

# What's Up With Coach?

An Editorial Opinion by Tom Caccia, NISCA Editor



**Tom Caccia** is the NISCA Journal Editor. He has held that position for the past 12 years. He is the Head Coach of the Girls and Boys Teams at Platteville/Lancaster High Schools in Wisconsin and has held that position for the past 30 years.

Normally, I'm a little hesitant to try and influence people with my opinions because that's all they are, just my opinion. If it's something important, then by all means, I'll state my point of view, but if it isn't something that I see where I can add to the argument, then I try to stay on the edge, patiently waiting for a spot where I can add to the discussion. This might be one of those cases.

While on the short trip from school to the pool for practice this afternoon, I heard an interesting exchange on the Sports Talk Radio that is usually playing on my radio. Even though there isn't much time on the trip to evaluate the discussion, this one struck a cord with me and I've been mulling it over ever since. It might seem trivial to some, but it really isn't to me.

The discussion began with a letter from a listener to the radio host. In the letter, the listener alluded to the "frivolous use of the salutation 'Coach' when a reporter was referring to Bill Cower" of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The letter writer went on to lament about how so many broadcasters referred to "Coach" this or "Coach" that. The radio host, after completing the letter then chimed in with the letter in complete agreement, and going on to further relate to his college professors about referring to each other in the hallways as "Doctor" or "Professor" rather than a simple Bill or Joe or whatever.

I may differ than many people across the country and maybe it's because I'm getting older, but I don't let my swimmers call me by my first name. I expect my swimmers to refer to our officials as Mr. Allbaugh or Mr. Scheuerman, not Stu or Jim. My guess is that neither the letter writer nor the host of the radio show have ever been a "Coach." If they had, they would understand the noble profession to which many of us are a part. I remember my first meeting with my high school coach as a coach myself. I greeted him as always with a handshake and, "It's good to see you, Coach." He promptly corrected me by saying, "Tom, we're on the same level now. We're colleagues, you can call me Denny." To which I responded, "Coach, we'll never be on the same level. I have way to much respect for you to ever call you Denny. To me, you'll always be 'Coach.'" And to this day, nearly 40 years after high school, I still look forward to

every meeting with Coach Carlson and I still address him as Coach.

I wonder if these two (the letter writer and radio host) ever thought of the fact that to be called "Coach" is one of the greatest compliments someone could ever receive? Coach ranks up there with Dad, Mom, Wife, Husband, Grandpa, and Grandma. For me, it is more than just a term for endearment... it is a term of respect. Respect for the work that has gone into that profession. Respect for the knowledge that has been gained. Respect for the work that is done on a daily basis. One of my greatest days in teaching was when a graduated swimmer came back to practice and said, 'How ya doing, Coach?' I'm proud to be called Coach. I'm proud that my kids and my kids parents refer to me as Coach. To be respected enough to be called Coach is a great compliment. I know that my chest pumps up with pride when I see my son-in-law doing his job and kids refer to him as "Coach." I'm biased in my opinion, but I think he does a great job and I try to explain to him what an honor it is to be called Coach.

It's not said often enough. Maybe it's the age in which we live. Maybe we think it's a sign of weakness. I'm not sure. But I'm not one to buy into the theory of entitlement for kids or anyone else. They have to earn my respect through their work effort. If, in return, I earn their respect for performing my job, well then, by all means, call me Coach! IF we have earned the respect to be called Coach, then we shouldn't take that lightly. I don't refer to everyone I meet in our profession as Coach. I'm proud to have the friends I do in Coaching and I'm even more proud to be considered as their friend. But, to those to whom I do refer to as Coach, I hope they know that for me, that is about as high an honor I can say to them. I don't take the word lightly and I don't try to diminish its impact.

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It's interesting how different words affect us. Maybe I shouldn't have become so upset by these two individuals knocking the word Coach as a meaningless salutation. But, unless you have become part of the coaching fraternity, you just can't understand what it means to be honored by such a salutation. I think some of these for-

mer players turned broadcasters understand the dynamics of what coaches do for athletes. I think they, like me, use the word as a sign of respect and yes, even honor. I hope these broadcasters keep referring to the likes of Bill Cower as "Coach." While they're at it, maybe since they have a love of sports by making a career of it as a radio host or a life-long fan, they should stop and thank a Coach.