

Tom Bragg - Hall of Famer!

About 3 decades ago, Hyde was playing Gould Academy, a traditional rival that was worth a lot of Heel Points.

Tom Bragg's team had jumped out to a quick lead, but he was not happy with either their attitude or execution.

He voiced his displeasure from the bench... No change.

He called a time-out... No change.

Apparently, the players had decided, *Hey, we're winning by 6 points, so maybe we just keep free-lancing...* Bad decision!

So, Tom called a second timeout, waited for the team to huddle up, and then calmly – but firmly – announced to his starters: “OK, Take a seat at the end of the bench. You're done for the day. And know that the amount of playing time you will get next game will be directly related to how enthusiastically you support your teammates in this game.” He then proceeded to coach the second unit thru the rest of the game.

Although it was close, we lost that game. As Lydell Capers '97, an all-time Hyde great who captained that team, later said, “Coach Bragg never had to do that again. We got the point. And two months later, we made it to the Gold Ball game.”

That's Tom: Attitude is everything. (And he means it!)

I was fortunate to teach and coach Tom during his three years as a Hyde student. He was respected by peers and teachers whether in the classroom, on the playing field, or around campus as an authentic school leader. While this auspicious event may celebrate the best in basketball, basketball might not even have been his best sport. Fun Fact: Tom is the only Hyde alumnus to ever play Division 1 in two sports as he went on to star in both hoops and football for the Leathernecks of Western Illinois University.

Focusing on Tom as a basketball coach, three signature superlatives stand out in my mind that truly set him apart:

1. Once the kids buy in to his defensive genius, they revel in the offensive transitions that result.
2. Anyone can sit the bench at any time. Anyone can end up on the court with meaningful minutes. Attitude is everything.
3. I cannot recall a coach in any sport with a greater capacity to have his players peak come tournament time. Regardless of win/loss records or talent levels, he never strays from a mindset that says, “However good this group could possibly become, we’re going to be that good by the second half of February.” That is a hallmark of his teams.

There are certainly other qualities, but those three arguably guided him to this event today, both as a player and a coach.

Finally, when word spread thru the Hyde grapevine that Tom was receiving this recognition, social media was abuzz with excitement. I close with one comment from a late 90s alum who today is headmaster of a school in Wisconsin:

Very lucky to have been coached and taught by TB. Tom treats every athlete and human exactly the same. When you receive praise from Tom, it means more coming from him than it does from almost anyone else. His expectations are the ultimate, it's not about authority or control ... it's about the highest of expectations. Tom stands way up high on my Mt. Rushmore of coaches. I would do anything for Tom, because I have received so much from him. And I am one of hundreds who feel this way.

Congratulations, Tom, on your induction to the Maine Basketball Hall of Fame!