

Nelson Best Sees Athletics As Building Block Of Education

BY DOUG RUTTER

Physical fitness is the basis for all other education. Those simple words of John F. Kennedy are written on a poster board that hangs in Nelson Best's office. They are words Best puts to use every day as athletic director for Brunswick County Schools.

"My philosophy has always been educate the whole child. I'm a firm believer in that," says Best, who has spent 38 years in education—the last 24 in Brunswick County.

"While I think academics are vitally important, I don't think we're educating the child unless we're giving him the physical education too," adds the former principal at Leland and North Brunswick high schools.

Best's four decades in education include 15 years as a coach of boys and girls basketball, baseball, track and field, football and tennis at high schools such as Four Oaks, Yadkinville and J.H. Rose in Greenville.

A native of Grantham in Wayne County, Best has called Brunswick home since 1969. Before moving into administration, he was principal for three years at Leland High and was the boss at North Brunswick for seven.

Even as a principal, Best always had a special interest in sports and physical education. He initiated football at the old Leland High School and coached the boys' basketball team to 66 wins in three years.

Best says sports build character, teach good work habits and create leaders. "A lot of people underestimate the value of athletics. It's a good investment in our youth."

For Best, the numbers don't lie. Statistics show students who participate in athletics have better grades than students who don't and are less likely to drop out of school.

Also, most student-athletes make better grades while they are actively participating in sports than they do in the off-season.

At a national convention several years ago, Best learned something else about high school athletics. Most of the men who earned Purple Hearts in World War II also had earned varsity letters.

What do the statistics mean? Best says success in sports breeds success in other areas of life. "A person's got to achieve in something that he values if the self-esteem is going to be there. I don't know anything that does that like athletics."

Best has seen the benefits of sports from a teacher's point of view. He has taught history, science, physical education and health, and considers himself a strong advocate of teachers and coaches.

As county schools coordinator of athletics, health and physical education for the last 14 years, Best has greatly expanded the sports menu offered to area students.

At the high schools, soccer, wrestling, tennis and track and field have been added during his tenure. "Girls sports have seen tremendous growth in quality and quantity in the last 10 years."

The only sports offered at the middle schools when Best took over in 1979 were boys and girls basketball. Now the kids can choose from football, volleyball, soccer, softball and baseball, which was added this spring.



NELSON BEST is a firm believer that physical education should be a vital part of every child's experience at school.

Best isn't about to take all of the credit for the expansion. "I think a lot of the credit goes to the community for supporting it. They go to the games and support the board of education funding."

As an administrator in the Southport school offices, Best tries to look out for coaches and has been instrumental in increasing their pay. "I think the supervisor's main job is service, to serve the people you work with."

It wasn't until the early 1980s that the county school board started funding coaching salaries. Before then, Best said the only money they received came from ticket sales and the concession stand.

Best isn't the type of administrator who sits behind a desk all day. You can always find him out in the trenches, so to speak, attending high school and middle school athletic events.

"I feel like it's part of my job to be there supporting

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—Nelson Best

the coaches and the teams. I make a special effort to be at a lot of the games," he said. "I enjoy seeing the kids compete and being successful."

Although Best and his wife, Helen, live in Leland, he says he isn't biased when it comes to schools the north end of the county. There's a special place in his heart for North Brunswick, but Best roots for everyone equally.

"I really love teen-agers," he smiles. "I love to be in the schools and spend as much time with them as possible."

Hanging around energetic teens has obviously been good for Best, who doesn't look anywhere near 61 years old.

A basketball and baseball player in high school, he set a single-season record for stolen bases in his only year at Louisburg College. A knee injury cut his college career short, but Best played semi-pro ball until he was 37.

In his early days in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Best said it wasn't unusual to coach three sports and handle a full course load. One spring he coached the baseball and track teams at the same time.

He used to get basketball players to help him varnish the gymnasium floor in the summer. In the winter, it was up to the coach to fire up the boiler if he wanted heat in the gym.

Even though coaching was a lot of work in those days, Best says coaching now is tougher in many respects.

"The greatest change I've seen is people expect more out of a coach. There's certain pressure to win," he said. "The coach is more on the line than he was 10 years ago."

Best received his bachelor's degree from East Carolina University and master's degree in health and physical education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"I knew what I wanted to do when I was 16 years old and I haven't changed my mind yet," he said. "I was fortunate in being able to choose something I was suited for and I certainly have enjoyed over the years."

Best says he hasn't seriously considered retirement, something Helen did recently after 21 years as a secretary at Leland Middle School. "As long as I feel good and I'm making a contribution I'll stay on."

The Bests have two children and two grandkids. Their daughter, Sally, is a math teacher at North Brunswick. Billy, who spent five years in the Kansas City Royals organization, is an assistant baseball coach at Auburn University.

Parent Involvement Is Focus Of Youth Family Night

Parent involvement was the focus of the fifth Partnerships for Youth Family Night held April 8 at the Brunswick County Government Center in Bolivia.

Approximately 300 people attended the event sponsored by the Brunswick County Schools and Brunswick County Community Based Alternatives Task Force on Youth Needs.

A culmination of Youth Week (April 5-8), the program provided information and entertainment, said Wendy Milligan, Partnerships For Youth program director for the Brunswick County Schools.

"The response from the community suggests a commitment to support the students who are the future leaders of our county," she said. "It appears to be evident, from the cooperation received from community agencies and school personnel, that collaborative efforts to provide services and support for our youth and their families are very real."

The West Brunswick High School drama class presented an original play dramatizing many youth problems of the '90s. They were directed by Mike Sapp, director of the Odell Williamson Auditorium.

In his remarks keynote speaker Roman Gabriel, director of Charlotte Rage and a motivational speaker, encouraged young people to embrace a vision for their

lives, set goals and then work to achieve them, and to work hard, enjoy life and don't surrender.

The third- and fourth-grade honors chorus from Union Primary sang "Heal The World," for a standing ovation.

Also 15 community agencies offered information on their services available to young people. These were the YWCA's JTPA Summer Youth Employment program, Family Services Big Buddy program, Brunswick County Parks and Recreation, Brunswick County Schools Drug Abuse Prevention/Wellness/JTPA program and counseling service, Brunswick Community College, American Red Cross, Employment Security Commission, Home Harbor Home, Cape Fear Substance Abuse Program, Brunswick County Literacy Council, Brunswick County Volunteer & Information Center, Brunswick County Sheriff's Department Crime Prevention Division, and The Brunswick Hospital's Adolescent Center.

Brunswick County Parks and Recreation was presented the 1993 Outstanding Display Award.

Also as part of Youth Week, school counselors assisted teachers in discussing youth and social issues such as stress, the importance of staying in school, abuse and neglect, living a healthy lifestyle and taking care of the



WEST BRUNSWICK HIGH winners in the "Heal The World" art contest pictured with their instructor Faye Fullwood (front center) are (from left) Barry Johnson, Misty Skipper, David Fullwood, Kris Stanley and Donnie Milligan. Laurel Keesee is not pictured.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



WENDY MILLIGAN (left), Partnerships For Youth program director, presents awards to South Brunswick Middle School art students Adam Clemmons and Damian Davis for their entry, "Help the Homeless."

environment.

Art teachers sponsored an art contest with the theme "Heal The World," with local school winners advancing to the county contest. Their art was displayed in the Public Assembly Building and county winners were recognized during the program.

David Fullwood of West Brunswick High School received best-in-show honors.

First-place winners were Ryan Bennett, Union; Adam Clemmons and Damian Davis, South Brunswick Middle; Leigh Everette Milligan, Waccamaw; David Fullwood, Laurel Keesee, West Brunswick.

Second-place winners were Trey Milligan, Waccamaw; Charlie La Brecque, Leland Middle; Chris Mc-

Lean and Larry Brock Jr., South Brunswick Middle; Audrey Porterfield, South Brunswick High.

Third-place awards went to Georgina Matthews, Union; Samantha Watson, Shallotte Middle; Maria Schilz, Shallotte Middle; Barry Johnson, West Brunswick High.

Receiving honorable mention were Beth Long, Supply; George Sloane, Dana Stanley, Paul Matthew, Union; Candice Smith, David Powell, Shallotte Middle; Tanika Ballard, Leland Middle; Lauren Winfree, Bolivia; Bob Coffey and Steven Lanier, Michael Mitchen and Joshua Cumbee, South Brunswick Middle; Kris Stanley, Donnie Milligan, and Misty Skipper, West Brunswick.