

3 Takeaways From My 1st Year as a Head Football Coach

By: Jordan Irsik



You think you're ready for it. However, in reality, you discover soon enough that nobody really is. I had been an assistant varsity football coach for 5 years in the state of Kansas before I decided that it was time for me to take the leap. In February of 2020, I accepted my first Head Coaching job at Syracuse High School in Western Kansas, and became the youngest Head Football Coach in the entire state. What happened after that was the learning experience of a lifetime.

What ended in a 4-4 season, one of the best seasons the school had in the past 20 years, was a dynamic educational experience that provided me with a refreshed view of what being the Head man is all about. My 3 Takeaways are something that every young and aspiring Head Coach should know, and I promise you I save my best lesson for last.

1. The Standard is The Standard - EVERY SINGLE DAY

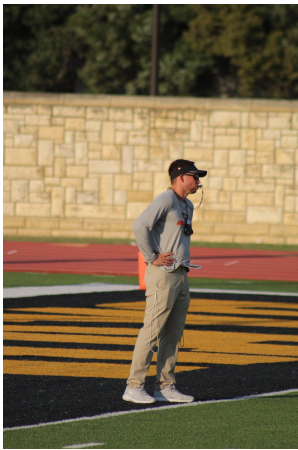
What I quickly learned in my first year as a Head Coach is that you have to be the same exact person every single day. Any good Head Coach will prepare "The Manual" for their interview process that details program organization, goals, core beliefs, and schematics. What is important to remember is that you have to be the living example of someone striving to achieve those goals every single day. An example of this is that you cannot put an emphasis on having good academics, if you're the same coach that doesn't do a good job of teaching in the classroom. The exhausting part comes in not only holding your kids accountable, but holding your coaches accountable as well. Nobody wants to have to get on another grown man for their work or behavior, but the reality is that sometimes that is exactly what needs to be done. A Football Program is simply too big for one man to hold each person accountable -- it simply just starts with him. If the assistant coaches cannot hold themselves or the kids accountable, then the program ultimately will not reach its peak potential.

2. Your Emotions CANNOT Overcome your Composure

You're gonna face many challenges in changing your program's culture during your first year, and probably many more even in the years after. Many of the problems will insult you, challenge your beliefs, and straight up piss you off. These will eventually come to decisions that you're gonna have to make. You are gonna want to make decisions out of anger, or possibly follow the path of least resistance. Because of this, it is important to remember a couple of things before you make that decision.

- a) Is this decision the best for the program?
- b) Is this decision the best for the kid? (In the LONG RUN)

3. Never Forget Your Purpose - YOUR WHY



It is easy for many of us to get lost along our coaching journeys at some point, especially for Head Coaches, where we have little time to reflect and meditate. What I found along my journey was some unprecedented success. We had started the year 3-0, and it was the best start our program had in 21 years. Because of this, we gained a lot of notoriety. Statewide news coverage was writing articles about us, and it wasn't uncommon to have a reporter calling my phone 3-4 times per week to ask for an interview. Our players and coaches preparation habits changed, and suddenly we had lower efforts with more internal and external pressures to win. In the peak of the toughest part of our schedule, we lost 3 games in a row, and

concluded the third with a mutiny of players fighting amongst each other and the coaches for the reason we were failing. We called a meeting that following Monday to deal with the issues. In this meeting all of my Takeaways were addressed:

- a) We were not holding ourselves to our standards of behavior in terms of leadership and character. I was failing to hold each assistant coach responsible for actively preparing their position groups in practices and meetings, instead of letting them "go through the motions".
- b) Our players' emotions were overcoming their composure and leading them to make bad decisions on and off the field.
- c) We had forgotten our why. We put blame on each other, instead of looking internally about how we could be better teammates and brothers. We had forgotten that the foundational year of our program was about improvement and changing our culture - not necessarily all about winning.

The next week, we lost to our rival by 6, in a game that came down to the final play. After the game, it didn't matter that we had lost. What mattered is that we had come together as a team to execute our gameplan and play with each other every snap. We had proven to our rivals that we

belonged on the same field with them again, for the first time in decades. The game actually gave us momentum, and we concluded our regular season the following week with a 40 point victory over another conference rival. The conclusion of our season gave our young men a purpose to their season, and many remarked in our postseason evaluations that this was the most they have ever enjoyed playing football. The season was one that caused me to reflect and remind me why I had gotten into this profession as well. What it came down to was that I firmly believed in the value of teaching hard work, discipline, self-confidence, and the teachings of my faith in Jesus Christ through football. While gaining a newfound level of respect for the profession, this reflection allowed me to find myself, and shaped my vision towards something completely different than what I had once envisioned. This included the desire and willingness to continue to learn, and learn from the best. With reflection, hard work, and success came opportunity, and my reflections on my beliefs and my purpose led me down my current career path as an assistant football coach at Folsom High School in Northern California.



Coach Irsik is entering his first season as the Defensive Backs Coach at Folsom High School in California in the Fall of 2021. Prior to that, he spent 6.5 years coaching football in Kansas at Syracuse High School, Garden City High School, Wamego High School, and Butler Community College. During his 6.5 years in Kansas, he coached 20 All-Conference Players, and 8 All-State Players. In 2015, Irsik was on staff for the Wamego High School Regional Championship Team. Coach Irsik has a Bachelors in Secondary Education from Kansas State University and a Masters in Sports Administration from Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

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