

A Walk-On Coach Leads the Way

BY MICHAEL JOSEPHSON

Richmond High School near Oakland, California, is in the midst of poverty and violence. Many of its students don't take education very seriously and hope is in short supply. But in 1999, the school had one thing going for it: its winning-est basketball team ever. They were 13-0 when Coach Ken Carter made national news by benching his entire squad, locking them out of the gym, and forfeiting the next two games to emphasize his demand that his players take their studies seriously.

But that's not all. In a city plagued by gangs, he makes players sign and live up to an agreement requiring them to stay off the streets and maintain a 2.3 grade point average—higher than the state's minimum 2.0 GPA for sports partici-

pation. What's more, Carter's students not only must attend classes, but must sit in the front row.

The great thing is it all works. According to a July 2001 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, all 15 academic slackers on the 1999 team are going to college. This story is all the more remarkable since Carter isn't a full-time coach or even a member of the Richmond faculty. He's a walk-on coach who runs a sports supply store and a barbershop for a living.

But when he's with his team, Coach Carter knows he is, first and foremost, a teacher. Explaining his stance for academics, he said, "On the streets and public basketball courts in Richmond and any other city in America, you see the broken dreams of former high school legends who got left behind by life. And I'm not going to let that happen to these boys."

Carter's definition of winning seems to be getting a college education for his athletes. With this definition, maybe winning is everything.

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