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I Saw What You Did and I Know Who You Are

by Ken Embley, CPPA

Last summer I witnessed a coach make a fool of himself and destroy any semblance of teamwork. Maybe worst of all, the coach, confident in his actions, thinks, "I am tough on these kids for their own good." Coach, I have some news for you—you screwed up big time! Sometimes I just scratch my head and wonder when a person, as they say—"just does not get it."

I umpire baseball, and last summer I was behind the plate doing a game at Ken Price Park in Murray. Here is the situation—one out, bases loaded, and the batter hits a line drive toward the left fielder, who is charging the ball and trying his best to field the now bounding ball. He made a great effort to come up with the ball but the ball skipped over his glove into deep left field—a disaster for the left fielder—and the team at bat scored two runs on the play. What happens next is the part where I just scratched my head and wondered. The coach calls time and sends another player out to replace the left fielder. The humiliated player runs off the field while the coach is screaming something about "pulling your head out." With that, the player throws his glove to the ground and kicks it into a now empty dugout. I watch as he sits alone on the bench and buries his head in his hands. I later learned that this 15-year-old player was sobbing.



Returning to my position behind the plate and passing the catcher I said, "That can't be good." His reply was, "Our coach is an ass!" The team at bat went on to score five more runs and easily defeated a lackluster group that just wanted to go home. The coach—well, he continued to rag on the team about their poor quality of play and their commitment to the game. He also had a few "kind" words for me, but that is another story for another day.

"I Saw What You Did and I Know Who You Are" is the cumbersome title of this article and the title of a book written by Janis Allen. I like this title because I believe it speaks volumes to managers and leaders, no matter whether they are a coach at a baseball game, a leader in the community or a manager on the job.

"I saw what you did and I know who you are." The baseball coach saw a player miss the ball, saw the opponent score two runs, saw his team lose the lead in the game, and saw the other team celebrate their success at what he believed to be at his expense. The baseball coach knew who was the cause of the problem, and in his mind, took steps to remedy future errors. "I saw what you did (make an error) and I know who you are (the left fielder)!"

My thoughts for the coach—you did not see the things that can make your player a better player and make your team a better team and make you a better coach. You did not see an opportunity to rally your team to address the challenge.

Imagine if what the coach saw was a player making a valiant effort to field the ball and make the play. Imagine if what the coach saw was an opportunity to teach his player how to square himself as he charges a bounding ball. Imagine if what the coach saw were his players rotating into position to make the play. Imagine if what the coach saw was a team excited to compete and be supportive of one another.

Just imagine the difference. The player in left field knows of his error but he also knows that his coach and teammates support him and want to compete with him. The player knows the coach will offer constructive advice as to how to approach a bounding ball. The team knows that they rotated correctly. The team knows they can take a risk and try as hard as they can to compete. The team knows the coach will support each player and, in turn, each player knows to support others when the going gets tough. As for the catcher behind the plate, when I said, "That can't be good," imagine his reply being something like this: "That's okay, we are going to win this game!" Just imagine the difference.

"I saw what you did and I know who you are." Do managers and leaders see team member challenges as an opportunity to support, develop and recognize skills, abilities and efforts? I believe most will say—yes! However, I am not so sure.

I know when people are under pressure they sometimes act out like the baseball coach—who believed his actions were good for the team but failed to recognize the folly. I hope for managers and leaders who develop the skills and abilities of team members, in part by seeing their actions in a constructive light ("I saw what you did"). I hope for managers and leaders who recognize the efforts of team members ("I know who you are").

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