



The Right Time To Leave: Retiring From Coaching



By Jim Ledbetter

In every coach's career, there will be a time to pass the duties on to someone else. Knowing when the right time comes is the key. You never want to leave too soon or stay too long.

I resigned from coaching wrestling in the spring of 2007. I had been coaching for nearly 30 years – some of those years coaching three sports. Obviously, I would not have stayed so many years if I did not enjoy it. It certainly wasn't because I thought I would get rich! My decision to retire stems from the demand of the sport I was coaching as well as my own biological clock. In my particular school, all head coaches put in roughly 11 months with their sport. Five to six of those 11 months are very intense and time-consuming. The way athletes have evolved, it simply must be done to stay competitive with schools that are putting in the extra time.

I personally have had very rewarding years as a coach. I feel that I have touched student-athletes' lives in general – not just coaching (and I know many of you have as well). Below I have listed the reasons that I chose to resign from coaching. Perhaps these reasons will be familiar to you. They are:

- A. Demand of time
- B. Physical body slowing down
- C. Mental stress
- D. Other things I would like to pursue

Demand of Time

I had promised myself that when time demands became too arduous, I would consider resigning. In my heart, I knew I wasn't willing to keep the torrid pace that the program needed and the athletes deserved. I put in as much time coaching as I did teaching (roughly 75–85 hours a week). Being involved in wrestling for 40 years made this a very difficult decision. Nevertheless, I feel that I made the right decision.

Physical Body Slowing Down

At age 55, I feel that I am in great shape. However, the aging process has not let me escape the aches and pains of coaching wrestling. I physically get involved with my team workouts – it is the only way I do it. Some days were worse than others getting out of bed. Plus I could not get any more sympathy from my wife when I came home and complained! Bottom line – the way I coach is simply too brutal for my body at my age.

Mental Stress

I have never taken losing too well. But the past few years seemed to take a heavy toll on me mentally. It got harder to not internalize too much or take things too personally. I used to not mind taking wrestling home with me, but lately I would beat myself up for what happened or not happened in a meet or practice. The majority of my athletes were hard workers and even tried to please me. I did not like my silence at home because I was a "volcano" internally – it wasn't fair to my wife! Realizing that stress over time can affect other physiological functions, it became a huge factor in my decision.

Other Things I'd Like To Do

While I still feel pretty good for my age, there are things I would like to do before I become too old. I would like to return to officiating wrestling. It keeps me around the sport that I have been involved with for so long. My wife and I love to travel. Coaching has not permitted us to do that over the years. We have grandchildren in three states with whom we would like to spend more time.

If you are at a crossroad in your coaching career, I urge you to be realistic with yourself and the sport that you coach.

Stay in coaching if:

- A. You are effective and competitive
- B. You enjoy what you are doing
- C. You care about your athletes' future
- D. You stress morals and values
- E. You are physically fit to do a good job
- F. Being a positive role model is important to you
- G. Wife and family are still a priority



You should retire from coaching if:

- A. Your heart really isn't in it
- B. You are not enjoying it
- C. You are too bitter
- D. You are not willing to put in the time required
- E. Making money is your priority
- F. Wife and family are slighted
- G. You are really not a good role model
- H. Health issues are a factor in you doing a good job
- I. You show favoritism to top players

As you read through these two lists you may find where you really stand in coaching. Everyone who leaves coaching is not because of something negative. On the flip side, some individuals stay in coaching because of money and a better retirement. If so, the least you could do is give our young people the time and instruction they need. **CQ**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jim Ledbetter recently retired as health and physical education teacher and head wrestling coach at Warren Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. He was a teacher and coach for 29 years and coached three individual state champions in wrestling. He had at least one wrestler reach the state finals competition in every season but one. Ledbetter is a former member of the NFHS Coaches' Quarterly Publications Committee.



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