



Nat:

Welcome back to another episode of Reach. Teach. Talk. And today we're going to talk about coaching and teaching and the intersection between both. And it's interesting because the coaching industry has grown so much in terms of career coaching, life coaching, just focused on what a one-to-one personalized coach is. Yet, we also obviously, with Reach. Teach. Talk, we're spending a lot of time talking about teaching, and building relational teaching, and how relationships impact the student teacher relationship. And also, you can't think about school, at least K-12 school or even university without also thinking about the innerlay with athletics and the importance of athletics in education and the importance of building community. When you're all cheering for the same team, you're all on the same side of the field, same side of the court, and also just as a teacher, you're looking at students in a very, very different light.

Nat:

And, when I started teaching back in the '90s, it was expected for me to, for all teachers really, to teach and then to also coach and to maybe run clubs, or the yearbook, or student council, all that good stuff. And it was expected. And I was like, wow, this is such a great way for me to see the students that I taught seventh grade history or eighth grade English, to see those students in a different light. And to watch them on the field, to watch them physical coordination, to watch how they communicated with each other, to watch how they collaborated with each other. And it's this idea, right, that they're setting a goal honestly, 12, 13-year-old, 14-year-old mindset, a goal to win, one single goal. But really it's also the idea of picking apart what is it to be a winning team?

Nat:

Is it a bunch of showboats combined together or as we've learned in many cases, it's not about just getting the best, recruiting the best and expecting that they would work together. There is a nuance and a finesse to that. So anyhow, a good coach recognizes that nuance and a good coach knows his individual or her individual athletes in just deep, deep, many multilayered ways. And yet also as we keep arguing with that both this podcast and also in my book, Time to Teach: Time to Reach, that teaching also, relational teaching involves one-to-one approach, teacher to student, knowing your students, knowing them as individuals, not just as test scores or quantitative measurements. So today I thought, gosh, how can we build a Reach. Teach. Talk episode with a guest who can combine his knowledge in both teaching and coaching?

Nat:

And before I introduce our guests formally, I would like to also bring your attention to a website called teachercoach.com based in New Jersey, yet very, very well recognized all around the US this website really promotes the teacher as coach, the teacher as... Well we'll define what

coaching is during this episode, but this website teachercoach.com really promotes the idea of a teacher as a coach and provides many resources, hundreds honestly, resources on their website to help teachers become better coaches, to help teachers nourish themselves, strengthen themselves and really build the skills that excellent relational teachers and coaches bring to the classroom and to the field.

Nat:

So without much further ado, Alex Rosenblum is here with me today. He is a 10 year teacher and a 10 year not tenured, 10 year teacher and a 10 year coach at football. And he is currently at Sierra Canyon school, a pre K-12 school in Chatsworth, California and the North Valley of Los Angeles. And I'm just so glad to have you here Alex. I'd love to just turn the mic to you to give kind of your background, how you got to where you are today because you are extremely well recognized for what you do both in the classroom and on the football field.

Alex:

Yeah. First just thank you for having me. This is really cool to be able to talk about two things that I love coaching and teaching and I struggled growing up as a learner in the classroom. I struggled processing, I struggled reading and being able to kind of analyze and interpret information and sports really allowed me to get over any type of learning issues that I really had growing up. Also, I was a really hyperactive kid. I always wanted to run around. I was the kid in class that was looking at the clock wondering when recess was because I couldn't wait to get out and play soccer or play football or just be active. And as I got older I realized if I can learn a football playbook, what's the difference from learning math or reading a book and understanding what I've read?

Alex:

So in a lot of ways sports kind of helped me through learning, my learning issues. And as I got older I realized I had a lot of positive influences that kind of guided me through my youth and really good coaches, really good teachers that kind of influenced me to want to be able to teach and coach. So that's kind of how I got into the whole idea that I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be a coach. And when I got to college I played football in college. My wide receivers coach was a guy named Scott Baumgardner. Really great guy. And he told me one day, "I really think it'd be a good idea for you to get into teaching and coaching. You'd probably be pretty good at it. You love football, you love learning and it probably would be a good profession for you to get in." And that's really a big reason why I wanted to get into that. Yeah.

Nat:

So walking it back when you were a young kid, maybe you can dive a little bit deeper into the kind of student that you were. If I were to have one of your teachers from elementary or middle school and particularly on the show and ask him or her, what was Alex like as a student, how would they describe you? And next question is going to be how did you take to the field as a place of refuge in a sense?

Alex:

I was the kid that was afraid to participate in class. They probably would have said that I was the fidgety kid in the back that was always playing the drums on the desk and wearing my hood because I was afraid to get called on. But then I would get onto the football field or the soccer field and it was like that was my comfort zone. I was faster than people. I could do things that other people couldn't. And I wanted to express that on the field. And I feel like you talked about

seeing students in a different light. I feel like for my teachers that had me in the classroom, if they were to see me on a field, they would have been like, that's two completely different kids.

Nat:

Explain that. So you in the classroom versus you on the field. Two completely different kids. Three adjectives to describe both.

Alex:

Okay. So me in the classroom quiet, shy, nervous. Me in the field, aggressive, confident, happy.

Nat:

And so it's fascinating, right? Because that's two completely different descriptions of the exact same person, which lends credit to so much to what we're talking about, about knowing your students individually as individuals and understanding that as humans we are complicated, we are nuanced. And it reminds me of when we were in faculty meetings that are student based and you know those faculty meetings where you know you have a list of students you're going to talk about? Right. And so the science teacher, the math teacher, the English teacher, the history teacher, the coach, whatever, art teacher, they all have a different lens on the same student. So if your teacher was to describe you or sit in the coffee room with your coach, right, it'd be-

Alex:

Totally two different perspectives on the same individual.

Nat:

Yeah.

Alex:

We have kids in our football program who struggle in learning and I coach the offensive line, offensive line divine is one of the hardest positions to play, to understand. There's so much going on that you have to understand. And to the untrained eye just block the guy in front of you. That's not how it is. You have to make calls, you have to be able to process information and then apply that information at the drop of a pin. And so to play the position of center, it's really complex and you could talk about our offensive linemen in the classroom and so many teachers would never understand how they could accomplish what they accomplished on the field based on what they see in the classroom.

Nat:

Right, right. And I'm thinking about how it might've been a transition for you going from elementary school to middle school because the way you viewed school did it change?

Alex:

So that actually didn't happen until high school because my middle school, we didn't really have a middle school sports program. I played club soccer. My parents wouldn't let us play football until we got to high school, which is kind of funny because all I ever wanted to do growing up was play football. My grandfather kind of instilled that in us. And then when I got to high school and I got to play football, it was like the wheels are off. I was ready to go. And I literally would

count the hours until football practice throughout day. I would look at the clock. "Okay, what time is the football practice?" And that in a lot of ways that got me through school. I didn't get the best grades early on in high school until I started to figure out that I could actually understand. I can learn how to learn when I was kind of probably a sophomore or junior in high school.

Nat:

Was there a catalyst for that? Was there a certain teacher who kind of gave you that?

Alex:

Yeah. Again, Mr. Smith, he was my English teacher my junior year of high school and I was good at sports and I thought I was the best and he kind of knocked me down a couple of pegs. He said, "Listen, you're 5'8, you're not the fastest guy in the world. You might think you are, but you're not. And if you don't start to understand what's happening in the classroom, you're going to struggle when you get out of this place." And he sat me down, had me come to his office during lunch and we read *The Great Gatsby* together. And I remember being so intrigued by *The Great Gatsby* and he always used to do these voices for when he would read different characters. And he used to always read that the old sport, I don't know if you remember that from the *Gaspe*.

Nat:

I do.

Alex:

He's used to always say that. And he used to crack me up, but he really, I mean he got me interested in that book and from that point forward he had me locked in.

Nat:

It only takes one, right? It only takes one. And it's interesting because the power of words and the power of belief piece is so important and yeah.

Alex:

One of the other cool things about Mr. Smith is when I went on to college and played football, he was a University of Washington fan. In my freshman year of college, we were at the University of Nevada and we went up to Washington and knew we'd beat them. And I remember talking to him on the phone and he was so excited for me, even though he was Washington fan, he was so excited for me. And that was one of the coolest things to have a relationship with your teacher after you were not in high school anymore. To know that that person was still a fan of yours or a support of yours even though you weren't in the school anymore. That was awesome.

Nat:

But now, I got to get back to this guy because I'm thinking now, we had a guest on recently who was talking about communication and he was talking about how to have difficult conversations with, in his case, he works with fortune 500 companies and he's a mediator and he's really a, actually, he's a coach. He's a leadership coach and a business coach. But he's the guy who CEOs call in to kind of have the difficult conversations or teach the managers how to have those conversations. Anyhow, and we had a great talk conversation about how one holds those conversations. And what I'm thinking about is, didn't you say that, is it Mr. Smith isn't it?

Alex:

Yeah. Mr. Smith.

Nat:

It is literally Mr. Smith. Like you're not using euphemisms. So Mr. Smith, he told you that you don't have a future in the NFL basically. Right. He said you're you're a 5'8, you're running back.

Alex:

No I was wide receiver.

Nat:

Wide receiver.

Alex:

Even worse.

Nat:

Okay. So-

Alex:

If I was a running back, that might've been okay.

Nat:

Yeah, right. Actually true. But he was giving you bad news in a sense.

Alex:

Oh yeah.

Nat:

So I don't understand how somebody who gave you that bad news ended up connecting with you?

Alex:

Well, I think in a lot of ways he was like, you need to have a more realistic approach to the world around you. Very few people actually make it to the NFL. Very few people actually make it to college. And I actually, I walked on to the University of Nevada, most people that walk on don't even make it. And I think he was kind of like, I'm going to break this to you now so that you're not disappointed later. And I don't know why, but something about that just clicked with me. Nobody's ever really had that conversation with me before where, "Hey, there's a lot of people just like you in this world and what's going to set you apart from those other people?"

Nat:

That's huge. That's absolutely huge.

Alex:

If you don't know how to read and write, you're not going to be able to communicate with people moving forward. You need to start to take an interest in this stuff. And then for some reason that clicked. And the other thing I think about it too was my dad was really interested in *The Great Gatsby* and I remember talking to my dad about it. I think the fact that my dad had that interest, Mr. Smith had an interest and it kind of like, I think it sparked that interest in me a lot too.

Nat:

Yeah. It all came together. And I love that Mr. Smith was delivering that information and you didn't walk away and you didn't say, "Forget, I'm going to be that guy." I mean you could easily also have still in your mind thought that I could still beat those odds, right. Because you continued to play football on two extreme [crosstalk 00:12:53].

Alex:

Yeah. I did all right. Yeah.

Nat:

You did quite all right. Yeah. But he also gave you kind of another outlet. Like I see something in you, Alex, that you might not even see in yourself, which is you can appreciate literature, I've seen. Did he tap into? Am I right to assume that he tapped into an academic strength that you might not have even known about yourself?

Alex:

Oh yeah. It's funny because whenever I talk to specifically football players and not to generalize football players, but that's just who I work with the most. And they don't read as often as they should. And I always tell them that if you struggle reading, there's probably a reason for it. You probably don't do it often enough. Just like with any skill, the more you catch the ball, you're going to become better at catching the ball. The more you read, might not happen right away. But if you read frequently, you're going to start to develop a little bit more of expanded vocabulary. You're going to start to understand words a little bit better, a little bit differently. So the more you read, the better you get at reading, the more you run a certain route or the more you work a certain technique, the better you're going to get it at just through the repetition of it. And it takes time. And it's not just going to happen overnight, but the more you read, the more you're going to understand what you've read.

Nat:

So in that way, you're being both coach and teacher to your football team?

Alex:

Oh yeah. I mean that's when I talk to my offensive line about understanding certain plays, when you teach them something for the very first time, they struggle in it and then they run it and they run it and they run it and they understand the concept. And then they see it versus a different defense and then they start to be able to apply the rule that they've learned to whatever they're seeing in front of them. And it, again, it's the repetition of having done it and having done it and having done it. The cool thing about being in a place like Sierra Canyon where we only have one football program, I mean we coach every single kid that comes into our program and when I get them as freshmen and we teach them a concept when they're in ninth grade and they stick through it all four years. At the time they're juniors my job as a coach isn't to teach them the offense anymore. It's to build the relationship.

Alex:

We had a group of kids last year, we had four seniors on our offensive line, which is rare, but for a coach, it's awesome. Those guys could coach the team better than I could because they're the ones actually experiencing it. And so after the first two years of coaching those guys up and getting to know them and build the relationship, by the time they were juniors and seniors, it wasn't me coaching them hard or yelling at them. It was me just having fun with them and talking to them. And the whole way that we coach them was different. And it's funny because now this year all those seniors graduated. So we've got a brand new offensive line, five brand new guys that have never played together. Some of them are new to the school and don't know the offense.

Alex:

And it's a struggle for those guys right now and they're starting to pick it up and now we're in the playoffs and we actually played really well last night. It was pretty cool, but last night it clicked for a lot of those guys. And we get all of these kids back, that's the best part about it. They're all going to be seniors next year. And I always tell them the best part about what we have right now is that we're learning how to work with each other. We're building the relationships, we're learning the offense, and you guys are learning to work together as a group.

Alex:

And I can't wait to see what next year looks like because we get every single one of those kids back. They're going to have a better understanding of who I am. They're going to have a better understanding of our offense and they're going to be able to play with the confidence that I don't need to be so tough on them all the time. I don't need to be right behind them. I can let them figure it out and talk to each other and almost coach each other up.

Nat:

Okay. If there's one theme that I just heard from this incredible lens on coaching that you just shared-

Alex:

My ramble.

Nat:

It's your philosophy? It's a beautiful ramble and someday I hope you write a book about this because this is incredible.

Alex:

We always joke about our coaches have always joked about we need to write a book someday.

Nat:

You really ought to and several books-

Alex:

[crosstalk 00:16:31] for some information on that.

Nat:

Absolutely. But if there's one thing that that just came out of that it's the idea of you removing yourself and finding the right time to extricate yourself and letting them, there's a point that you said clearly there's a point with those four that junior year, so you'd worked with them since freshman, by junior year you were able to let them kind of almost coach themselves, you said.

Alex:

Oh yeah.

Nat:

That's tremendous because that involves observation, reflection and getting your own ego out of the way.

Alex:

Oh yeah. That's the biggest thing is, is you have to remove yourself at times. But I kind of liken it to, if you think about learning an offense, have you ever read the same book like three or four times?

Nat:

Yeah.

Alex:

Okay. And every time you read it-

Nat:

It's a little different.

Alex:

... It's a little bit different. But also you feel like you understand it a little bit better. Right?

Nat:

Absolutely.

Alex:

And so imagine reading the same book for three years and you're getting different points and different pieces to the point where you're an expert on that book. That's the offense. When these kids get to the point where they know every intricate detail of the offense, that's when I get to kind of step back and let them do their thing.

Nat:

Wow. You're absolutely right. And as a teacher, if you've got kids who, students who have built the foundation, who know how to write the essay in the structure that you've been working with them on for months and months and months, right? Then you can do this. And usually around the spring, the spring is when that kind of can happen in a really successful classroom.

Alex:

And it's funny because right now with the middle schoolers, we were teaching them the introduction to writing a thesis. And when you introduce that to middle schoolers, it's a complex concept.

Nat:

Totally.

Alex:

And they look at it and they're like, "What the heck is this guy talking about?" And you introduce the same concept with different materials, similar concept, different material. By the second semester you start to see these kids picking it up and it's awesome. And then in our history department too, we have our history chair's [inaudible 00:18:17] and he's awesome and he wants to make sure that what we're teaching in seventh grade is going to make its way in eighth grade and they're going to build on that in ninth grade. And it's really cool, especially with our ninth grade teachers and that they're seeing these kids doing the writing, the introduction in seventh grade and then taking a step further in eighth grade and by the time they're in ninth grade they understand the process of how we want them writing. And then they get to put their own characteristics and touches to it. And by the time they're in ninth grade, they get to build a new foundation with those teachers. So it's pretty cool.

Nat:

And it goes back to what you were saying about what a privilege it is to coach a team or to coach athletes that you started, that you have a four year relationship.

Alex:

Oh yeah.

Nat:

[crosstalk 00:18:53] applicable. You have that four year relationship with them starting in ninth grade going up to two senior year. And being able to watch them grow and just like that example you gave of the teachers kind handing off the students are into grade but not losing what they learned in the previous year. It's scope and sequence but really [crosstalk 00:19:10] that.

Alex:

Exactly. And it's great a place like Sierra Canyon where we have the small classrooms and we have the attention to detail with the teachers and the students. It's so cool. Even though I don't teach that student when they move in the ninth grade, you still have the relationship with the teacher. You still have a relationship with the student that when you see them around campus you ask them how things are going. You talk to the teacher about, "Hey, how's so-and-so doing?" And you get to kind of keep that, like the communication between the adult, the student it's just the... I don't know how to explain it, but it's just the way that everybody kind of works together for the betterment of the student. And it's the same thing with football or with sports in general.

Nat:

Yeah, absolutely. And it's getting me thinking about how with teaching you can have a mindset honestly, as a teacher, and I've been guilty of this in the past, my deep past when I was

teaching English about just sometimes you think your class is the only class and it's my class and this is look at the progress in here and you forget that-

Alex:

There's so much those kids have going on during the day. You always lose sight of it.

Nat:

That's right. I think there's room for that in a sense that ego or the hubris is, it's good to have teachers feel like, all right. As a student I imagine I'd rather see a confident teacher who thinks that we are the center of his world, right? Copernican teaching. But then, but I imagine also obviously with coaching it's like the coach is not the showboat.

Alex:

Oh yeah. I mean it depends on where you are as far as that goes. I think with our coaching staff, I think one of the things that makes our coaching staff successful is the lack of an ego. If somebody wants to step in and coach one of my guys, I'm going to let him do it. Especially because I trust those guys and I feel like this coach is a successful coach and he knows what he's talking about. And why is he talking to that kid? Because he wants for them the same thing that I want for them. He wants them to be successful. And we have, our head coach is a guy named John Ellinghouse who he actually played offensive line. I never played offensive line before. I was a wide receiver and when I first started coaching for him, he had to teach me a lot about coaching.

Alex:

I had to learn how to coach the offensive line. When you don't play offensive line, you don't have a clue what's going on. And that's why I wanted to do it. I wanted to learn a little bit more more about the position-

Nat:

To broaden your exposure.

Alex:

Yeah. I wanted to learn and trust me the first two years of doing that was the... My mind was, but John he's an experienced offensive lineman and an experienced and successful offensive line coach. And I was struggling my first two years doing this and he sat me down one time, and this is actually kind of going right back to relational teaching. We were sitting in his backyard at his house. He called me over kind of late and he said, "Alex, right now you're new to this still, but these kids aren't buying any of you. You weren't an offensive linemen. You are you're still learning a lot. You need to get these kids to believe in you and want to run through a brick wall for you. You need to change your approach to the way that you're teaching these kids. You need to get them to love you."

Alex:

And that was to me at when you hear something like that as a coach, your ego comes in like, "What? What's this guy talking about? I know what I'm doing." But I really took a step back and it's something that happened eight years ago, maybe seven years ago now. And it's something I think about all the time, especially when coaching offensive linemen. I mean, there are different

type of kids and so you've got to get these kids to first off love you. Know that you care about them, know that you want their best interest, but also know that you're in it with them.

Alex:

If they mess up, they know they've messed up. You need to not just break them and yell at them, which I'm guilty of at times it happens especially being passionate about something like that. But at the end of the day, these kids need to know more than anything else that you care about them and that you want to see them succeed. And something I think about all the time in coaching is, am I doing that? Am I making sure that these kids know that I care about them? Am I my making sure these kids know that I love them? And that's really been one of the reasons that we've been successful at our school is because of whether it's the sports or whether it's the classroom, the kids know that we're passionate about what they're doing.

Nat:

So getting to the main debate topic of our conversation, Alex, is coaching and teaching identical? Is it the same priority? Is building relationships, showing them you love them. Getting them to say, "I'm going to run through a brick wall for my teacher or my coach." There was one time in this conversation and only one that you actually used the word teach instead of coach when we were talking about football. So I'm wondering, do you look at them as identical or is there some difference?

Alex:

Oh, they're so similar. I don't know that they're identical, but there are so many similarities. I think you can kind of push the envelope a little bit more on the football field or in that athletic setting, in terms of allowing your emotions and your passion to kind of guide your coaching and your teaching. I think in the classroom you're kind of restricted and there's such a broad or diverse setting in the classroom. I think one of the things that Sierra Canyon is on the football field. It's all guys and they all are competitive and they're all with a similar mentality. We're here to win and we're here to play and we're here to have fun. In the classroom, depending on what you teach, you have some kids that love history, you have some boys that are really into World War II.

Alex:

But then you have some of the girls that aren't in the history or maybe they don't connect to World War II in the same way that... So you have a very diverse, I think a audience in the classroom. And I think on the football field or in the athletics realm, it's less diverse in terms of what people want or what people enjoy. So in the classroom, not everybody enjoys history. Not everybody connects to math. Not everybody will understand science. On the football field, it's more kind of funneled into this is what we're here for, this is what we signed up for and this is what we're doing.

Nat:

It's great, and it gets me thinking about when you were saying earlier that you played soccer in elementary and middle school, right? But did you know that you had skills for football? Did you know that you had a sense for-

Alex:

Yeah I felt confident.

Nat:

Yeah a confidence for football. Because there's a theory right about the difference between teaching and coaching is that, let me get this right, is that when you're teaching, you are responsible for the imparting of information that's new to, as you said, a very wide array of students.

Alex:

Yeah. Diverse audience.

Nat:

A diverse audience. And when you're coaching, you're facilitating what these, your team, what your team actually has in them. So in a sense, right. And I'd love to hear your thoughts about this quote because it's not etched in stone, that's not the answer because I don't know if there is a perfect answer for teaching versus coaching, but what do you think about that? Because the idea that when you're teaching, you're transferring new information to a very wide array. But when you're coaching you, it's like you're pulling out. It's almost like when you're teaching, you're pushing and when you're coaching you're pulling. So [crosstalk 00:26:15].

Alex:

I think when you're teaching, it's kind of like I was talking about when you're teaching how to write a thesis, you're using different content to teach the same skill. And I think that's the similarity. In football or in coaching, it's you're teaching the same technique with maybe a different defense or maybe a different understanding of, or you have to change the rule for something, but there's still a reason behind it that's the same as it was before. Teaching a thesis is going to be teaching a thesis regardless of what you're writing about. Teaching an offense is going to be teaching an offense regardless of who you're playing against.

Nat:

The more I'm talking with you and the more I'm hearing about your approach to coaching, the more I make this similar, I take these trace, you're talking about and apply them to teaching. I mean it's about belief. It's about showing that you love them. It's about engendering a sense of team in a classroom even though, but it's-

Alex:

That's hard. That's one of the hardest things.

Nat:

Harder in the classroom than on the field.

Alex:

We were at dinner a couple of weeks ago with Tom [Finola 00:27:18], one of the greatest people I know.

Nat:

A legendary teacher.

Alex:

And I was struggling with one of my classes in 11th grade class that's got some social stuff going on and it's kind of it's my challenging class. And I remember talking to you about and I said, "Man, I just had a... It didn't go the way I wanted to." And you said, "Well it's funny because you look at it as these class needs to be perfect. This class didn't go well, blah blah. And they're looking at it as like class, class, class, class, class." Do you remember what the quote was?

Nat:

Totally.

Alex:

I don't remember the exact quote.

Nat:

Totally. It was a teacher that I interviewed at Andover and he was saying, "It was one day that I had the student came up to me and was like Mr. Domino you're really concerned about how did that class go? It's so clear that you're concerned about, oh, was it a good class or not a good class? But all I'm thinking is class, class, class, class."

Alex:

Exactly.

Nat:

Right. So it gets back to the point earlier about the ego in the teacher, remember I said earlier in the conversation, right? The ego and the teacher and saying, "Oh, it's all about me. It's all about my class."

Alex:

Yeah, exactly.

Nat:

"This is all that matters."

Alex:

You have to see the big picture. These kids are going through seven different classes a day.

Nat:

Right. And they've got football practice afterwards.

Alex:

And they've got football practice after. But in terms of building the team environment in the classroom, sometimes it happens and sometimes it doesn't. And I guess that's the same with the successful team. Our most talented teams have not always been our most successful. Our closest teams have always been successful.

Nat:

Define closest.

Alex:

The kids that love each other, the kids that there's no drama, there's no behind the scenes stuff going on. They're willing to play for each other through thick and thin no matter what.

Nat:

It's harmony.

Alex:

Exactly. So I had a middle school class two years ago and it was just a great group of kids, bright kids. Not all of them were A students, but they all had a similar mentality. They all loved the environment. They came in and it felt like a team. And it's funny because I could pick out the kids in that class. I could probably name three fourths of that class without even-

Nat:

From two years ago.

Alex:

From two years ago, just because of what they brought to the classroom. I looked forward to that class on a daily basis. I couldn't wait to have them. And they were fun. And I see them all the time and they still talk about how much fun that class was. And it's funny that same year we won a state championship in football and same thing. I mean we could talk, I could tell you every single offensive lineman, every play, every player that stuck out in my mind and both what they have in common was the kids in the class all got along. They all liked each other and they all enjoyed learning in that environment, that football team, they all got along, they all played hard for each other and they all loved what we were doing within that environment.

Nat:

When you think about environment, the word environment, maybe come up with if you can, three elements that you as a coach and as a teacher, ensure that you bring to your classroom and your practice.

Alex:

Okay. Well one of the things that teacher, Jenny Hernandez taught me a couple of years ago when I was first teaching, she said, if you're in the classroom and you're not having fun and these kids aren't having fun. Something's missing. So you have to make it fun. It's never fun to lose, but you could be having a rough season and still make it fun for those kids and make them want to be there. So you have to make them want to be there somehow. You have to have something in you that attracts those kid to go, "I want to be around Mr. Roosenbloom, he brings a positive energy."

Nat:

Okay. So-

Alex:

Or most of the time [inaudible 00:30:30] I'll be honest with you.

Nat:

It's okay. No worries. You just say you'll rip the team when they deserve a kind of a smack down, but then of course you come back together afterwards. Right. But I'm thinking have you had a bad losing season before?

Alex:

Oh yeah.

Nat:

And so how do you keep the positivity?

Alex:

It's tough. I mean, you got to kind of manufacture some way, taking the kids to get food or building some type of bonding experience. And that team that it was my second year at Sierra Canyon. We went five and six and everything that could go wrong did go wrong kind of thing.

Nat:

Like injuries and-

Alex:

Yeah, we had our best offensive lineman got hurt. Our quarterback got hurt. It was just one of those scenarios where it was like, when it rains, it pours. But we found a way to kind of keep those kids engaged. I remember coach Haas telling me the best way to an offensive lineman heart is through his stomach. Brought this kid In-N-Out. We spent a lot of time here and also sometimes you learn more through failure than you do from constant success and absolutely that rough season going five and six that year, the next year we ended up going, I think 12 and two we made it to the semifinals CIF. The next year we were CIF champs and next year we were state champs. And so we kind of took that took our lumps that year. But we kind of like in a lot of ways that strengthened us through the losing and through the tough times and through the adversity.

Alex:

So I don't know how you keep the positivity is just by showing up, having a positive attitude and enjoying the fact that you get to coach and do what you love on a daily basis. And the kids, they have to see that.

Nat:

They do have to see that. And it's interesting because it's not, I guess in separating being positive versus being nice. Do you see the difference?

Alex:

Yeah. I mean you can't always be nice. You can be positive. You can have positive, constructive criticism, but it's not always going to be nice.

Nat:

Do you have that same approach in the classroom when you're-

Alex:

Oh yeah. And it's kind of like you were talking about how do you have that conversation that Mr. Smith had with me with your students? And that's a tough one. But at the end of the day, you're going to have to give them that feedback that maybe they don't love to hear at the time, but it doesn't matter if they love it at the time. It's how is that going to impact them moving forward?

Nat:

With that effort that I know you have maybe even more than you know in yourself. Let's put it this way.

Alex:

If you can learn our offense, you can figure out how to interpret these terminologies terms on your English paper.

Nat:

I didn't even think about this. You must teach some of the same kids that you coach.

Alex:

Yeah, that's fun. I mean like I was telling you with one of our offensive lineman, he kind of struggled learning the offense and now we're 10 weeks in and he's got a grasp of it. He's making the calls, he's telling what's going on and it's like he's the teacher on the field and I have him in the classroom and it's like, "Hey man, if you put in the same effort to understand what you read last night for homework as you did in the learning the offense, yeah, it's going to take you some time, but you're going to get it if you put in that same attention to detail, that same focus." But what's tough is that kid loves football more than anything in the world. He doesn't love history more than anything in the world. I think that makes it that's the difference between the classroom and the football field.

Alex:

That was like me when I was a kid. I wanted to play soccer more than anything. I couldn't wait to play football. I couldn't wait to learn math and history and English. I didn't realize or prioritize that probably till after I got out of high school and even into college or even early on when I was in college, I struggled and I told you about Scott Baumgardner. That was my wide receivers coach. He had that conversation with me like, "Hey man, you've done a lot of really good things here. How embarrassing would it be that you are not going to be able to play because you're academically ineligible?" And that was the moment where I was like, "Oh man, things need to change."

Alex:

I don't think I ever got underneath the 3.1 or 3.2 GPA for that academic all-conference. And it was like that was the turning point. That was another one of those Mr. Smith moments with coach Baumgardner, who when I think about people who have really had a positive influence on my life, I mean he's been one of the most influential people hands down, whether it was coaching me or having a positive influence or making me want to be become a coach or teacher and he's still one of my biggest mentors.

Nat:

Wow. Well Alex, this has just been amazing having you here because maybe you can sum up better than I can. Just where do you think we came to in terms of the difference and the similarities between teaching and coaching?

Alex:

I think that they are as close as you can get to being identical without, they're not identical. They're different, they're just maybe a few hairs of separation between what makes them the same. They're just, there's a little bit of, a little bit difference, they're not exactly the same, but they're very, very close. I will say they both fall under that blanket of education.

Nat:

What do you mean?

Alex:

You're learning in the classroom, you're learning on the field, but they're different avenues.

Nat:

And I think a meta message for this entire episode is the importance of having athletics programs, arts programs.

Alex:

Oh yeah, exactly. It's funny because I talk to our arts teachers all the time and their coach is in a different realm. I mean they're coaching talents and techniques that we, yeah, just in a different way too.

Nat:

It's absolutely true. It's absolutely true.

Alex:

The director of the school play is essentially just another version of our head coach. But different way to communicate to different types of students. I don't think he's going to go in, yelling at them for a... Oh maybe he will. I don't know, but.

Nat:

Well if they're not off the hook by week before curtain rises, if they're not off the hook-

Alex:

He can start putting a little bit of pressure in them, so.

Nat:

... Then you put the heat on, right?

Alex:

Yeah. There's a football coach named Chris Ault, he was the head coach at the University of Nevada. He's in the College Football Hall of Fame. He's the innovator of the Pistol Offense. When I was playing football at the University of Nevada, coach Hall, coach Jim Mastro, coach

Baumgardner and Chris Kanakas and Cameron Norcross, they went into a room together and they created this offense and I didn't realize it at the time that what they were doing was revolutionary in football. And I think back about like why I wanted to get into coaching. And yes, the comradery of teaching and working with the students, but those guys did something innovative that nobody else in the country had done.

Nat:

Explain.

Alex:

In creating this new offense. The Pistol Offense was brand new and revolutionary and people criticized it and critiqued it and made fun of it. And now everybody in the country runs it.

Nat:

Can you explain it? Is this something you [crosstalk 00:36:55].

Alex:

All they did was they took the running back and the quarterback and they moved the quarterback to four yards from the center and put the running back behind him. And it was something that nobody had done before. And it created so much to the new offense. I mean, and then all of a sudden they brought in Colin Kaepernick. I don't know you guys, everybody knows Colin Kaepernick and what we were running before we had Kaepernick and then what we were running after we had Kaepernick. I mean, it changed the game of football. And to me that was why, I mean, I idolized those coaches because of what they did.

Nat:

And they developed that as a team of coaches.

Alex:

Oh yeah. As a team of coaches, they were innovative. They took the game of football and they changed it. And John Ellinghouse and Mark Survey and Ed Garcia, the guys that I coached with now, not that we look at those coaches specifically, but that's what we do every week when we game plan, we try to be creative, we try to be innovative. We try to put our kids in the best position to do what they do best. And it's fun because it's creative and it's expressing its art in so many ways. That's it.

Nat:

Oh yeah. Sport as art. Absolutely. That's a whole other topic.

Alex:

That's the grand finale, right there.

Nat:

Beautiful. Grand finale. And to flourish at the end there. And the idea of harmony. We'll leave listeners with this notion of the importance of it's not about being the coach or the teacher and just being alone doing this. It's building the team, both the team of colleagues, teaching colleagues and coaching colleagues and also obviously building your passion team, building

your football team, building the team that's putting on Macbeth on the stage, right? You're building including the set designers and then honestly like that's what a school is too and that's another topic, but the idea [crosstalk 00:38:33].

Alex:

If you can build that camaraderie in the classroom, build that camaraderie on the field and the team environment, that's what creates the successful learning environment. That type of harmony.

Nat:

There we go and then you get the winning champions, you get the manners and everything. Just it's glorious from then on.

Alex:

Absolutely.

Nat:

Alex, wonderful to have you on this-

Alex:

Thank you so much for having me. I had a lot of fun.

Nat:

[crosstalk 00:38:51] a lot of fun for us too. Thank you.

Alex:

All right. I appreciate it.

Nat:

Awesome.

Speaker 1:

You've been listening to Reach. Teach. Talk. With Nat. If you'd like to recommend to guests for a future episode, you can send your suggestion or questions to nat@reachacademics.com.