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Collegiate Baseball
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NC Coach Wins State Titles

One of the pleasures of my life in baseball is traveling around the country meeting and learning from so many fantastic people. If you are open to new experiences, they come out of the blue – totally unexpected. Opportunity rarely comes with a label.

For years I have heard of a hitting clinic in Snow Hill, NC. I happened to be in the area so I stopped by. To begin with, Snow Hill is in the eastern part of North Carolina, where it rarely snows. Next, the clinic is run by Rabbit, Jabo, Peanut and a host of other nick-named instructors. Now, Rabbit is 68, Jabo is articulate and Peanut is anything but! This is going to be interesting.

There are well over 50 youngsters in this 16th annual weekend clinic led by Rabbit Fulghum. From across the field I hear “...next you’ll (the players) go to the video station”. Video? At a camp? In Snow Hill? I had to ask Rabbit when he started to incorporate video into such a large camp. “Sixteen years ago” he said. I knew then that this is a special coach.

I asked to interview him and he told me to come back and meet him at the field during the week. I did – on a cold day with 40 mph winds. He said to follow him over to his warm house. So we left the parking lot and stopped at the main entrance to the high school. His truck exits the school without turning, crosses the 2 lane road and directly enters the driveway to his home. “I hate the commute” he says.

Jim “Rabbit” Fulghum recently retired from coaching baseball for more than 40 years. In that time he won 6 state championships - 5 in baseball and 1 in basketball. The 5 state baseball championships titles are even more remarkable when you learn that they came in 4 separate decades!

My next question, your question, was undoubtedly the obvious – “How did you do that?” His answer:

- ✓ Do the simple things well; execute fundamentals and winning will take care of itself
- ✓ Increase your personal knowledge – *never stop learning*
- ✓ Change with the times
- ✓ Be patient and teach

These principles didn’t surprise me at all. Over the years I have had the pleasure of interviewing or spending quality time with some great amateur coaching legends. If they have anything in common it is these very same priorities. The terms teaching and personal change and development continue to pop up in the histories of the super coaches.

There are many components to Fulghum's life as a coach: on the field, players, off the field character issues, the facility, and the community.

On the field he is committed to doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way. He teaches correct fundamentals and then works them into situations. The key word here is 'teach' first. Don't just practice.

Off the field he embraces parent communication. He believes that being fair, honest, consistent and open with parents is the basis for gaining their trust and support. It is hard for him to believe there are still large numbers of coaches across the country that manage by fear and intimidation, and cut off communication with parents resulting in unresolved problems festering in the stands. Then they are totally shocked when they can't motivate a fundraising program and parent volunteer participation.

It is rare or maybe unheard of that a coach can build a 40 year career and continually avoid adversarial relationships with parents. Fulghum invested his time in building relationships with parents. The return on that investment was not only a continual level of respect and admiration from parents, but financial support as well.

Being there for the first time and not knowing exactly where I was, I was very impressed with the field where the camp was held. Talking with one of the college coaches teaching at the camp, I complimented him for allowing the high school to use his facility. "This is not my field, it belongs to the high school", he said.

Now, it's late in the fall and Greene Central High School baseball field is game ready at a college standard. Every blade of grass is trimmed around the fence, batting cages are groomed, and even the area under the stands is immaculate. How does this happen? "Pride" Fulghum said. "I'm fortunate to have a staff that simply takes pride in the field. And most of the work comes in their free time."

I said, "Your AD must appreciate that work". "I do!" Rabbit replied. You're the AD? How long have you had that job? "37 years" he said with a grin.

A few years ago Fulghum re-developed the field. The parents led the way, raising money and obtaining donations in kind from all segments of the community. (I've also seen this community teamwork in New Bern, NC, where the business leaders stood in line to help develop the baseball facility. And the majority of the donations did NOT come from parents of players.)

The day construction started a strange rumbling echoed through the Carolina pines. It was the National Guard. Somehow Fulghum gets the local unit to contribute all the ground clearing and preparation for the complex of fields. (I'm assured by a confidential source that Fulghum has no relationship with Dick Cheney or Halliburton Inc.)

In honor of his contribution and results, the school named the entire sports complex after Coach Fulghum.

My afternoon with Rabbit comes to a close. He must move on. No, it's not school, team or field business that calls him away. It's politics. Rabbit Fulghum is also a county supervisor in his 'spare' time.

The Governor of NC, a former teammate, was the keynote speaker at Fulghum's retirement celebration. In addition to paying tribute to his friend, the Governor may have had an ulterior motive in keeping a close eye on the Coach, now that Rabbit has a little more time on his hands. Run Rabbit Run!