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# My Favorite Player

- *John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Membership Development and Disabled Programs*

After thirty plus years of coaching in this great sport, I think it is time to tell you who my favorite player is. Every coach has one you see, and I am no different.

The player I am talking about I have never measured in height, but I know this player has the biggest heart of the team, and always plays up to a special stature.

She is the one who cares about her teammates, on and off the court. The one who came up with the idea of enlarging her sick teammate's face to life size, putting it on a stick and making sure it is in every picture taken, team or otherwise, when we went on an away trip.

He is the one who understands the words, Citius, Altius, Fortius, and who I saw with my own eyes, or knew from the changes, was every day was doing something to make himself better as a player, and a person.

She is the one who goes to the farthest corner of the gym to get that one errant volleyball hiding from others in plain view, always running to retrieve it, and always doing so without being asked.

He is the one who is there 5 minutes before practice is to start, and the last one to leave the gym.

She is the one who is a balance of humor and fun, coupled with intensity and full effort.

He is the one who is nice. He understands the proverb of winning and losing are temporary, while friendships last forever.

She is the one who could not get the ball over the net for weeks when first learning to serve, who gave the roundhouse serve a go, and in the end, served 5 straight points including two aces for the championships.

He is the one who broke a team rule, and accepted the punishment without a word of complaint, and without blaming others, and who never broke that team rule again.

She is the one who when she got injured by an opponent under the net, ended up making good friends with that player. She still came to practice and helped while healing, learning the coaching side of things, and helping out the team.

He is the one who shanked the serve reception near the end of the game, but who did not turn to look at me for answers, instead refocusing and passing the last tough serves perfectly.

She is the one who brings up the team spirit, in voice, attitude, humor and support. Who goes for every ball, and gives full effort in every drill and game.

He is the one who owns the record “wall ball” mark, for the highest on the wall spiking error in the team’s history, some 35 bricks high, and we still smile about it.

She is the one who uses words better than I can, sharing with me great inspirational quotes, giving his teammates empowering nicknames like “Terminator” and “Crush;” contributing a great “cue word” for teaching a skill to her teammates.

He is the one who sits out without tantrum or torment, being a team player on and off the bench, letting the coach play others as determined by the coach’s plans and totally supporting and encouraging those starting, if it was his turn to sit.

She is the one who asks me....“Coach, how can I get better at \_\_\_\_\_?,” and who doesn’t ask what he is doing wrong, but asks, “Coach, what do I need to do right this next time?”

When asked what it takes to win an NFL Super Bowl, over 90% of the General Managers said one word – “talent.” Not every coach gets talent in the door every season, but I hope you each get a chance to have a favorite player every year. These players have taught me a lot about what matters in the game, beyond winning, and what matters in the heart of an athlete. Remember, it is not an “athleto” or an “athletea” – as sport does not know gender when a real athlete steps on the field of play, no matter if the surface, is snow, grass, concrete, wood or even sand. Help them come to just play and enjoy.