



Cannon Blast

Classics

HOFFMAN'S BIBLE BASKETBALL

By Bart Cannon

In a recent feature article, Star-Telegram staff writer Wendell Barnhouse extolled basketball coach Bob Hoffman for lifting UT-Pan American from the cellar in a mere three seasons. While Barnhouse accurately portrayed Hoffman's accomplishments (the Broncs boast the best record of all Texas Division I men's teams), he neglected to say how Hoffman did it. The answer is simple. Hoffman teaches Bible Basketball.

Hoffman inherited a program brought to its knees by lawsuits, restraining orders, three stints on NCAA probation, and loss of conference affiliation. Prior to Hoffman's arrival in Edinburg, the Broncs chalked up four consecutive losing seasons and set a national record for consecutive games lost on the road.

So why would a "proven program builder" like Hoffman leave a secure position at Oklahoma Baptist University to take the post one former coach called "the worst job in Division I basketball"? "I've always liked a challenge," Hoffman quipped. "My wife Kelli and I sense this as our family mission as Christians to be ambassadors to the kids entrusted to us. In the beginning, we had a lot of questions, but we feel that God opened the door for us to come."

In his first year, the Broncs' new coach restored stability to the troubled program, broke the road jinx and coached the Broncs to more victories than the three previous campaigns combined.

According to Hoffman, his accomplishments can be attributed to the involvement of "a higher power" and building on the rock of biblical truth. The team's unity of purpose statement is derived from Philippians 2:2-4: "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."

In Hoffman's view, team unity hinges on building up others. The Broncs finish every practice by forming a circle, holding hands and praying about "life issues." "When you can fight your guts out in practice, then hold hands and pray, I don't think there's a stronger bond that can be developed," he commented.

Hoffman believes his greatest challenge is maintaining consistency. That's why he assembled a staff with common values and a willingness to hold each other accountable to biblical standards. "Kids want to play for people they trust. It's not that we don't make mistakes, but how you deal with them can build strong relationships," he contends. "We tell recruits up front that we're gonna deal in truth. Only five can start. If I tell everybody they'll start, I'm lying to somebody."

"Basketball is a vehicle for being successful," Hoffman observed. Therefore, identifying the players who want to be successful is the key to recruiting. Hoffman's staff strives to impart principles on the basketball court that can affect other aspects of life. "I enjoy having the opportunity to see

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young men grow up and walk out with a degree," he said. OBU players compiled an 87% graduation rate during Hoffman's nine years as head coach.

Hoffman's staff also sets high standards for behavior, both on and off the court. "Our players need to communicate life instead of death. That's why we don't allow them to use curse words," he asserted. In addition, Broncs coaches and players are expected to give back to the community through elementary reading programs, basketball camps, and various other activities. "We need to set a good example," Hoffman declared. "Basketball is not the only game in town. A lot of people know what our players are doing [on the court], and community involvement opens their eyes and helps them understand what people think of them," he said.

Quoting Colossians 3:23, Hoffman commented, "We're working for the Lord. As coaches, we talk about winning too much. We need to be builders. I believe we're not put in this world to make a living. We're put in this world to make a difference."

Considering the success Hoffman's Bible Basketball brought to the Broncs basketball program, I wonder if he could teach those of us who can't play roundball very well how to play Bible Business, Bible Government, Bible Neighborhood and Bible Family.

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