

Sportsmanship Section

Leadership – A Hoops Hero

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Tim Amundsen, Head Boys' Basketball Coach at Clovis East (Calif.) High School, is getting a lot of e-mails these days. Many of the messages simply say, "It's nice to know there are still decent people in the world who care about more than winning."

All of the attention has taken Amundsen a little by surprise, since the decision that put his name on sports pages around the country was, to him, simply making good on a promise to a hard-working kid. In one of its final regular season match-ups, Clovis East was up 25 points against neighboring Buchanan High with five minutes to go, so Amundsen called on his bench. Among those inserted was senior Ryan Belflower, a special education student who served as the team's manager. Belflower had participated in every team workout for the past two years, and Amundsen had promised him some playing time before the season ended.

But with Clovis East's starters on the bench, Buchanan began to narrow the gap. The lead fell to nine points, and Amundsen thought about reinserting his starters. But he didn't. With under a minute left, a break-away layup allowed Amundsen to relax. Then Clovis East got the ball back and with two seconds left on the clock, Belflower caught a pass behind the three-point line. He let it fly, the buzzer sounded, and the ball fell through the hoop, catching nothing but net.

The Clovis East student section swept Belflower up and marched him around the court on their shoulders. People cried, Amundsen among them. "As a coach, you love to see the kids who work the hardest get rewarded," he says. "I hope that this makes my other players realize, in real life, you won't always be the star, but success comes from doing what you can with the opportunities you get."