

eighth grade

When I was in eighth grade each of the starting players took a turn as captain of our basketball team. It was a good decision on the part of our coach. Why not give each player the honor of representing the team at the coin flip along with the experience of feeling especially responsible for what went on that night? For the most part it worked OK. It backfired on the night I was captain. The job took on an importance of a great magnitude for me. I was going to make sure we won that night. Winning was never questioned as the ultimate goal on our team. Our coach, Mr. Powers, provided us with the standard rationale for playing team sports; to win and learn the skills of the game. I learned well and quickly became a competitive little bugger.

That night was a very close game. The lead seesawed back and forth. I played well helping keep our team in the game with drives down the middle from the guard position. We ended up losing by a point or two. We were playing in our opponents gym and I was captain and had failed the team. After the game frustration took over and I found myself over in the corner punching a wall. The wall was concrete; my hand quickly becoming bruised and scraped flesh. I had never done anything like this before. However, I was convinced, in a barely conscious way, that this behavior was acceptable to both the coach and the parents who had come along for the game. I was showing the kind of competitiveness and will to win that was what this game of basketball(and eighth grade) was all about. Of course the parents and Mr. Powers were not pleased at all and quickly put a stop to it. I had been taught both directly and indirectly that what mattered was the score. Whatever other reasons there might be for playing basketball games were buried and lost in the scoring shuffle. It took me 20 years to gain a perspective that could hold its own against the power of that teaching.

Sometimes I officiate basketball games at the University of California, San Francisco. As Director of the Intramural programs there, I am responsible for campus sports and schedule myself for games in order to stay in touch with the players and action on the floor. UCSF is a health sciences university dedicated to graduate work and research. It is an institution of world-wide reputation and attracts students and staff who are there because they have competed well in the classroom or the lab. Participants are also older than at an undergraduate campus. We have the usual

behavior problems on court. Ten years ago games were often organized mayhem.

One year after taking the job in 1986, I was knocked to the floor from behind by an irate player (after a call in overtime). Since then I can remember many many nights going home at midnight after a series of games, upset and angry at the abuse I had to take as an official. Some of these games were like a war. And these players were generally pretty cool and reasonable off the court. Something seemed desperately wrong. I became fascinated with the problem and have since realized it runs deep - very deep. I did not know how deep until I met John Leahy.(mention professor at Berkeley)