



Morgan Wootten

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# Morgan Wootten Interview

## Traits of Great Players and Coaches from a Basketball Hall of Famer

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# Morgan Wootten Interview

## “Traits of Great Players and Coaches from a Basketball Hall of Famer”

HSA: Alright, you have Brian Schofield here with HoopSkills Academy and I am lucky enough to have Coach Morgan Wootten with me on the line. Coach Wootten, thank you very much for coming on with us.

Morgan Wootten: Brian delighted to be with you, always happy to talk about basketball.

HSA: Excellent, excellent thank you. I grew up and I played high school basketball in the early 90s and DeMatha and your program was always something that – well everybody aspired to be and we all looked up to. So this is very much a privilege for me and an honor to be able to talk to you about this, a game that I love and a game that all of our listeners love also. If you wouldn't mind, would you go into a little bit of your background? I know you may not be the coach or the type of person who likes to brag, but I need you to brag a little bit here. If you could talk about entering the Hall of Fame in 2000, how many wins you've had and all that stuff.

Morgan Wootten: Well Brian, I've been very fortunate to have a lot of great young men that I've been able to coach them through the years; I've been surrounded by great coaches that have coached with me. In fact I think that one time, eleven of my former coaches that I'd coach with or head coaches at the Division one level, so it gives an idea of the tremendous coaches that worked with me, even today guys like Mike Brey, the head coach of Notre Dame, not only played for me but coached with me and Sydney Lowe head coach at NC State, was a great point guard with us and of course he's done a great job of coaching both at a professional and the collegiate level. So, I've just been blessed with coaches, I can talk for the next hour on, they've been very important to our success and of course the great young men that I've had the privilege of coaching, we've had eighteen of them went on to play in the NBA and certainly highlighted by Adrian Dantley, who is just inducted in the Hall of Fame last year and it just gives you the idea of the type of young men that I've been privileged to coach. So you know, you've got great players and great kids and great coaches to coach with you, you're able to have obviously very successful program and it was indeed a great honor in 2000 to be inducted in the basketball Hall of Fame, but in a way I think I represent all of these people who helped get me there.

HSA: Very good. When I think about DeMatha I always wondered, it is a program that can recruit, is it all catholic school?

Morgan Wootten: Yeah, we can recruit but we can't give athletic scholarships.

HSA: Got you.

Morgan Wootten: We have all the catholic schools in Northern Virginia and the district of Columbia and suburban Maryland, can all participate in the Washington Capital Athletic Conference and we can talk to young men that we see play, if we think are good students and good kids

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and all that and encourage them to come to DeMatha, but there are no athletic scholarships. Any aid that's given is based strictly on need.

HSA: Not bad. I was going to say though, how many kids, when you were in the prime of DeMatha basketball, did you turn away that wanted to go to school there?

Morgan Wootten: Well, unfortunately there have been kids that wanted to come that didn't get in. I can tell you a couple of funny stories, a couple of great players that really wanted to come and just through some administrative foul ups, I mean they were very admissible, but they didn't end up coming because we had a couple of mix up. So we've lost some good kids through the years who'd wanted to come and unfortunately there's been some that we would've liked to come, but they've gone in other directions but we've been blessed, we've certainly had our share that's very obvious.

HSA: Not bad, very good, thanks for sharing that. For those that are listening as well, you've been selected national champion five times, won over a 100 different major titles and been voted number one in Washington DC twenty-three times, you've won national coach of the year four times and Coach of the year in the DC area ten different years and but you have to be also, very proud of your son who's gone the same way as you correct?

Morgan Wootten: Yes I'm very proud of Joe, of course I was fortunate enough to coach both my boys and Joe was the youngest and he graduated in 1991 from DeMatha and his team was undefeated.

HSA: I remember.

Morgan Wootten: It was one of the teams we had and they were undefeated and they were of course number 1 in the Washington area, they were ranked nationally in the top 10 at the end of the year and Joe went on to, who is not the head coach of Bishop O'Connor High School in Northern Virginia and he's just done an outstanding job there and I'm very, very proud of him and you know, you're always happy when you see your son follow in your footsteps, I guess it's a bit of a compliment.

HSA: Yes, definitely, definitely. Can you talk about your basketball camp? I mean I want to push this as much as possible as well, you've got a camp that has been – well as you advertise as USA's number one teaching camp and I've talked to a number of people this past few weeks who say it's an absolutely wonderful camp, can you go into a little bit detail when you have those, different people that help out, the coaches that can assist and so on?

Morgan Wootten: Right Brian, we have an – and I still enjoy it very much – we have our overnight basket ball camp and we hold it at Frostburg State University, which is about two and a half hours from Washington DC, it's in the mountains of Western Maryland, just North of Cumberland Maryland and we have four weeks for boys and one week for girls and we have it right on the campus and we pretty much take over the campus the five weeks we're there. We try to go the last two weeks of June and the first three weeks of July. We've got players who come from Europe, we've had the Taiwan national team come one time, so it's open to every and any body from any where in the world really and we have tremendous coaches. We have high school

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coaches who will come to us from all over the county, we have coaches from Europe that have come and from Canada and it's a great teaching camp. We really concentrated on the fundamentals, developing the total player and we don't normally play games, we'll play three games a day but we have five fundamental drills a day. We have outstanding guest speakers that come in and speak. A lot of my former players have come back, Danny Ferry who is the general manager of the Cleveland Cavaliers now, Adrian Dantley, our Hall of Famer and many of my former players in the pros and so on, have come back; they've been guest speakers. Outstanding college players have come from the Christian Laettner and so on. A lot of the players from the ACC will come and it's just a tremendous camp, it's also a tremendous camp for a young coach or any coach who wants to really get into the game to come to, because we have an hour round table every day where we have basketball brainstorming sessions and it's a great camp and any coaches or players that are interested, they can go right to our website which is [www.CoachWootten.com](http://www.CoachWootten.com) and see all about our camp.

HSA: Very good, I was checking out the website as well. How many kids can go to the camps?

Morgan Wootten: Well, we limit it at 600 a week and we just turn them away each week.

HSA: Ok, I was going to say.

Morgan Wootten: Now, 600 sounds like a lot, but the way we work it is the 600 campers are divided into six leagues all based on age, a combination of age and ability, like the ACC is the oldest league. So there's only really 100 in each league and every league had a commissioner and there's teams in that league and every team has a coach. So, it's like actually six different camps moving within a camp and so it's a real personal touch and just a great basketball atmosphere.

HSA: Excellent, thank you very much. Its one of those things again with coach Wootten's website make sure you spell it correctly, it's two Os , two Ts, so it's [www.CoachWootten.com](http://www.CoachWootten.com), great website. Alright let's get into this a little bit. When we created our website and we created our product for HoopSkills Academy, we deal a lot with younger players and younger coaches, so that's going to be the two topics we'll touch on today. First thing with young players, when you talked to kids that are just starting to play basketball, how early do you recommend they start playing competitively and why?

Morgan Wootten: You mean playing on an organized level?

HSA: Yes, on an organized level.

Morgan Wootten: Right, because you know its fun to see kids at a really young, young age, just kind of playing with the ball, trying to learn how to dribble, maybe playing with their dad or some of their friends, just fooling around but, of course it really depends a lot on the individual person, but we see leagues obviously organized here now at the lowest of grade, sometimes your wonder is, is it too low? I think obviously, say the fourth grade level, would be a nice place to start on an organized level, I think fourth, fifth grade and again the biggest thing, you want to make sure that these youngsters when they do start on an organized team, that they're exposed to the game in a way that they develop a great love for it and I know I started at a pretty early age and the greatest thing that coach did for me, he inspired in me a love for the game of basketball.

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HSA: Mine to, mine to. I started early and I had a father who was, he pushed me hard to play but he didn't have to. It got to the point that when I fell in love with basketball, he didn't have to ever tell me to go shoot, I'd go to my neighbor's house and find a hoop or a church or anything close by, I wanted to just go play. But that's why I asked that question first, we have a lot of kids that their parents even, that asked about whether they should get their kids involved in first grade, second grade and my personal opinion is, I want the kids to develop or like you mentioned, I want them to have a specific love for basketball, so don't get too discouraged too early, and that's something that they can get in there and play, develop some level of success and build on that. Sometimes I'm afraid if they start too young and I mean they're missing nine out of ten shots, they got called for travelling even in first or second grade now, you know, it's just kind of different for me. I don't know if you have a different opinion or want to expand on that a little bit.

Morgan Wootten: Well yes, I think this, you've got to remember that even if you play on an eight foot bucket, if a kid starts too young he can't even make a lay up, he'll never score.

HSA: Right.

Morgan Wootten: And that could be very discouraging and as you suggested, they're not going to really get a love of the game if they can't put the ball in the basket even in a drill and if they really can't dribble the ball or pass and receive, so again a lot depends on the individual and again I hope they have eight feet baskets for the really youngsters, I think that's so important. Because again, if you're not going to taste some success, you're not going to really be interested or develop a love in that area, that's why again, it depends so much on the individual, how talented the youngster is, but I think once they have the ability to make a lay up and they can pass and catch the ball, and maybe they can learn and dribble with their head up, that type of thing, they're ready to play some organized basketball and really have a lot of fun at it.

HSA: Very good. If I'm a coach and I'm dealing with fourth grade kids, fifth grade kids, what should I be focusing on?

Morgan Wootten: Well, of course you know, just the very basics. They've got to be able to learn how to throw a basic two handed chest pass, a bounce pass, to pass and receive the basketball, that's the first thing you've got to be able to do.

HSA: Ok.

Morgan Wootten: Then I think they obviously have to learn how to dribble the basketball and the basketball has got to become their friend, they want to be able to handle it well and the better they can handle it, the more they're going to like the game. So to be able to pass and receive and dribble it that's great and the thing I look for first, the pieces that go into a drive for a right handed lay up and left handed lay up and that's a great thing if a kid at a young age can start to develop the use of both hands. But I've had coaches come to me, they're saying, I'm just starting to coach and these kids on their first year, they're going to play, what was it you look for, I say, if you teach them to pass and receive the basketball, be able to shoot a driving lay up and really getting greedy if they can learn to maybe shooting with their off hand, learn to pivot, work on footwork, then you're starting to do a good job in getting these kids ready and I think those are

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the basic things they've got to be able to do and also getting the defense stance and learn how to play man to man defense one on one.

HSA: Very good. So you're even talking about even teaching defense at an early age like that, fourth and fifth grade?

Morgan Wootten: Positively, I mean hey, half the game is defense and down the road if you can't defend then you can't play. So I think it's a great idea, because teaching them the basic defensive stance, you're then going to automatically have to go to work and teach them foot work or being able to slide and switch directions and so, footwork is so important in basketball. Great footwork is a commodity that every great player has.

HSA: Oh, very good, I appreciate that. I have a hard time – well, not a hard time – but I like to watch a lot of young kids play, I'll go to the gym that will have – I like to watch the youth leagues play basketball. I have a difficult time though with coaches, but then again I was blessed to have good coach growing up, but I have a difficult time with coaches who will take their fourth grade kids and they'll turn it into where they're so concerned about winning at this age, where the ball will go to one kid who can dribble and drive and shoot, he might be the kid that's taller or bigger than everyone else. So I have a hard time with those coaches who'll say, lets pass the ball to Jimmy because Jimmy can drive and shoot the basket. Is that something I should be worried about and if I am getting into coaching, do I want to focus ore on wins an losses when I'm in fourth grade, fifth grade or do I want to be more focused on teaching the kid the right way to play?

Morgan Wootten: Well the second part of what you said is right on the money. You want to focus on developing them, hopefully the fundamentals, but a great love of the game of basketball, the idea of team work and to play hard but you're supposed to have fun. So, we always taught our teams play hard, play smart, play together and have fun and have fun is so much important. If a kid's going to really develop a love of the game and if at fourth grade, tremendous emphasis is put on winning and maybe one player is going to have the ball the whole game and take all the shots and so on, there's not much fun in that.

HSA: Yeah, there's no fun in that.

Morgan Wootten: I like that one of my grand children was in the league and he had just started playing and actually they would have raised the score at the end of the half and then they would start all over again, where the score was not that important, everybody had to play a certain amount of time and the real emphasis was on just developing love for the game.

HSA: Very good, I love to hear that. I love to hear that. What age do you believe they should start to get really competitive, they should start to say ok, here's the kids, we've all separated now, these are the kids that really love basketball, they're good, they can play, when do we start to worry about that, junior high?

Morgan Wootten: I would think as you hit the seventh and eighth grade certainly then it can be a little more emphasis on where the score is important. Because you have to learn in life that you will be rewarded by how well you play and the beautiful thing Brian, let me say is here and it

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goes through all my conversations and I've spoken to many corporations from Goldman Sachs right down to other economic groups and whenever I speak, I tell them that whatever makes basketball work, will make life work and so, as you hit the seventh and eighth grade, they want to find out ok, the object of the game is try to win. We want to be the best defensive team we can be, the best offensive team we can be, we want to play together and we're going to try and be as successful as we can be and with that attitude, I think its ok to start to play to win at that point and remembering whatever makes basketball work, will make your life work.

HSA: Very good, thank you very much for sharing that. As far as young coaches, when you look at or watch the game of basketball today, what are some traits that you look for of good coaches?

Morgan Wootten: Well good coaches, you want one that has a love for the game, a passion for the game, a passion for what they're doing.

HSA: Now how can you see that?

Morgan Wootten: I think you can see it in the way that they interact with their players, with the kids. You can tell if they're really going to be good coaches, if they're really have the welfare and concern of each individual in that team in hand. You can tell about their enthusiasm, you can tell about their eagerness to learn. Are they going to clinics, or are they working camps in the summer, or are they reading all the books they can get their hands on, or are they asking questions of other coaches and one thing about basketball it's a great fraternity. There isn't a basketball coach alive, that wouldn't share knowledge with any coach who came up to him, no matter how young that coach might be.

HSA: I agree.

Morgan Wootten: I was a young coach. When I grew up I was very fortunate in getting to know Red Auerbach real well, John Wooden real well, they became great friends of mine. I remember as a young coach, when I first started, I'd go to them with questions and they were always eager and anxious to help

HSA: How did you do that?

Morgan Wootten: Well, I was very fortunate that Red Auerbach lived right here in Washington DC and I met him when I was on my first year at DeMatha. I was introduce to him at a summer league game and we started talking basketball, I started asking questions and I think he appreciate the fact that I was eager to learn and that I wanted to find out how to solve this problem, how to handle this situation and Red and I became very, very close and he came and spoke at our banquet and I went up to some of the Boston Celtics Championship games. We had lunch on Tuesdays for years and years and years and I think what he appreciated and any coach appreciates, that I was a coach eager to learn and I think, you say how can you spot it? The coach or they're eager to learn or they're trying to improve each and every day so they are able to go back and be the best coach for their team that they can be.

HSA: Very good, thank you. What areas today in coaching, do you think they neglect, that's the most – something that's kind of missing nowadays.

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Morgan Wootten: Probably the most neglected area is fundamentals. So often in this – any coach can fall in this trap, I'm not so sure that I didn't at times, you fall the into the trap of putting a team offense, a team defense, out of bound plays, team this, this that and that's all important, don't get me wrong, but in doing it you might neglect the fundamentals. And so really, I think you've got to concentrate on the fundamentals first and then build into the team concept and it's not something you can do just in a season. I've often said most of the great players are made in the off season, where they really concentrate and work on fundamentals, because that's the name of the game. It's really simply.

HSA: And in fundamentals specifically, you're talking passing, shooting, defense, dribbling –

Morgan Wootten: I'm talking passing, receiving, driving or dribbling, obviously shooting, defensive foot work, rebounding, quickness, agility, all these things that need to be worked on.

HSA: And, in your opinion, coaches today sometimes can focus too much or practices specifically on, let's work on this offence or this offensive plays or defenses, team defense and so on.

Morgan Wootten: Exactly Brian and I'll give you a perfect example. The first team I ever coached was at an orphanage. My uncle had called me up and said the team needed a coach.

HSA: How old were you?

Morgan Wootten: And I was just in college, just started college, my first year at college and he called me in the summer and actually called to coach them in baseball, the following year, I coached them in basketball. Well even though I played basketball for a year at Montgomery College, I played in high school, really loved the game and played before then of course, I didn't know a lot about coaching and so, we were able to practice two hours a day. Well, I really didn't know the total idea of how to coach a team, so the first twenty minutes, we shot lay ups every day, but you know what? We could shoot lay ups better than any team we faced. So if you concentrate on the fundamentals, you'd be amazed at how well you can do.

HSA: Very good. As a coach, what was some ways that you built or tried to foster team chemistry?

Morgan Wootten: Well, I think team chemistry is something you need to work on every day and it doesn't – you know, the players may not even realize that's happening, but I think one of the things a coach has to be is a great salesman and you've got to sell them on the fact that, hey you park your egos at that door, you walk in and you're going to be part of something greater than yourself. There's obviously more strength in a team then there is in an individual.

HSA: Right.

Morgan Wootten: And I know all the great players that I've had the privilege of coaching and you're talking about all of them that went on to the NBA, over 250 played college division one ball. The beauty is, they all were willing to put their ego aside and be part of a team and we talked about that and we talked about it everyday and I think you gain chemistry by, for example

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acknowledging a great pass, a player takes a charge, everybody runs to help pick him up, a guy dives for a loose ball, they're patting each other on the back, they even later acknowledge a scream, but every body find in a way to congratulate their team mates to realize they're all part of something greater than themselves. And you can gain chemistry by being positive, by team mates getting used to patting each other on the back, or they make a mistake they say get your head up the next possession is the only one that counts and you work on it everyday.

HSA: So when it comes to that – you know, I've been through or I've seen a lot of different college coaches even practice and I signed with the University of Utah out of high school and I had the benefit to work with Coach Majerus a lot and he's not a coach who thrives on the positive. You know what I'm saying? He's not the most – he screams, he says stuff that a lot of kids, especially the Utah kids, they've never heard those terms before and don't know what they mean. Were you the type of coach that focused more on the positive, is there a middle spot, did you have a player on your team or tried to create a leader on the team that took that role, how did that work for you?

Morgan Wootten: Well, number one, I would say this in terms of a coach, the most important thing that a coach has to do, is be himself or be herself. That's most important. Now, you've got to be the kind of coach that you'd want your own son or your own daughter to play for and you have to be your own best critic. If your language or your decorum or the way you are conducting yourself is something you wouldn't want your own son and daughter to be exposed to, then you'd have to be a good enough critic to correct the things in yourself that need to be corrected, but that's the most important thing. These players will never forget their coach, as long as they live, they will have an opinion of every coach they play for. I stress at the clinics, we stress at our help and you know you may forget the name of a teacher, you may forget some people you meet in your life, but I guarantee you, you'd have an opinion of any coach you play for and it may be, I hope a very positive opinion, where you say that coach touched my life, that coach was great, my life was better and richer because of that coach. You know I've talked to some players who said, this one coach I had, I took nothing from him, I would never want to be like that a person. So, again it's important that coach realize how they are touching lives and those kids will remember them as long as they live. So, that's the first thing to me a coach really has to do and to be yourself, be the kind of person you want your son or your daughter to pay for and you're on your way, you can just be yourself and be that kind of coach. I myself, I think the greatest compliment that was ever paid to me, was certainly one of a great compliment, when we were doing five good minutes with Cal at the Cal Ripken program and they asked Danny about how was I and Danny said, he never heard me use a curse word and so I felt pretty good about that and so I think coaches have to examine themselves.

HSA: I agree. It is up to the individual coach. I had some experiences with coaches where at time I might now have not liked it, five years after the fact I could see it for what it was and what they really trying to do and my respect for them grew even more. Where I really realize, this guy was really trying to teach me these things, because you know how it is with these kids, the players get told to many different things, they're told they're so great by 100 different people and then you get them and they walk in the gym and they're yours and you've got to get them to buy into a certain role, a certain position on the team and buy into that whole team concept like you talked about team chemistry and it can be difficult. This is a situation with me with t his coach, this coach had taken me aside, wanted me to be the team leader and really take control of everything

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and I did realize that until five years later when it was after the fact, I wish I would have gotten it then but.

Morgan Wootten: Well, that's the beauty of the game now, back to our saying whatever makes basketball work will make your left work, even at five years later you realize that's what he was trying to do, that and you were your growing all the time and now you can take that message which was conveyed and you can run with it.

HSA: You're right and I have, you're right.

Morgan Wootten: Sure.

HSA: You're exactly right. It's amazing, you talk about this and I just think of how here's Coach K who gets five Mc Donald all Americans a year and has to take this kids and by the end of every season, even the first two weeks into their season, you see how much he has got these kids to buy into him. He's taken all these kids who are the best players in the country, best players on their team by far, who took twenty-five shots a game and now he gets them to play and buy into a certain role. It's amazing to watch.

Morgan Wootten: Well, you look at Mike and look at the job he did with the Olympic team.

HSA: Oh yeah.

Morgan Wootten: I mean, he got these pros that they came from a league of basketball where its star studded, everything is centered around the player not the team and it's a deal of all stars and he got them to buy in and play together and of course that's what a coach is, he's a great sales man and Mike is himself, he is a great sales man but he is a great teacher. I think like coach Wooden years ago, when we sat down and talked he said, one of his first role of leadership was think of yourself as a teacher and that's what Mike does and I think that's what all successful coaches do. They are a teacher, they have the perfect classroom, the kids want to be there, they're eager to learn and so if you think of your self as a teacher, you have a chance to be a pretty good coach.

HSA: You're right; you're right, thank you. What are some different motivational tactics you'd use to get your team to respond, to get them to do better?

Morgan Wootten: Well, again everything that would depend on the particular situation, the type of game coming up, that type of thing, again I'll get back to what I said earlier, we talk about a team, you're going to play hard, you're going to play smart, you're going to play together and have fun, but the biggest thing is selling them on the only possession that counts is the possession coming up. A lot of times a kid will make a mistake, hang his head, take the next four or five possession off, feel sorry for himself or whatever it might be but constantly talking, here's what the great ones do, the great ones never take a possession off, the great ones don't let a mistake beat them, all they think about is the one coming up right now, that's the only one that counts because basketball is a game of mistakes. You're going to make some mistakes, in fact a team that doesn't make some mistakes; they probably won't win because that means they're not really trying to accomplish anything. But the idea of playing as I said, together as a team, playing smart,

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it will reap benefits. Motivate them, it depend on the situations that come alone. I can think of situations where you're a coach, what do you say when you're down six with thirty seconds to go, six down with fifteen seconds to go. I was at DeMatha Hall of Fame last night and one of my former basketball players who was inducted and he said he never forgot the time that we were playing down in Georgetown University against the league rival and there was a time I'd taken them with thirty seconds to go and we were six down and he said, I'll never forget, that I got in a hub and said we got these guys right where we want them and we did win in regulation believe it or not.

HSA: Really?

Morgan Wootten: And yep, we pressed full court double team, we made three steals in a row, got fouled and we won in regulations but we were six down with thirty seconds to go. So, you've got to be positive, you've got to think positive and so if you're hanging your head because you're six down with thirty seconds, you obviously have another chance, so you motivate them by saying, hey we can get this done, we can do it, and I've been proud of some of our teams who's made great, great comebacks in the past. Again, it's different, like when we played Power Memorial when they had Lou Alcindor who went on to be Karim Abdul Jabbar, they'd won 72 games in a row. Well now the motivation was already there, the gymnasium was sold out 12,500, papers were building it up as the greatest game ever played, that was ever been played, so now, with all that motivation, my point, or my big problem was to make sure we didn't get too overly motivated where we couldn't play and you try to get them to play on an even keel. So, every situation is different, but you've got to try and have what I call the feel of the game and I learned that from Red Auerbach, because if you have a feel of, do they need to press the button and send little electricity into them that really get them jazzed up, or you need to calm them down a little bit, depends on who you're playing, depends on the circumstances.

HSA: Does it also depend on the player, to you?

Morgan Wootten: Oh yes, very definitely. Every player is different. Like someone said do you treat all your players the same, I said positively not. I said, don't get me wrong, we all wear the same uniforms, the same things required when practice starts, your decorum and so on, but just like ever player doesn't scratch the same way. If you've got your big player, he's probably going to scratch out before practice starts differently then maybe a small quick player. Well, the same thing is true I think, in terms of motivation, some players respond to pull them on a side, whisper in their ear a little bit one on one because they just don't like any constructive criticism at all, he just have a hard time with it. I had a player one time that was crying at the end of practice and I asked him Chris what's the problem, he said, I know you're trying to motivate me but he said, when you yell at me a little bit, its like having to go into a shell and he said I know what you want me to do, so I found at the quiet talk, quiet encouragement with him really work, where another one tell me, hey get on me, if I'm not doing it you tell, me let me know. So, every player is different and I think the art of coaching is finding out what button to push with each player.

HSA: I agree, I agree. Man, very good point thank you. Some of the greatest challenges and questions that we get asked from coaches today, we get asked a ton about dealing with parents. I'm sure it was one of your favorite things, but what advice can you give them?

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Morgan Wootten: Well, this is what I always did and I would advice this to every coach. Once the team is picked and before the season started, we always had a dinner, and being a Catholic school, we had mass and we had a dinner and when the dinner was over, I spoke. The parents were there with the players and I spoke and gave a little general talk and I said, now basketball is a very emotional game, I'll be very positive, here's the schedule we hope you'd be at all the games and encourage your child, be a real support for them and I was saying that's it as a very emotional game and I said, I can tell you now, that probably in many cases, probably your son, since I was coaching a boys team I said your son will not play as much as you want, maybe he won't get as many shots as you'd like to see him get, but I promise you this, he's going to be on a team that plays together, they're going to play for one and another, they're not going to worry about who scores that basket, they're just going to worry about accomplishment, team goals, its all team stuff, and I'd say to the parents if any of you ever have a problem or a question or a point, you call up, make an appointment with me, my door is always open, I'd be delighted to sit down and talk to you. Now, I'll never want to talk to you in an emotional situation, so like right after a game, win or loose, I prefer not to talk to you, but I said if you ever want to come and talk to me and I'm the only one that can do you any good on this, you just give me a call, I'd love to talk to you. So I had the open door policy. But again that didn't always work for all of them; obviously in long career I had some parents that kind of got out of hand. If I saw a parent getting out of hand, I'd call them in, sit them down and I would tell them, here's the way it's going to be and I'd say to them, you're hurting your son, you're hurting your son, he's not the player he can be because you're trying to tug and pull on him one way, he can only play for one coach, that's me, but if you want to coach him, you get the job, you take him – and I only did this to the most severe cases and I would say basically, I've really been blessed through the years with great parents and like one example I was always able to give to a parent if they were having a little problem. I'd say, let me tell you about one of the greatest parents I ever had, he never said a word, he never questioned a thing we did and I had two of his sons, actually I'll tell you why he never question anything, because he was a general manager of the Washington Bullets at the time, Bob Ferry and I said he played pro basketball, he obviously played college basketball, he knew so much about basketball, he knew that any question he did, would hinder his son's progress, so I would use that as an example. So really knowledgeable parents, they don't run their mouths, they are not a problem, it's the ones that don't have knowledge and if you could introduce that, its your pre-game dinner, before the season started, saying that its been my observation through the years, that parents that really understand the game, the most they ever do is maybe come in and have a great quiet talk if they were confused on a point. So you probably set the table ahead of time.

HSA: Right. What I always tell kids, because I deal with a lot of Junior High age kids now and I'll ask them how the season going and they'll say, its always the coaches fault for everything, the coach is a jerk he didn't play me because I've got the wrong last name or he hates my family or you know, I'm sure you've heard thousands of them. I always tell those kids, why don't you go talk to the coach, sit down, talk to the coach, because they've never had the courage or the ability, they've never had the desire to really just sit down, talk to the coach and explain to him what they're feeling and thinking, so the coach can then come back at them. So, I always encourage them to communicate.

Morgan Wootten: Great point Brian, great point.

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HSA: But do you ever have – because in most situations, I always tell those kids, you know what, your parents are telling you one thing, you believe one thing and the coach believes one thing, you're hearing it from your parents but you're not willing to hear the coaches side, so sit down, talk tot him, get his opinion and then go from there. I had again, the same experience with me, I had a coach, I loved him, loved him to death and I bought into what he was teaching me and telling our team and it was working and we ranked two or three in the State of Utah at the time, but I had parents, friends saying other stuff, you should be starting, you should be shooting more shots, you should be doing this and it gets in your head and the best think I ever did was take fifteen minutes one day and talk to the coach. As you can attest to, you can sense those things when something is wrong with your players, correct?

Morgan Wootten: No question.

HSA: So, it was one of those things, I know he sensed it and was relieved to talk to me about it and made a better relationship and anyway.

Morgan Wootten: Brian you bring up a great point and I neglected to say, the other thing that I did do, I always and I've always said a coach can't do enough of this, you sit down and you talk with each of your players individually, how's it going the whole bit. I know a great coach at Duke, used to have a method where he would be at the entrance to the gym when the kids came in for practice. He called each one, hi Billy, hi Joe, hi Mike, how's it going and he could tell almost with their response how things were going and the guys with their head hanging and mumbling, he'd pull them aside and talked to them. Say how are things going, maybe things aren't going well in school, maybe there's been a fight at home, maybe they don't feel good about the basketball situation, but I always spent a lot of one and one, I made it a point at least once a week to go one on one with every player, sometime in that week, get a feel of how they felt, how the team was going and so on. So, I had a pretty good feel of how each player felt. If he was getting any outside pressure, how he felt about the team and how our relationship was. That relationship and you brought it up beautifully, is extremely important.

HSA: Did you ever had team that you had eight to twelve of the kids go on division one?

Morgan Wootten: Yep.

Morgan Wootten: I've seen a lot of coaches with good players not win.

HSA: Right.

Morgan Wootten: I've seen coaches with average players win, but what you say is true, like Kenny Carr, is just one example, Kenny Carr was like a three time all American at NC State, played ten years in the pros most of them were Portland and Kenny didn't start for us until he was as senior, but he was playing behind Adrian Dantley and Wittenberg and Lowe, they were the back quarter at the national championship team in high school but they didn't start until they were seniors.

HSA: I didn't know Wittenberg went there?

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Morgan Wootten: Yeah Wittenberg and Lowe, they were our backcourt.

HSA: And they both went to NC State?

Morgan Wootten: Yeah, they both went to NC State and then Derek Wittenberg is now the head coach at Fordham.

HSA: Yeah.

Morgan Wootten: And Sidney is head coach at NC State.

HSA: Wow I didn't know that.

Morgan Wootten: Yeah.

HSA: Very good, so they were the backcourt that you had at DeMatha, they own the high school national championship there and they went on to win it in college.

Morgan Wootten: That's right and I think that's the only time that's ever been done.

HSA: I didn't know that, that crazy. That's amazing, amazing. I would have loved to be in one of those practices.

Morgan Wootten: Oh I wish you could have been there, I really do.

HSA: Speaking of which, since that time and my time even, I went to high school in the early 90's, from there to now, there's been a huge growth in AAU basketball. It's gone where its almost bigger than the high school game; agree, disagree, do you think its good for the fame or bad for the game?

Morgan Wootten: You know its overall, having been a high school for all those years and feeling that high school basketball is the purest form of the game, I think that's the way to go. Now AAU has come on as you say very, very strong, some cases, it's been good, many cases it has not been good. One of the biggest criticisms might be that all they do is play games, so there is no emphasis on fundamentals, no work on fundamentals and also they might play three games in a day, so, you know if we don't win the first one, so what, we have a game in two hours. Again, who's coaching the AAU team? In the case where it's a genuine coach who really cares about the kids and he's doing everything for them, I say great, but in a case where it might be a coach who is trying to leach on to great players and maybe right they coat tails or direct them to a certain colleges or even be involved with them later on if they're professional players, that's bad.

HSA: And have you seen that first hand?

Morgan Wootten: I have seen examples of that yes and it's most unfortunate.

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HSA: Ok. Its one of those things, I loved AAU, when I was growing up, it was getting bigger, a few tournaments we'd go to every year, but it's where I got the benefit of actually playing against better competition. In Utah it's different, we don't have the east coast ball players; Utah is different in that sense. Not that there's not good basketball, to me its good basketball but you don't get the wealth of talent you're going to find in southern California or the east coast, the mecca of basketball where you're at. But that's where I got to play against Jason Kidd, Travis Best, the Hurleys; we were at all for these camps and these days and in that sense I thought it was good. But it's like you mentioned, as it's grown bigger, in my opinion, it all depends on the coach. If they get a good coach who is there for the kids, teach them the game of basketball and help them develop the love of the game, great. But if they get the coach that's just there, that's a mom or dad trying to get their kid recruited, I can see it just leads to a lot of different problems.

Morgan Wootten: That's right, as in a wrap up you've almost got it, it all comes back to the coach really and the coach should never forget, I don't know if you're AAU coach or high school coach, college coach at any level but particularly at a younger level, the boys club coaches, middle league coaches CYO, whatever it might be, you have an enormous responsibility because you are influencing lives for the better or for worst and that responsibility should not be taken lightly.

HSA: You're right, you're completely right, and it's like you mentioned earlier in our conversation. I remember every coach I ever had, whether it was for a game, whether it was for two games, ten games, I remember ever coach and I have a certain experience or feeling about that coach.

Morgan Wootten: No question, that's true with every player Brian.

HSA: That's crazy, I've never even thought about that before, but you're exactly right. One of my last questions and then we'll wrap this up, is I want to get your opinion about how these kids are committing so early to college now. How you're seeing a lot of different kids that are committing their, say four year school as freshmen or even Ryan Boatright committed to USC as an eight grader a few years ago. What do you think about all this?

Morgan Wootten: I would be definitely opposed to that, I think the earliest a kid should ever think of committing would be maybe after his junior year was over.

HSA: Ok and how come?

Morgan Wootten: Because, number one, think of how much you've changed form the ninth grade, to the end of your junior year in high school. You changed tremendously, physically, mentally, emotionally, in every way and what you thought you wanted as a ninth grader, you might think something different as a tenth grader something different as an eleventh grader, maybe you're aiming too high, when you commit as a ninth grader, maybe you're aiming too low and remember you can commit all you want, but the commitment doesn't even become final until you sign a scholarship papers.

HSA: Right.

Morgan Wootten: I just doesn't make sense. Why try to start being a college player before you're

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done high school.

HSA: Right.

Morgan Wootten: You've got plenty of time, if you can play college basketball, you'll have plenty of time to make a good sound decision, but lets enjoy high school first, lets not rush through life, lets enjoy the moment.

HSA: Very good.

Morgan Wootten: There's an old saying, enjoy the moment, yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, that why they call today the present, enjoy the present. Most people spend their life, not just in basketball but in everything, they never enjoy the day they're living at that time, they're always looking for tomorrow, I'm going to do this tomorrow, I'm going to do that tomorrow and they never enjoy today, but today is the greatest day of your life and most people never enjoy it, because they're always looking ahead. So, for a person in the ninth grade to look ahead and say I want to go to this college, that doesn't make sense.

HSA: Well its so different now, I remember, you never heard about it when I was growing up, now its just so rampant that these kids are so consumed with it and these websites that promote recruiting and they're making money off these kids. It's crazy. I'm sure some of these kids just want to commit just to get the pressure over with.

Morgan Wootten: Well, it could be that or it could be because they want their name being thrown around for the next three years, saying I'll commit to Duke.

HSA: Yeah you're right.

Morgan Wootten: And there's a lot of prestige involved, hey I'm a former, I'm going to be a Duke player, etc and so on. They want you to just be the best high school player you can be and let things fall into place.

HSA: You're right, excellent. Well I think we'll call it good, coach. This has been honestly, one of the best forty-five minutes of my life, I appreciate it very, very much. Thank you so much, all our listeners will love this. I'm going to end the recording and I'll talk to you for another minute and we'll go from there

Morgan Wootten: Brian, I really enjoyed it.

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