

Off-Campus coaches: Working away from school has its benefits and drawbacks

Dec. 21, 2003

By Joe Wolfcale, Marin Independent Journal Assistant Sports Editor

Drake High track and cross country coach Bill Taylor bristles at the suggestion that a part-time or off-campus coach might not be as effective as a full-time teacher who coaches.

In Taylor's opinion, coaching is teaching. He says coaching someone how to run a mile requires the same instructing skills as teaching algebra.

"I like to think I put in as much time as anyone. In fact, I can put more time into it," said Taylor, who taught history for a number of years in Southern California before moving to Marin. "The obvious weakness is when someone is not grounded in education because I think the primary reason for high school is education.

"I see it as the ancient Greeks saw it. I don't separate academics from athletics. That can seem corny, but I see the mind and body as one, not as a separate. For me, Drake has provided that perfect conduit and the source for that connection for me."

Taylor's perspective on coaching is unique in the Marin County Athletic League. Besides coaching two sports for about the past 20 years, Taylor has spent nine months a year preparing Marin County students for a trip abroad. This week he returns from a trip to Iran.

Taylor founded the Arete West program, in which a handful of students take a year-long course in European culture and history, then tour the continent for more than a month. He has taken 13 student groups abroad. He once told the IJ, "It started as a European track tour, and it's become a European mind tour."

Taylor pays his bills by working in an investment business. Being an off-campus coach allows him the time to focus on his weekly seminar with students and his investment job, things he would not be able to enjoy as a full-time teacher.

"The fact that I have a credential is not a technical point. It's provided me an educational background," Taylor said. "I wouldn't coach just for the sport. This is my life. It's been such a huge chunk. No way has it been part-time for me. I'm a very lucky person to have worked out this balance."

Nevertheless, there still is something special for the students about having a full-time coach on campus all day. For example, Novato all-league running back Paul Knell takes an economics class taught by head football coach Travis Brackett.

The Novato varsity team does have a contingent of off-campus coaches, but the primary coaches- Brackett and defensive coordinator Mazi Moayed – work on campus.

“It definitely helps because (Brackett) understands what’s going on around campus all the time,” Knell said. “Now that the season is over, he’s been more like a buddy to me. It’s definitely not the same with off-campus coaches because of the communication, so that’s not such a strong connection. The more communication between the players and the coaches, the better it is.”

Another drawback to off-campus coaches is the possibility that school officials might have difficulty staying in constant communication with the coach. Cell phones do not solve all those complications.

But there are some advantages to having off-campus coaches. One is pretty basic: money. In this era of severe budget restrictions in education, off-campus coaches often are more likely to afford working for small coaching salaries. Many off-campus coaches are quite successful in the Marin business community. Renira Keating, Marin Catholic’s girls volleyball coach is a supervisor at Il Fornaio, a popular restaurant in Corte Madera. She generally works from 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. before going to volleyball practice or a game in the evening.

“Being off-campus, sometimes I can make time to attend a coaching clinic or do other things that an on-campus coach might not be able to go to,” Keating said. “I also think off-campus coaches can bring different life experiences into the lives of the kids. . . . I’ve been coaching about 20 years now and I’m really part of the local volleyball community. I might have more life experiences in volleyball to offer than a teacher who just happens to enjoy volleyball.”

Most off-campus coaches find full-time jobs that are the perfect balance – such as a morning job that allows them to coach in the afternoon or evening – or they work for employers who admire their commitment to coaching and are willing to provide them time to do it.

“One of the reasons I work in the restaurant industry is because my bosses understand my passion for volleyball,” Keating said. “That way, it shows the kids that you can be balanced in your professional life and still pursue your passion. You can work had off-campus and still do something you really enjoy.”

Some off-campus coaches are specialists who work professionally in the sport they coach on campus.

Geoff Martinez, a tennis pro at Rafael Racquet Club for the past seven years, is eager to share his expertise. He is the coach at Marin Academy, a private school in San Rafael. His work schedule allows him the flexibility to coach at MA, less than a mile from his workplace, and the athletes benefit from his tennis background. Similarly, former

professional soccer player Josh Kalkstein brings a world of experience to his role as MA's soccer coach.

“Ultimately, just wanting to coach, it really comes out of a labor of love,” Marin Academy athletic director Heather Rogers said.

San Marin athletic director Sue Taggard agreed.

“Why do these people do what they do?” Taggard asked. “They get paid nothing. It's actually paid volunteer work. They do it for the love of the game, the kids and hopefully they're making a difference.”