



GARY WOLFE: A Lawyer Serving His Community through Coaching

By Harold Stephens

The running back darts to the right, finds an opening and dashes for a 40-yard touchdown. As the group of 11- and 12-year-old football players jump for joy and slap each other's back, I know what you're thinking. His dad must be the coach, right? In this case, the coach is not the running back's dad, not the quarterback's dad, not even the middle linebacker's dad. In fact, the coach is not the father of any of the players. The coach doesn't even have a son on the team. Coach Gary Wolfe is a lawyer with the firm Wolfe, Jones, Boswell, Wolfe, Hancock & Daniel in Huntsville. He hasn't had a child playing on any of his football teams for the last six years. He coaches because of his love for the game, to teach athletic skills to young players and to serve his community.

As Gary describes his introduction to the world of coaching, he cheerfully notes that he has coached youth sports

for 20 years. He professes to know nothing about the game of soccer but recalled that his first year of coaching his team had six wins and no losses. With humility, Coach Wolfe explains that his next soccer team went 0 and 6 and he immediately concluded that it was the kids, not the coaching, after all.

From a quick glance around his office, it is apparent that Gary's true love is coaching youth football teams. His experience in Huntsville began at Fern Ball Park coaching his son, Riley, who played on a city recreational team. Despite Gary's refusal to take credit for his teams' successes, trophies around his office reflect city football championships in 1998, 1999, 2003 and 2004, including undefeated seasons in three of those years.

But why does Gary continue to coach now that his own children are grown? He states, "I love being with the kids. You

see kids literally grow up before your eyes.” Gary takes great satisfaction in helping young athletes realize that they can achieve something both on and off the field. Coach Wolfe explains, “Sports is an opportunity for kids to experience their own excellence.” Coach Wolfe believes in coaching through praise, not punishment. He notes that once you reward young players for their achievement, their self-confidence, on and off the field, begins to blossom. As Gary describes it, you have players literally go from watching airplanes streak across the sky during the practice to asking, “Coach, can I do that drill again?” In his decade-and-a-half experience in coaching, Gary has observed young players, even without football experience, grow into accomplished players with some going on to play high school football.

In 2005, Gary shifted his focus from city league football to the Pop Warner League. As he explained, this is an age- and weight-restricted program which includes a national playoff system. Having had an undefeated season in 2005, Coach Wolfe’s Huntsville Sting had another outstanding year in 2007. In fact, the 2007 team went undefeated (9-0) in league play. This qualified the team for the regional playoffs. With imbued confidence from Coach Wolfe and the other members of their coaching staff, the 2007 Huntsville Sting won their first two regional games at Milton Frank Stadium. This qualified the team to participate in the regional championship game in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Huntsville Sting faced last year’s national championship team who has been undefeated for the past three years. Although losing to the defending national champions 24-16, the 2007 Huntsville

Sting players had an incredible season. If you have any doubt, just ask Coach Wolfe and he will be happy to show you some of the video highlights! Gary Wolfe is a lawyer by profession but one who clearly has a calling for teaching and coaching young football players. He describes himself as a “firm believer in sports” who is convinced that success on the gridiron can remove the fear of failing. As a lawyer serving his community, Gary Wolfe is helping to build the character of young men both on and off the field.

Gary grew up in Huntsville and graduated from Huntsville High School in 1971. He served as in-house corporate counsel in Birmingham for eight years, practiced law in Denver, Colorado for ten years and returned to his home in Huntsville in 1996. Gary and his wife, Belinda, are the proud parents of three children: Riley, who is a sophomore at Troy University; Patrick, who lives in Huntsville and helps coach wrestling; and Bergan, who coaches softball at Catholic High School. His children’s love of coaching is quite natural.

The ball is snapped; the quarterback takes a couple of steps backward and then proceeds to charge straight up the middle of the field behind what Coach Wolfe describes as their “wedge play.” With a front line of blockers pushing the opposing team back, the quarterback fights his way into the end zone. It’s another touchdown for the Huntsville Sting! On the sideline, the coach has a big smile on his face—and it’s not even his son playing. “Sports is an opportunity for kids to experience their own excellence.” And, Coach Gary Wolfe is a shining example that Alabama lawyers render service to their communities. ▲▼▲

H. Harold Stephens received his undergraduate degree, summa cum laude, and his law degree from the University of Alabama. Before entering private practice, he served as an Assistant United States Attorney in Birmingham. Stephens is past chair of the Litigation Section of the Alabama State Bar. He is a member of the Alabama Academy of Attorney Mediators, a member of the Board of Bar Commissioners, a member of the Board of Directors of Farrah Law Society at the University of Alabama and president-elect of the Alabama Defense Lawyers Association. He practices with Bradley Arant Rose & White LLC in the Huntsville office.



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