



The Role of the Substitute

A player who shows envy or jealousy toward the starting five or those in the limelight with long press clippings is often judged to have a poor attitude. In truth, however, envy and jealousy are feelings, and feelings are neither good nor bad. It is how a player handles her feelings that determines whether she is team-oriented.

Not wanting to sit on the bench is perfectly acceptable. If a player has given everything she's got, and it's not good enough to be a starter, she has two choices: She can quit the team and take on another challenging project, or she can accept the role of being a substitute, knowing that she will have opportunities to greatly contribute to her team's success. She may never make the headlines, but she can find satisfaction in knowing that her coach and teammates appreciate the difficulty of the role she has chosen to master.

Even the eighth player on the team usually gets a lot of playing time, so it is important that nonstarters are ready both physically and mentally to enter a game knowing that they will not hinder – and may on occasion even enhance – the team's performance. The greatest compliment a coach can receive about substitutes is, "Your bench is so strong that I couldn't tell any difference when you substituted."

A substitute must learn to take satisfaction in performing steadily and reliably each time she steps on the floor. That should be her goal, rather than dreaming about an unbelievable, Walter Mitty-type performance. The opportunity to be such a hero may never appear leaving her disappointed. More emphasis should be on setting achievable goals. A high school substitute receiving substantial playing time should aim to be the best sixth player in the state.

What goals should be 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th players set? The greatest contribution that these players can make is giving 100% effort in practice. A team can only be as good as the players they practice against. If the starters were to practice daily against a group that had no pride and was not giving it their best shot, they'd have a tough time improving. But if they have to scratch and fight every day to beat the subs, they'll improve easily.

Our 1979 state championship team had a group of substitutes that epitomized how the role of the substitute should be approached. After scrimmages I make the losers run; I try to even the odds by giving the second team a 6- or 8-point advantage at the beginning of each quarter. Well, these substitutes not only never grumbled about playing against the strongest players – they were insulted toward the end of the season if I gave them more than a 4-point advantage!

They practiced so well that they platooned nearly every game. The second five was guaranteed 6 minutes of playing time each second quarter. In the regional finals they replaced a faltering starting five and gave us a 6-point lead at the half. We won by 1-point in double-overtime. How important a role the subs played that day!

An achievable goal for the substitute seeing little playing time would be to give her all in practice every day to improve the starting five. To do this she must prepare herself mentally and physically just as the starters do and understand that she has an integral part in improving the team by doing her part in practice.

Again, how a substitute handles any feelings of jealousy or disappointment determines her attitude and her team spirit. *A substitute should never:*

- ❖ *Start or listen to gossip that alienates the team against another team member.*
- ❖ *Sulk or act disinterested while on the bench*
- ❖ *Put a damper on everyone's spirits after a game because she didn't play, or*
- ❖ *Grumble about having to practice with the weaker players (the starting five need to stick together for timing and cohesiveness).*

The role of the substitute is difficult to master, but its rewards are worthy of the effort.

Please Read!

I was given this article by an AAU coach over 12 years ago. I could not find the author of the article anywhere on the internet. Hopefully the author (or someone who knows the author) will eventually see the article and will grant permission...