

## “Coach”

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**I’m sure when people look at me, their first thought isn’t “Well, there’s a footy coach for sure!”. To be fair, footy coaching isn’t something that I ever considered adding to my résumé, however, over the last 12 months I have had the pleasure (and the heartbreak) of coaching 6 differently aged teams across both rugby league and touch football.**

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My first team—the boys, laughed when I showed up. Then they laughed some more when they realised that I really was their coach, and it wasn’t a joke. When they realised that I was “here for reals” they put me through my paces, just as I thought I was going to do to them. Some had been on the volleyball team I was taxi driver for, so knew that I had minimal sporting skills—but they all wanted to find out just how little I knew.

However, I learnt from previous efforts, and had done some homework (including learning the rules—which is always handy for the coach to know!), brushed up on the scoring system and developed a vague idea of the game play of rugby sevens (7s).

But back to my first team—the Macarthur Adventist College Rugby 7s Primary school team. I envisioned a nice and easy start, a couple of gentle games and the team playing in harmony. Turns out, the reality of a team that had never played together, had only 1 hr coaching at school and a couple of kick about games in the street, was not going to be a ‘nice and easy start’. I appointed a captain, he ran some warm up drills, and we knelt and prayed together before the boys took to the field. It was apparent that we (coach and team) were very ‘fresh’—it was a tough day and we lost every game.

Despite the loss, the boys didn’t turn on one another. They prayed together before every game, encouraged each other and shook hands with the winning team in each and every game. They were frustrated, they were disappointed, they were tired—but they continued on. I felt blessed to be able to have seen such heart, and so proud of them for the way they conducted themselves. I was proud to be their teacher.

The next time for ‘the coach’ was a bit more pressured. Grade 7 and 8 boys – these boys were



Under 15's Touch Football Team

Back Row - Wanyei Solitua , Clayton Lui, Dontay Perez, Tuli Palelei, Bobby Tapaatoutai, Mr Namakadre, Miss Lee

Front Row - Alfred Lenati, Atatu Phillips, Vasatchi Kasier, John Tokailagi

# Reflections, Impressions & Experiences



CIS Under 14's  
Rugby 9s Team  
with parent Mr  
Curuenavalu

good. They played together often and even had some wins under their belt. I felt way out of my depth, but followed my last 'coaching' tactics—I appointed a captain, he ran the drills. Again, we knelt and prayed before the boys took to the field. This more experienced team still supported each other and shook hands with the other teams: all the way through to them making the finals! While I would like to think that I had something to do with it, I know that it was 'all them'.

As the team prepared for the final, the boys were the only team from our school left in the competition. This time when they knelt to pray before their game, it was not only their team-mates beside them, but all the players from our other teams too, providing a circle of support and encouragement that 'raised these boys up'. Sadly, they lost the final amid some controversy. Even though they struggled with the ruling, the boys still congratulated the other team and shook hands with the 'ref' at the end of the game.

Yet still my coaching adventures continued. This time I moved to touch football coaching for high school aged girls. Again, I did my homework, learnt the rules and then went along for the ride! Whilst we lost every game that we played the team improved immensely (I can't wait to see what they do next year) and the girls grew as individuals too. There were other teams on the day competing from school, and the 15-year-old team made the final. Again, all our teams came together to pray before their games, thanking God for the opportunity to travel and play, and asking for his protection on the field.

Last week my coaching career ended (for now) when I took six of our boys (who had been selected

from hundreds of young hopefuls) to training for their State Competition. We crowded into a borrowed 7-seater car and headed to training. After a long day of training and travelling, I treated the boys to dinner on the way home, and reflected on my time as 'coach'.

Not only was I blessed to have the privilege of being a primary school teacher coaching high school sport, I had been given the opportunity to get to know these amazing and inspiring young people in a personal way. Not only had I witnessed all our teams kneeling and praying before taking to the field (for each and every game) but here I was at dinner with six starving young men who, before eating, paused to say grace and thank God for the food, and for me.

As I sat watching the boys eating, I realised that I had witnessed something special while being a part of these sporting teams. I had seen amazingly open displays of honesty in faith, and the coming together of kids from many different backgrounds, united in prayer. I felt like I had been slapped in the face with the lesson I was just taught—and I had to ask myself, "Am I living my faith so openly? Am I witnessing to anyone I can? Am I including God in all that I do—not just when I need help?"

"What about my Christian friends who play cricket in a secular league—do they pray together before taking to the pitch?"

"What about those of us who eat out, do we pray together and thank God for the food and each other before we begin to eat?"

So I ask you, take some time today—pause. Ask yourself these questions too—perhaps even more. The answers might surprise you. **TEACH**

“When they knelt to pray before their [finals] game, it was not only their team-mates beside them, but all the players from our other teams ... a circle of support and encouragement”