

COACH HOOVER NIECE

On an afternoon after work I was driving by the old Irvine High School and happen to notice the football field where I played 4 years of high school ball for the Irvine High Golden Eagles. I decided to drive in and watch the practice going on, by the newly developed program the county high had begun. For the first time with the consolidation of the Irvine High and Estill High were now one school.

I was standing on the sidelines watching practice progress, when the head coach Hoover Niece I found standing next to me barking out orders. Out of the clear blue sky I introduced myself to Hoover and I casually made the comment, Coach if you ever need a hand I would be glad to offer up what knowledge I had. He made some kind of acknowledgement to my comment never in my wildest dreams did I think he would take me up on it.

Well not long after my comment I found myself back at another practice, when he casually walked up to me again and said, so you want to help, what would you like to do he asked I said work with the line, because that is where I played, he said you are on. You have got to know Hoover, he is not just going to turn his boys over to someone he met only once. But I stepped up and began a 21 year casual commitment that turned into a coaching career, but more importantly one of my best friends for life.

As I progressed with my coaching abilities his visits to my end of the field became less frequent. As he gained confidence in me I became less dependent on his visits. Sometimes I felt a little like a man on an island, but every now and then I would catch him watching me

administering my conditioning drills and on occasions he would drift over and see what progress was being made. Hoover always seemed to have his finger on the pulse of the team even though he wasn't with each faction each and every day. I was always amazed at his ability his sixth sense about what was or what was not going on. Hoover was never very far from where his Defense was practicing, he always knew what was really important to a program, he placed most of his emphasis on defense. But don't doubt his ability on watching every call that the offense was being made, even though he pretty much allowed his Offensive Coordinator to call the game he wasn't very far from that call being made and would quickly intercede when he thought he needed to. But Hoover called his Defense no matter what. One time I thought I would write down what the situation was and what he called to try and find a pattern, much to my surprise there was not a pattern, rather such a thorough knowledge of his defense, having a pretty good idea of what the opposing team was going to do, he had multiple choices of what kind of defense he wanted to run this time. Hence he kept his cross the field coaches wondering what he would come up with next, guess what he kept his own Coach guessing what he would call next as well, bottom line it worked.

Hoover worked his boys hard, on the field. Off the field he loved each and every one of them as young men. He showed interest in what they were doing, he gave them counsel when they needed it, he opened up his home, when a troubled boy needed a place to go, and Sharon shared his generosity and treated these boys like their own children. Essentially they were his children. If a player got into trouble at school they came to Hoover for resolution, if a player got into a scrap off campus they came to Hoover to correct.

Grades was another hot topic, Hoover instituted a program whereby the players would bring in their Report Cards and show them

to Coach Niece, if they were in good standing fine, if they had a bad grade they got a lick from his paddle. This became a badge of honor, Hoover would give a lick and the individual would sign it, trust me it was not a love tap. The result was most positive, as the number of offenders began to take a significant dip, and so did the number of ineligible players. That paddle still resides at Hoovers home, a little worn and taped together but most of the signatures for the most part legible.

Statute of limitations has run out on this practice I hope. As a matter of fact some of our methods that were allowable then are certainly not allowed in today's culture, they might hand us more severe punishment than that of a lick with a paddle.

When you speak of someone who is a student of the game, lot of people use as a catch phrase, but in Hoover's case it actually fits him. For nobody that I ever knew studied and rolled over in his mind what the opposition was going to do, and what we were going to do to offset their plans, and he kept this all in his head. I believe if there are any doubters out there that Total Recall exists, Hoover puts those doubts to rest. He can almost recount, every game, year by year and the plays that either won the game or lost the game, amazes me. I am certain that there are several in this audience tonight that possess the same ability.

Seems as though every season we were faced with the same dilemma, few boys, no speed, no size, yet by the grace and the knowledge we always managed to put a respectable team on the field, who would get after you physically, many times Coaches would come up and state we were the most physical team that they had faced, that is how we measured our success, did we play hard and aggressive, predominately the answer was yes to all 4 quarters of the ball

game. Scores always took care of themselves. We were Coach Cal before it was a popular trend to reload each and every year.

We took pride in the program that we had, we always except for a few had a great group of young men to teach some lessons to athletically and personally to help them through some tough times in their upcoming lives.

I think back and reflect on why Hoover and I hit it off so well was our age was similar, our expectations were alike, our priorities for measurement were alike, our love for the game and especially the boys were our catalyst.

I shall never get over the pride at having one of my players come up to me, lots of times with more gray hair than me, more wrinkled in the face than me, and I don't always immediately recalling their names tell me Coach you made a difference in my life. Let me tell you it don't get any better than that. That in and of itself makes Coaching for the right reasons so meaningful to me. We made or tried to make a positive influence in some young impressionable boys, who needed some true adult leadership in a time in their lives when the winds of influence can blow them in any direction. Over the course of 29 years a coach touches a vast number of boys how you are perceived by these boys will last them a lifetime as it did me with my Football Coach William "Bud" Spicer who played at my high school attended UK under Bear Bryant and became the first freshman to ever start the Sugar Bowl. He helped me through one of the toughest times in my life 2 tours in Vietnam, and the Loss of my Son who I was blessed to have the opportunity to coach him and father him until we lost him tragically in 2012 to Pneumonia, that was a trying time in my family's life and remains a difficult loss today.

I recall at every one of our Sports Banquet's after the season, all of the coaching staff would usually get up and say something. Saying something was not the difficult part the difficult part was trying to say something to the seniors without crying because we were losing part of our football family, and each subsequent year was the same, good until time to say goodbye to the departing seniors. Now tonight the culmination of a career of , caring, fusing, sweating, clawing through their injuries and wondering who was going to fill the hole, Crying, Coaching, and now saying thanks to Coach Hoover Niece for his Loyalty to Estill County Program for so all those years, this achievement exemplifies your Career and the KHSAA says thank you Coach and so do I, thank you for the ride for it was a good one.

I would like to thank the Committee, for allowing Hoover Niece this most Treasured Honor, for a Coach, A man, A father, Leader, a Mentor, to be inducted into the KHSAA Hall of Fame I give you Coach Hoover Niece.

Hoover D. Niece

Bio

Hoover Darrell Niece was raised in Whitesburg, Kentucky where he excelled in Football and Basketball at Whitesburg High School. All State in Football and Basketball his Junior and Senior Years. Attended Eastern Kentucky University and played Football, after suffering a debilitating injury had to forgo football and focus on his studies. He graduated with a teaching degree in Health and PE, was subsequently hired at Estill County High School, to teach and coach. His first two years Coach Niece spent as an Assistant Coach, the rest is 27 years as head coach at Estill County High. Some of his statistics are as follows;

- 1) Coached at Estill County High School 1970-1997
- 2) Record 128-108-1
- 3) Twice Sub-District Champs
- 4) 1,000 + Players Coached
- 5) 4 Players 1st Team All State
- 6) 1 Player Kentucky Mr. Football Finalist
- 7) 1 Player Kentucky All Star Team
- 8) 1 Player High School All American
- 9) 2 Times Assistant coach on Kentucky All Star Team.

Hoover made his mark on these young men from the first day that they stepped foot on the field. Coaching his boys, we termed them “Hoover’s Boys” he cared way beyond coaching football as it was a means to an end. He genuinely cared for these young men and mentored them, encouraged them, promoted them, rewarded them, but by the same token he corrected them and disciplined them as necessary. Many times school administration had issues with a Football or Track team member they would ask Coach Niece to intervene. The majority of the boys understood their short comings and accepted criticism in good spirit knowing Hoover was always fair and equitable with them. Thus he made them grow up, man up and the mutual respect has lasted for ever. Even today team members from his first teams to his last approach Coach Niece for advice, he still has a strong hold on their respect and council.