

He built winners for life's game

The year was 1946. That year, for the first time in history, the Vero Beach High School football team had an undefeated season. The following year we lost only one game. Not bad for a rinky-dink Florida high school team.

But all was not well. Our coach, H.L. Wasson, had some kind of disagreement with the school officials. At the end of the 1947-48 school year he moved. I've never seen him since.

That was more than 30 years ago. I've forgotten the teams we played, even forgotten the names of the boys I played beside. But there is one thing vivid in my memory: The head coach, standing on the sideline, shaking hands with every boy who came off the field. Even if the boy had only gone in for two plays, he was greeted by the head coach with his hand extended—a gesture of gratitude and respect.

I've watched hundreds of coaches since. Some of them yell at their players. Some hit them in frustration. Others march sullenly back and forth. But I've never seen one who shook hands with every boy.

H.L. Wasson was not just building a winning team, he was building men. Into each boy he built a measure of

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self-respect. It meant something to know the head coach cared, and appreciated your effort. Every boy, from star to sub, was important. That handshake proved it.

That truth, ingrained in my life at a formative time, has become the foundation stone upon which many other truths—including my worth before God—has been built. I count. I'm important. I'm worth something.

It has helped me understand that others count, too. My wife. My children. My associates. All need to be shown my respect and appreciation.

Recently I was in Nashville for a TV appearance. After the show there was a phone call waiting in the lobby. "I saw you on the noon show . . . I don't know if you remember . . . this is H.L. Wasson."

It was worth waiting 30 years just to say, "Coach, there's something I want to tell you. You're important. You're worth something. You're a special person to God."