



Coach Groce Transforms from Wildcat to Spartan

Signaling the beginning of every season in the CCJBC, the Campbell Junior Spartan Basketball program can now count on a celebration of Coach Jay Groce's birthday. While this significant birthday milestone coincides with his first foray into his huge area of responsibility, Coach Groce feels his time has come.

"I've paid my dues for the past four years," said the exuberant coach. "I can't wait to get started."

For those past four years, program director Greg Foster had taken Coach Groce under his wing to serve his apprenticeship and exposed him to all sides of what it takes to teach and develop talent in the Campbell Program in different scenarios. This was a big step for this young coach in a program in need of an infusion of youth.

"I played basketball in middle school with Coach (William) Fox at Wheeler (in 2001-2003). We had a LOT of talent on that team (led by current Los Angeles Laker camp invitee and former Minnesota Gopher Trevor Mbakwe). I would come into the gym and see guys do things that I could only imagine at that time. My dad worked with me a lot and our pickup games were really competitive. I learned that basketball can give you courage. When I was a little skinny kid over at Wheeler I learned quickly that playing with kids that could do a whole lot made me go to my bread and butter and that was shooting. I could shoot really well but I was in the baby stages of handling the basketball. Basketball can give you swagger and demeanor as well as confidence; a style reputation or confidence. You become more self aware of what you do and what you don't do well."



A look at Wheeler history indicates that not a huge percentage of the boys players that play in middle school ever don a varsity jersey. It turns out that Coach Groce was no exception and was fortunate enough to be able to transform from a Wildcat to a Spartan, where the grass for him is greener.

Because of his early success in basketball, Coach Gross knew that to be able to fulfill larger dreams he needed to dig in and learn the basics of coaching. Being at Campbell and working through the program has helped him take a major step up the ladder.

"Although I feel that basketball and soccer are the two hardest sports to play, another sport that I loved to play was baseball," said Coach Groce. "After middle school at Wheeler we moved and I played baseball at Campbell as a freshman on the varsity. I played almost every position and loved it. In my senior year I did alright but my team didn't do so well so I didn't have a lot of offers. I would have had to work a lot harder than I planned on. I studied Business Admin at Chattahoochee Tech for a year. I found myself not playing and got a job with the Cobb County school system and I am still here."

During his early successes the imprints were made not only from his middle school teammates but from watching some of the greats that influenced the game. “(Allen) Iverson and Tracy McGrady was a dominate player for a long time when I was in school. There were the Vince Carters, whom you hoped you could jump like one day.”



But there was one player in particular that caught the attention of Coach Groce even more.

“Gary Payton was one of my favorite players growing up,” said Coach Groce. “When I played my dad, my dad was a supreme trash talker. He was going to beat me whenever he wanted to and we both knew that but he had to beat me with his mouth and that frustrated the crap out of me. He was a master at doing it and he would only do it at the right time ... when the game got close. That’s when he would get into my head. I would choke every time.”



“Gary Payton was a master trash talker but he was also a guy that would back it up. I was watching a highlight video the other day and at the end, he picked Michael Jordan’s pocket and dunked it and on the way back, he stared him down. I love that he felt the need to let him know about it. In that instance Jordan was Goliath and he was the little guy but he didn’t care. I love that type of player. Gary Payton bought toughness and confidence but he also bought a mental aspect. He was usually one of the smartest players on the court as well.”

By coaching on the girl’s side this season coach Groce is well aware of the long term opportunities that exist for his students when their education is complete that didn’t exist as readily and as abundant as they are now.

“I watch WNBA at every chance that I get. I would like to see ticket sales increase. This has given little girls something to look forward to when they didn’t have much to look forward to in the past. All little boys have had the NBA for as long as we can remember.

So who is the best player?

“There are a number of right answers, but probably the best player in the WNBA right now is Maya Moore. Simone Augustus is going to challenge her for that. The best team right now is the Atlanta Dream or the Minnesota Lynx. Brittany Griner has size and ability so you can’t count Phoenix out.”

Just what were some of the things that Coach Gross learned from being an assistant?

“To begin with, you have to be liked. You want people to understand that you are showing your best side, be personable, have easy access and answering questions and not shying away from parents. Kids tend to respect what you can do and how you do it so it will be to my advantage to get out there with them, as opposed to standing on the sideline and saying it. I will be active.

“My goal is for all of the girls that play with me through 8th grade are ready to play varsity as a freshman. I realize that it is crazy and unseen but you are setting the bar high. If I miss and four do make the team, it was a very good turnout. My goal is development. I would like them to meet me and be able to play high school basketball and be able to do what the coach asks of them. “There is a mentoring side that also goes along with it. In watching coach Dunning, at the end of the day he is usually right. Most young ladies look up to him as a type of a father figure. On

the basketball court he takes on a dad role, where he is not going to baby you but at the same time he has your back and will give you the shirt off of his back if he needs to. At the same time you will work for everything that you get. I love mentoring also and I am getting into it with my job.

“I learned that you can use the game of basketball to help kids change their lives. I have seen basketball change a lot of kids’ perspectives. One of the scariest things as a child is not being able to and I am not that far removed. Basketball teaches you that you are not going to be that good right away. You are not supposed to be. The thing I like most about education is that it doesn’t have any parameters. Anyone from six months to sixty years old can learn something new.”

Very true.

But what about the inevitable things that will occur in this new opportunity, such as dealing with adversity?

“As a coach, I can only talk to a parent about their individual child. As for what happens with the team, it is not really up for discussion. If you want to know about playing time I cannot discuss that. I have spent my time as an assistant coach to get this opportunity to become a head coach so I will not start second guessing myself now. I will continue to do the same things as I have done before. For the games that we need to win, I will stick to what I know.

“Outside of soccer, I don’t think that there is another sport that is as demanding to pick up as basketball. There are a lot of skills that go into the mix of making a good basketball player. If you are not working to be better you probably are not that good. The good teams and players are continuously working.”