

Congratulations to mentor, legend Roy Johnston. I was the senior captain of Coach Johnston's first varsity basketball team at Beaverton high school in the 74–75 season. I would like to give heartfelt congratulations to him for the state record of most career victories for a basketball coach in the state of Michigan. I also had the opportunity of playing for him as a sophomore on the JV team. Even though I've known over all these years that he was still coaching, I didn't really follow the teams or the records that much to know that he was slowly, consistently earning legend status. Recently a friend from Gladwin sent me the team photo that appeared in the February 8, 2017 Gladwin Record of the 1975 team (I was number 52). No article accompanied the picture. Doing the math I realized it had been 42 years and began a Google search to check his record as coach, only then realizing he had achieved the state record for winningest coach.

Most of your readers would not know who I am so I'll give a brief background. My parents were David (Bud) and Charlene Miller. My dad was a business partner of Ted Smith in the Smith-Miller real estate company, established around 1968. A short footnote, my dad was actually the captain of his Harrison basketball team during his senior year of 1950. I attended Grand Rapids Baptist College in 75/76, also playing basketball for them. When my dad lost his battle with cancer in July of '76, I decided to stay home with my mom that next year and began to work. Benny Robinson, a friend of my Dad's and owner of Homestead Tool and Machine offered me a job. I began in early 1977 and worked for him for two years. When I moved to South Carolina I started working for a company that had just moved south from Dearborn, Michigan, Springfield Tool and Die. I have worked for them for the last 39 years. I have continued to revisit the Beaverton area every year for the last 25 years each November, not to watch basketball but whitetails. I have also returned for each of my seven class reunions and numerous Michigan "heritage tours" with my wife and children.

As I look back on my years playing basketball for Coach Johnston I recall what a hard coach he was. It seems as though he used me for an example at practice to "get it right". I remember the wind sprints back-and-forth on the gym floor until we could barely breathe. We did boxing out drills over and over again to "get it right". Probably the most famous saying from coach that I remember on defense was "deny the ball". We were to never turn our backs to the ball, but always use our peripheral vision to see the ball and our man at all times. As a result, I learned defense. That was my strongest asset. I scored and rebounded some but it wasn't those statistics that kept me playing, it was the defense that he had drilled into me. "Deny the ball" and "box out" are the two things that I remember hearing from him the most during practice. During the game, the noise that I remember most was probably from the toe of his shoe kicking the bleachers. I wonder how often his shoes and the bleachers have needed to be replaced over the years.

It didn't matter if it was the big guy underneath or the hot hand out front, whoever was the biggest threat that's who he had me guard. The best example I could use that may be familiar to the local readers was playing Gladwin at Gladwin. Their hot shooter was John Kern (still a

local resident). I remembered him from going to school together at Beaverton until the second grade, before his family moved to Gladwin. Oddly enough after high school he married my cousin, Linda Ladner. But this particular night I was tasked with guarding John. He was averaging over 20 points a game and I was told to shut him down. The year before when we played Gladwin at home and beat them in overtime John scored 25 points. Coach did not want this to happen again. Despite my best efforts, it did. John scored 26 points that night. He was hot and would not be shut down. Even though I was not able to stop his hot hand, as a team we came out on top and we were able to keep Butch, the traveling dog, in our showcase for another year.

I understand that in the near future, Coach Johnston may have the opportunity to coach a third generation player, Steve Mishler being the granddad. Steve and I went to the same church in our early years and I frequently found myself visiting their farm on Glidden road. Also as a senior, I was a gym assistant for Coach Van Wieren, and as a freshman Steve was in that gym class. It's hard to believe that he's old enough now to have a grandson who could be playing varsity ball soon. From a coach's perspective that would be quite a privilege, accomplished by very few. I hope Coach sees that time come to fruition.

There are many good memories from high school, and playing basketball for Coach Johnston ranks right up there at the top. I have indeed been privileged to have played for him and to have been taught and mentored by him. We finished his first season as varsity coach in Beaverton with a 16-8 record. We won the district championship for the first time in 20 years and were eliminated in the regionals by Benzie Central. That season was the beginning of a winning tradition for Beaverton. The life lessons that I have learned by "hanging in" and working hard for a tough coach have been invaluable. I realize that by working through the tough practices and being pushed to the physical and mental limits were good for me. That's the reality of life. You can't quit every time the pressure is applied, but by hanging tough, it generally pays off. In the case of Coach Johnston, he will never know how his coaching has helped prepare many young men for life. I want to thank him for the personal influence he had on me and congratulate him on this coaching record that will likely stand forever. It is a privilege to have been able to contribute in a small way toward his legacy at Beaverton. Congratulations Coach!

Written by Rick MILLER