had to have. He swished it and St. John's won the game. Oh, and the kid who made the shot? It was the same kid who had the bad turnover earlier in the game. I think this story is a microcosm of the man himself and one of the secrets to his success. I have always believed that if he had ripped into that player earlier in the game he would have never made that shot at the end. That kid made that shot as much for his coach as he did for himself.

I know all coaches want to win but so many of them shoot themselves in the foot by sapping the confidence of their players by yelling and screaming every time they make a mistake.

I think it's safe to say that the likes of Bob Arnzen will never pass this way again. Thanks for remembering my name, Coach; you can bet I will never forget yours.

Jim Clay
Van Wert