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# The Bramlett Way

Kevin McCarthy

Club basketball, depending on your point of view, covers the spectrum from peerless to profane. However, what is indisputable is that it provides an opportunity for elders to effect the lives of youngsters in a positive manner. Someone who epitomizes just that approach is **Bob Bramlett**, the longtime coach of West Valley Basketball Club (WVBC).

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Opinionated yet humble, Bramlett typifies those who see their involvement with kids as an investment for the future. Here is yet one example: go to the WVBC web site and the home page features numerous photos of the players on the various teams, plus player updates, but nowhere in sight is a picture of any member of the coaching staff. That design is purposeful.

In addition, it is right in line with the organization's mission statement: "The West Valley Basketball Club is a non-profit organization dedicated to the development of student athletes. We specialize in the sport of basketball, using it as a metaphor for life. We teach individual skills for the personal development of each athlete and we provide them an opportunity to display their talents in front of college coaches so that they may have an opportunity to be evaluated and possibly offered a chance to continue their career as student athletes. Our goal is to make them better than what they were when they came. Our promise is to work hard at living up to this goal, by giving them our very best."

WVBC, as do many of the other similar youth basketball cooperatives operates on a mantra -- it's about the kids.

Asked in a recent interview why he is involved in club basketball, Bramlett offered, "Because I love kids and basketball. I have been very fortunate in my life and find the opportunity to give back through basketball most rewarding."

One of his rewards is that former players remain in contact with him throughout their lives. "I just heard from Lynn Washington the other day via email [Washington is playing in Japan]," Bramlett said. "Lynn was the Central Coast Section most valuable player at Andrew Hill High School who then played for San Jose City College and went on to be coached by Bob Knight at Indiana. I also just returned from attending Mike White's [UOP 2007 graduate and Monte Vista Christian High graduate] wedding up in Lake Tahoe. I try to go to at least one game of every player playing college ball who has played for us. I get regular emails from quite a few as well. But remember that most have moved on which is the way it should be. We are a station in their lives, not the destination."

Fans always wonder how a club team fills the roster. Bramlett goes about it this way for the West Valley squad: "We usually get referrals from the parents of former players, some inquiries from new parents and some recruiting, though not very much. Our preference is that they choose us because they believe we can help them as opposed to the opposite. One player told me the reason he played for us was because I barbeque so well, so who knows."

WVBC took shape back in 1996. Based on his experience, here's Bramlett's advice to anyone thinking about starting up a team. "The first thing they should ask themselves is why? If the answer has something to do with self-gratification or public adulation, money or power, then stay out. Kids deserve better than that. They should get us because they can trust us to do what we say and that our primary resolve is to be a part of their development as young people, not just basketball people. It's important to create your own promises that you will live by for the benefit of kids, not yourself, and to live up to those promises. The first and most important promise you make is that if you cannot keep from harming children, then stay away from them. The rest is what everyone else does. Buy a whistle, recruit players, get a gym, make travel arrangements, get certified by the NCAA and go play."

His counsel to a parent or player in determining a good fit regarding a club team is a multi-faceted, well-rounded one. "That's a tough question because you have misguided parents as well as misguided coaches," he said. "Some parents are convinced that their child is the second coming of LeBron himself and they see potential NBA star and not potential father/husband/friend. No matter what team they pick, the minute they think their child is being short-changed as far as scoring averages, minutes played, etc., then its off to the next dream merchant. I believe that they should determine the ability of the coaches to teach, not just throw the ball out, then get on the cell phone and wait for the two hours to expire while they yell out once in a while 'nice dunk dude'. Check out the coach's background and do real research. Some people will spend countless hours finding the correct place to house their pets when they go on vacation, but will drop their kids off and leave when turning them over to one of us."

Bramlett also has some tough words regarding the behavior of some club coaches. When asked about situations where coaches actively steer players towards or away from a certain school or schools, he replied, "Since when did they become 'his players' and not their parent's child? No one should ever have

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that kind of power, not college coaches, not high school coaches, or club team coaches. Of course it exists, but personally I would never condone it nor participate. If a parent thinks their child should be at another school, that is something for them to discuss as a family and work out on their own."

Here's what Bramlett says when his advice on choosing a school is requested. "As far as players go," he said, "I rely heavily on Al Grigsby who is a Cal graduate and our Boys Program Director. Al has a balanced view of what's important, being a former player and in light of his own recruitment and he offers good insight into what's expected. Also, the player's high school coaches, most of them, were recruited to play at colleges, and using them helps to bridge any gap that may exist. They are also a great source of reliability because of their true interest in helping their player/student. We are all in this to help the players."

But he also offers, "I caution the parents to do their own research and not rely solely on any one person, including me. I will help them all I can but they must make the decision, not us. We can be their advocates and that is all. We help them to understand certain things, see bullshit when it's coming, determine who is really interested [the difference between a form letter and a phone call from a college coach]. The same logic used to pick a college as a student is applied as a student-athlete. Major desired? Geography of school? Demographic composition? Size of school? Rural? Urban? Weather? Making an honest assessment of their ability to compete as both a student and athlete because if you stop playing, will you still like the school?"

When asked for his best story, Bramlett responded: "Every coach with this kind of experience has these tales. Farris Broussard is a classic example of why what we do is important to us. Farris was a 4.0 student at Independence High [San Jose] who wasn't generating much basketball attention. Then he played in a tournament in Las Vegas and attention towards him really perked up. He had sincere interest from Brown, Colgate, UC Davis and the Colorado School of Mines. He always had a liking for engineering so he chose Colorado School of Mines and ended up with dual degrees, one in electrical engineering and the other in computer science. The school had only six scholarships available in basketball and Farris got one of them, a full ride."

Broussard set school records for blocked shots and rebounding during his playing days there. Now back and working in San Jose, Broussard is also a coach with WVBC, making the circle complete.

One other important note is that former WVBC player Cliff Sammet has recently been diagnosed with osteosarcoma and is in the midst of treatment. Any notes of support for Cliff would be greatly appreciated and can be sent to [casammet@yahoo.com](mailto:casammet@yahoo.com) or [cliffysamm@gmail.com](mailto:cliffysamm@gmail.com).

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