

Parentally Speaking - December 2007

What would you think about a situation in which a 17-year-old high school varsity athlete had an opportunity to take a school-sponsored trip to Europe at the end of February and his coach told him that if he signed up he should not join the team. The trip is something that normally wouldn't be affordable, but the kid had fundraised enough money to go. The coach's reasoning for this was there would be other players who would be more dedicated to be at every game who deserved the opportunity to "step up" and be an asset to the team instead of him. He claimed that the kid, the starting point guard already for two years, was putting this trip in front of basketball. In the end, the kid opted to go to Spain. Sadly, the athletic director, principal and vice principal were asked to deal with the situation and come up a compromise, but they chose not to interfere with the coach's decision.

Telling the kid that he can't play on the team seems a bit extreme to me, because I'm a big advocate of life experiences. This is a life choice that should be considered seriously, depending up on whether there might be a pro or college opportunity for him in basketball. Certainly if he wanted to be a pro basketball player the way I wanted to be a pro baseball player, and he was in a position as a junior or senior in high school to know that he had a realistic chance to play professionally, then the choice becomes a little bit harder. The possibility of losing a potential scholarship offer also would make the decision more difficult, but it still is a choice that a 17-year-old should be allowed to make.

I'm a little disappointed that a compromise of some sort was not worked out. It seems to me that if he has value to the team and has been the starting point guard for a long time, a compromise should have at least been considered. It's very difficult for me to comment specifically, because there could be so much more to the story than what I know.

Generally speaking, I'm a big advocate of life opportunities as well as sporting opportunities. If this decision involves a potential professional or college opportunity that might be on the line, then there are other things to consider. But if this is about a normal opportunity to play high school basketball, after which his basketball career most likely

will be over, then life decisions such as the one to go to Spain are more meaningful.

It's a shame to me that something couldn't be worked out. You go to school to learn a lot of things that prepare you for the rest of your life. Through school we are afforded the opportunity to learn so much more than just basketball and what is printed in textbooks. In my opinion this is an opportunity to learn that anyone should have the right to pursue. Based on what I know, there seems to have been an opportunity for a win-win here, and I'm not sure why a solution couldn't be reached.

By Cal Ripken Jr.