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## **Athletes urged to strive for character**

By John Gunther, Sports Editor

NORTH BEND — A good athlete is someone who always works hard in practice, respects his or her coaches and teammates and never seeks the spotlight.

That was a portion of the message renowned speaker Bruce Brown gave in the third of three seminars at North Bend High School on Thursday morning.

Brown was in town to give specific talks to parents, coaches and athletes in a statewide program jointly sponsored by the Oregon Athletic Directors Association and Bi-Mart. Each of the three talks drew more than 100 people, the final one directed at athletes.

Brown encouraged the students to work hard and live out the characteristics of good athletes, sharing stories from his own experiences to illustrate his points.

“Being an athlete lasts this long,” he said, snapping his fingers. “But the lessons you can learn from being an athlete last a lifetime.”

And being an athlete, he said, doesn’t mean having superior abilities, so much as the right character qualities.

Brown, who has been a coach at the junior high, high school and college levels for 35 years and also helped evaluate talent for the NFL for eight years, shared what he learned as a coach about what types of athletes make up a good team. In particular, he shared his goals when he was recruiting basketball players for a college team he coached.

“I never recruit a kid who doesn’t practice hard,” he said, telling the story of a basketball standout from a small town that he scouted and quickly soured on because the player was lazy in practice and not a team player in a workout Brown watched.

“I never recruit a kid who disrespects his family,” he said. “A family is your team for life.”

Brown added that he never recruited players whose own goals were ahead of the team or players who

disrespected their coaches or teammates in any way.

He challenged the students to see whether they were athletes or nonathletes, using several traits as examples.

Athletes, Brown said, have teachable spirits. They take correction as a compliment that their coaches believe they can get better and want them to improve.

“If you don’t like being corrected, you’re probably in the wrong place,” he said.

Nonathletes, on the other hand, see criticism as being picked on by the coach.

Athletes also are accountable, and their teammates know they will work hard and get the job done.

One of the best attributes of athletes is mental toughness, Brown said.

“Athletes stay positive, enthusiastic and confident no matter what,” he said. “You can’t break their spirit. I love kids like that.

“As a coach, you like coaching mentally tough kids. You practice hard every day. You come back from a loss like it never happened. They’re fun to coach as athletes, and so fun to have as teammates.”

Teams that are not mentally tough, Brown said, have a lot of pouting, a lot of moodiness and a lot of internal drama — all bad things.

Another key area Brown highlighted for athletes is teamwork.

“Are you in it for others or in it for yourself?” he said. “Athletes put the needs of the team ahead of their own needs in every decision.”

That includes working hard in practice, getting enough sleep, eating well and being sure to get to class on time and do well in school.

“The only rule I ever had in 35 years of coaching was don’t let your buddies down,” he said.

Nonathletes only work hard when they want to, often show up late for practice and love shortcuts, days off and easy practices.

“They are energy sappers for coaches and team killers for you,” Brown told the athletes.

He urged the athletes to be great teammates, who will be recalled fondly by others for that reason 20 years down the road.

“It’s a choice you make today,” he said.

The audience for Tuesday’s talk included athletes and coaches from several South Coast schools. They

came away impressed.

Matt Shorb, the boys basketball coach and superintendent at Powers, brought several of his coaches and wished all his athletes could have attended.

"I could have brought a busload of kids," he said.

Doug Miles, Marshfield's boys basketball coach, said Brown's talk directed at coaches was "outstanding."

Brown discussed with the coaches their role with athletes and how to be "coaches of significance," helping mold the athletes into better people for the future.

Brown lives in the San Juan Islands in northwest Washington, but travels around the country. He writes pamphlets to aid coaches, parents and athletes and loves giving talks about character.

"I care about it and I care about the (coaching) profession," he said, adding that coaching and teaching are among "the most important professions."

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