

Dean Edwards Smith

Dean Smith grew up in Emporia, Kansas where his father, Alfred Smith, was the high school basketball coach, and his mother, Vesta, was a teacher at Emporia State Teachers College. She taught Dean that excellence in the classroom was a foregone conclusion in the Smith household. So Dean grew up with a profound respect for the coaching profession and his dad's emphasis on close relationships with players and education. What Dean learned at home and as a student and basketball player in the great basketball tradition of Kansas University he would later transport 1,100 miles east to Chapel Hill.

Alfred Smith has said of his son, "You know, Dean's forgotten more about basketball than I ever knew. But we gave him the atmosphere to learn to love coaching. And, Dean's always had a knack for putting things in the places they belonged."

Having the sense to figure out where things go and the courage and discipline to put them there: these may be the characteristics which best explain why Dean Smith is a legend in the sport of basketball; why he believes freshmen should not be eligible to play; why 97.6 percent of his lettermen have at least their undergraduate degrees; why he remains in devoted contact with 28 years worth of former players, nearly two dozen of whom have become coaches themselves; why he is on record for higher teacher salaries; why a merit and need based academic scholarship bears his name; and why Carolina alumni are fiercely proud of the honorable program "Coach" runs at Chapel Hill.

As an example of his talent for putting things in the places they belong, Coach Smith has written, "It is exploitive of young men to be admitted to an academic institution and work so hard to help their teams and schools prosper and then fail to receive the just attention they need to graduate."

An example of Coach Smith's priorities and his loyalty to former players is Doug Moe's story of how he graduated from college and became a basketball coach.

Coach Smith and Doug Moe met when Moe was a talented but immature sophomore at Carolina. The coach taught him basketball, but despite his influence, the carefree Moe was not persuaded to take school seriously.

Five years later, when Moe was two years out of Carolina, still two years away from a degree and selling insurance in Durham, he received a call from his former coach one morning. According to Moe, Smith said, "You have an interview with the coach and president at Elon College at two p.m. today. Be there on time. And wear a coat and tie." Then he hung up.

Moe was hired for his first coaching job and learned that Smith had arranged for a prerequisite for the job to be an agreement also to work to complete his degree. Today Moe is one of the most successful coaches in professional basketball. And he credits his success to Coach Smith.

Dean Smith's friend, Gerald Unks, professor of education at Carolina, has said of him:

Behind — and above — (Dean Smith's) commitment to excellence in sport is his commitment to excellence in education in its fullest and finest sense. Few of us have had the opportunity to observe that facet of this remarkable teacher. His classroom has no desks; he seldom lectures, there are no textbooks to be read and he gives no written examinations. Void of the trappings and equipment of the typical teacher, Dean Smith challenges, counsels, inspires, sustains, and consoles. In a word, he educates. We see a glimmer of the results of that education: wins and losses. What we seldom see is his appreciation for academic excellence, his intense desire to see that all of his students graduate, his humane values subtly transmitted in his "classroom," his devotion to his students long after they have graduated, and his remaining an inspiration for most of his students for the rest of their lives. This special teacher coaches in the crucible of public attention; in quiet privacy, he educates.

As his dad said, "Dean's strength is in putting things in the places they belong." And that's what Coach Dean Smith does at this University.