

Pricelless Points Shared By Vermont's Bill Currier

By BRIAN CAIN
Special To Collegiate Baseball

BURLINGTON, Vt. — Bill Currier became the head baseball coach at The University of Vermont in 1986 when he was just 26 years old.

He was one of the youngest coaches in the history of NCAA Division I baseball at the time. Twenty years later, Currier is still at the helm of the Catamounts.

He shared with *Collegiate Baseball* what he feels are the essentials of running a great baseball program and what advice he would give to young coaches.

Leadership Starts At Top

A ship will sail in the direction that the captain determines is the correct course. A team will go in the direction that its head coach displays is the correct path.

"Leadership starts at the top, with the head coach," Currier said. "The way you dress, the way you treat other people, your enthusiasm. Everything that you want from your players you have to be willing to give or they will not respect your leadership at the top."

"If I want to see how I look to my players, I need to spend some time in their locker room because I am a firm believer that the players will take on the traits that the head coach shows most often.

"If you are positive, your team will be positive. If you are up when you win, and down when you lose, regardless of how you worked the process, your team will follow suit. Their actions will directly reflect your example."



BRIAN CAIN

"Many of these young men are away from home for the first time and we have a duty as their coach to mentor and show them how to act responsibly and be a contributing member to society.

"As the coach, it is our duty to teach that player about more than just the game of baseball. We need to be teaching them about the game of life as well."

Aware of Their Influence

In today's game where the head coach can be pulled in a thousand different directions, it is often the assistant coaches that spend more

time with the players both on, and more importantly, off the field.

"Your assistant coaches must understand that they are very important representatives of the program and can often have a bigger influence on the development of the student-athlete than the head coach, and often anyone else at the university," Currier said. "Assistant coaches must also be aware of their body language, their tone and how they act both on and off the field because they are usually much closer in age to the players and have a more personal relationship with them."

"The assistant coach is a very important role, a role that you need to mentor and spend a lot of time advising if you are the head coach.

"Your assistants are out recruiting, they are very visible around campus, within the athletic department, and at camps. You must spend time teaching them what your program and personal philosophies are if you are going to be successful."

Good Captains Crucial

Often when captains are picked, it can become a popularity contest and the best leaders on your team don't always get appointed (to captain). Currier has had a lot of captains, and says the differences between *good* and *great* captains are clear.

"Having great captains is a critical element of your team's

ABCA Convention Features The Unique

ORLANDO, Fla. — Brian Cain, one of the top peak performance coaches in the nation, will be at the upcoming ABCA Convention in Orlando, Fla.

He will have a booth in the exhibit hall at the Orlando World Center Marriott and is extending special price breaks for readers of *Collegiate Baseball* and ABCA members.

Some of the programs he has helped include The Woodlands High School in Texas, 2006 Easton Sports national champion, Texas Christian University and U.C. Irvine, just to name a few.

"I worked with Brian for two years while he was at Cal. St. Fullerton," said Ken Ravizza, author of *Heads-Up Baseball: Playing One Pitch At A Time*.



Brian Cain With His Unusual Mental Props

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leadership and is necessary if you are going to achieve the amount of success that your program is capable of," Currier said. "In my 20+ years of coaching, I can probably count on one hand the number of great captains I have had."

"A great captain in my mind is the player who is going to put the success of the team over the importance of their friendship with their best friend or any individual on the team. I think too often captains try to be liked rather than try to do what is in the best interest of the long-term development of the program. There is nothing easy about being a great captain and leading your peers ... especially during difficult times."

"Our greatest captains have been an extension of the coaching staff and had a great understanding of what direction the coaching staff wanted the program to go in, and how they could help assist us in taking the team in that direction."

On many teams, the captain is also the star player or the player that has been on the team the longest. Currier finds that often his best captains are the kids that are the players that may not play the most, but are the most willing to put the team ahead of themselves.

"Our best captains have been 9th pitchers or the 4th catcher," Currier said. "They are the guys that show up everyday and do whatever they can to help the team. They are not as concerned with their individual success as they are with team success."

"They are the guys that are genuinely interested in helping other players get better and are the ones who the freshmen gravitate towards for answers on how to succeed in college."

"They are generally the hardest working guys on the team and are the guys at the top of the scale academically. They are the guys that may not be the most popular, but are the most well-respected because of their attitude, work ethic and desire to see others and the team succeed."

Mentoring Program

One way that Currier has tried to develop a team culture of success

and a culture of doing things the right way, has been through the establishment of a mentoring program.

"When our recruits come on campus is when the mentoring process starts," Currier said. "We try to pair the recruit up with a sophomore on campus who will be here if they decide that UVM is the school for them. That way, we are establishing a positive contact for that incoming freshman before they get on campus. That mentorship extends into the weight room, study halls and into practice in having that upperclassman show the underclassman what our standards of excellence are and what the right way to do things is."

"This has been great for us in getting freshmen to act like sophomores and to play like sophomores because they are more accustomed to the school and to our program because they have had someone there showing them the ropes and have not had to figure it all out on their own."

"I think this has done a lot for our program in establishing great relationships between the players, great team chemistry, and has helped us off the field to succeed in the classroom and to avoid a lot of the negative things that can happen on college teams, such as hazing or class distinction issues."

Team Retreats

Currier has also taken his teams on team retreats that he feels have done a lot for bringing his teams closer together.

"We have always participated in the Keith Cooper Memorial Run, a team run in memory of a former player, and do some community service projects, such as helping with a local Ronald McDonald House auction," Currier said.

"We have in the past 6 years taken the team on an overnight camp out where the players will stay in lean-tos and cook dinner over a big bonfire."

"We have each class get up and do skits that range from re-enacting IV shows, to poking fun at each others mannerisms. It is one of the most fun nights of the year and really pulls us closer together. It also helps all understand the different

personalities on the team."

"We have also participated in an annual wiffleball game at a local wiffleball stadium that is a miniature replica of Fenway Park. Our kids love playing there and it is a lot of fun. Since we have started to do more of these team retreats, I have seen off the field team chemistry and class ranks come together sooner."

When To Stop Coaching

Currier shared what advice he would give to young coaches or people looking to improve their coaching abilities.

"I think the biggest thing is being a lifelong learner," Currier said. "Once you stop learning, it is time to stop coaching. Maybe it is a new way to teach a fundamental skill, or maybe it is a different way to teach a skill from a more visual perspective and from less of an auditory approach."

"Every time I watch a game on TV or I am at a high school game recruiting, I am always looking for new things, things that I think I can take back and use in my program. Maybe it is a new way to teach our players how to play one pitch at a time and live in the present moment, forget about the past and the future and to play this pitch."

"Attending the ABCA and your local state organizations clinic is always a great way to learn and give back to the game. Subscribing to publications like *Collegiate Baseball* also helps you stay up on what is current in the game."

Understanding the influence that captains, a mentoring program, and team building activities can have on your program is essential for success. Never underestimate how much of an impact you as a coach and your program can have on the total development of your players as people.

For more information on Team Building Activities, The Mental Game of Baseball and how you can implement a Mental Training - One Pitch At A Time Program for your team and increase the quality of your practices, visit www.BrianCainBaseball.com, write Brian Cain at BrianCainBaseball@adelphia.com or call (802) 487-3046.