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### Jon Nuttle: Master Teacher Interview

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**JON NUTTLE  
MASTER TEACHER INTERVIEW**

**Presented to  
Dr. Allan Miller  
Fort Hays State University**

**for  
Educational Research: Qualitative**

**by  
Cindy Nuttle  
Christina Payne**

**May 1, 1996**

## Chapter II

### Interview with Jon Nuttle

The years have been good to Jon Nuttle. After graduating from college in December of 1964, he found a job teaching science. Later, he began coaching several good students and in 1983, he coached the 1A Girls' State Championship Basketball Team. During this time he married, raised three girls and operated a farm.

Jon was born in Ransom, Kansas, but moved to a farm one mile west and one mile north of Arnold (a town just eight miles away from Ransom) when he was five. Arnold became his home for the next thirteen years. He attended both elementary and secondary school at Arnold and participated in the only two sports that were available to him--baseball in the spring and fall and basketball in the winter months. Even as a child, sports were important to him. At Arnold, a student only had to be in the fifth grade to play basketball, and he couldn't wait to begin.

Arnold was a small town. Jon's graduating class had only three people in it--he and two other boys. After they graduated from the school, the school closed and consolidated with the

Ransom school. Their class used to laugh and say that after they left, the school just couldn't bare to stay open. Once, after telling his high school coach, Willie Nicklin, that he wished that he could just once play on a team in which every player cared as much about winning as he did, his coach told him that he had never had a student who cared more about playing the game than Jon did. This coach left such a lasting impression on Jon that he knew after he went to college that he wanted to be a coach as well.

At first Jon didn't know where he wanted to go to college. His decision was soon made for him when the basketball coach at Pratt Community College offered him a scholarship to play basketball. Jon packed up his belongings and moved to Pratt in the fall of 1960 to begin college.

Jon attended Pratt Community College for two years and played basketball for the team. He was involved in an education club and played intramural baseball during his spare time at school. To pay his way through college he had to have a job. He had always loved horses and had had them on the farm in Arnold. To raise money, it seemed only natural that he would work with something that he knew about and understood so he

began to break horses for people for money. He received a few bruises doing this as well as money for an education.

When he first enrolled at Pratt Community College, he had decided that he wanted to major in math and coaching. Other people encouraged him to take math classes because, as they said, math was something that would never change. Two plus two would always and forevermore be four. This, of course, was true, but Jon soon realized that although it didn't change, it could be limiting in what type of job he could work at. He couldn't think of too many jobs besides teaching in which he could use a degree in math and if teaching didn't work out, he wanted something that he could use to find another career. He then gravitated toward the natural sciences--especially biology. He still liked the problem solving aspect of math, and he incorporated that into the sciences that he also found interesting. He liked the way he could incorporate a wide variety of things into learning the sciences--chemicals, math, plant life, animal life, etc.

After his two years at Pratt, he transferred to Fort Hays State University, or as it was known as then, Fort Hays State College. As part of his degree, he student taught at Russell High

School under the science teacher Don Chegwidden. (An odd twist is that Jon's daughter, Joni, also did her student teaching under Don Chegwidden.) Don was a good teacher who had a style that the students responded to well. He had a very relaxed, informal classroom in which he guided the students' learning. He wasn't one to lecture and then sit back and let the students do the work. He taught by guiding them through the material. Jon learned a lot from Don as a teacher. As a student teacher, he was scared to stand in front of the class and teach, but Don helped him through it all and taught him how to teach. Jon finished his degree at Fort Hays State in December of 1964. The classes at college were interesting and necessary and helped him understand the subject matter, but they didn't teach him how to teach the students. That was something that would only come with getting a job and becoming a teacher in a classroom.

Because it was the middle of the school year, there were only two job openings for science teachers. One was at a Newton Middle School and the other was at Rexford High School in Rexford, Kansas. Jon already knew that he didn't want to teach junior high students so he applied solely for the position at Rexford. He went out to interview and was offered the

position. As soon as he could, he and his wife moved to Colby, which is near Rexford. It wasn't very difficult to move then, all he had to do was hook his pickup truck to his 8x30 foot trailer and drag it to Colby.

While at Rexford, Jon had no coaching duties. He taught freshman science, biology, physics, and chemistry. As a science teacher, Jon was always able to maintain a disciplined classroom. He felt that the reason wasn't him as much as it was the subject itself. Some subjects, such as the life sciences, created interest in the subject naturally and by doing so created their own discipline. Also, because of the nature of the topic, many students were perhaps a little nervous and unsure in a science classroom.

This job was good, but short. At the end of the semester, the science position in Ransom, the town where he was born, opened. After interviewing, he was offered that position and accepted. This proved to be his last change in jobs.

At Ransom, he taught the same science classes that he had taught in Rexford, but finally he was also coaching. He assisted the boys' varsity basketball coach, coached the B-team boys' basketball team, (at this time the Ransom school did not have a

girls' basketball team) and coached the baseball team for two years. After two years, the head coach left, and Jon took the job of coaching the varsity team as well. After five years, the job that he loved ended. The school dropped the baseball program so he was no longer needed to coach that game, and he was fired from coaching the boys' basketball team. He was now out of coaching. Jon never knew the reason for his release from the coaching position, but he took it all in stride and was soon asked back.

He went back to coaching in 1975 as the girls' basketball coach. Basketball had always been his favorite sport to coach, and he was glad to be back in the game again. He continued coaching at Ransom until 1989 when he retired. At the time he was coaching girls' basketball, volleyball and track. He continued teaching the science classes at the high school, but he was tired and wanted to watch his youngest daughter, Cindy, play basketball and volleyball in college. But for a man who loved to coach, it was difficult to retire, and by 1990 he was back to coaching girls' basketball.

Things had changed during his short retirement. The basketball teams were no longer comprised of only the Ransom



students. Because of dwindling enrollment at the Utica High School and the Ransom High School, the two schools had joined together to field one basketball team. He knew when he agreed to become a coach again that he would have the experience that it would take to hold these two rival schools together to form one team.

After coaching only the girls' team for two years, he was asked to consider coaching the volleyball team again as well. Of course he accepted. The following year he was again asked to take over another coaching position. This time it was the boys' basketball team. This was the first time he had coached boys' basketball since he had been fired from it back in 1972. At first, this return to nearly full-time coaching was a challenge. After school during basketball season, he would practice with the teams for about four hours each night, and then on game nights he would sit through and coach four games. The second year that he coached the boys' and girls' teams, the job was a little more tiring. The third year (this year) he coached both teams, it was very tiring and too much. After this year he decided to retire again. This time for good.

Teams and players came and went, as they do for all

coaches, and just like all coaches, Jon had his favorites. Of course, the girls' team that took state in 1983 was a favorite. This group was a team that had what it took to be a winning team. All the players worked as a team both on and off the court. They were friends who sat together at lunch and worked hard on and off the court. On the court, there were only five good players. This may not sound like a winning team, but each of those players excelled at one necessary position on the court, and when they played together, the parts came together to form the necessary whole. The key word for that team was balance. Something that was odd about that team, something that a coach doesn't normally have, was one starter who was six feet tall and one girl on the bench who was six feet four inches tall. Except for this state team, Jon has never had a team in which all five players had what it took to carry their part of the team. There has also been the problem of jealousy on all of the other teams except the state team. Another of Jon's favorite teams was the first team that he coached as a varsity coach, and on that team was the player that he felt was the best boy that he has ever coached. Jim Schreiber worked harder than any other one student that Jon coached. He played hard and tried his best

to do what was asked of him.

One person that also remains memorable in Jon's coaching career was a student who went on to become a professional sports figure--although not in basketball. Nolan Cromwell moved into Ransom his junior year and played football and basketball and also ran track his junior and senior year. He excelled in all sports but went on to become a professional player for the Los Angeles Rams football team. Jon remembers Cromwell as being one of the better players on the team who worked hard.

Because Jon was born, raised, and then later taught in the same community, he had to deal with some things that teachers and coaches in a larger town would not even have to think about. Jon coached his younger brother, his three daughters, and one nephew. As with everything else that Jon does, he took this challenge with grace. While coaching his brother Ted if there was a problem, they would work it out as brothers do and continue on. They never had too many difficulties, because they both realized that while at school there was a different relationship than there was at home. They took it as a given. Jon didn't have a problem coaching his three daughters either.

They also realized that a different relationship had to exist at school to maintain a peaceful existence. He had to be more critical of his daughters, for their sakes as much as his. And thus kept the other players from complaining that he favored his daughters. His being extra critical also made his daughters better basketball players. They understood and did what was asked of them, even if most of the time it was a lot more than anyone else was asked. They realized it was the best for both, their dad and themselves. Basketball was as much a part of life to the Nuttle family as breathing was. It was discussed at school, at home around the dinner table, and in the family car. If one of the girls was corrected at school during practice, she wouldn't take it personally because it came from her father, she would take it constructively because it came from her coach. The saying that a family that plays together stays together was not lost on them.

Jon's nephew was the hardest to coach because of family politics. Instead of having just one family to deal with as there had been when he was coaching his brother or his daughters, there was his brother's family and his brother's wife's family as well as, grandpas and grandmas on both sides. Although it may

have been difficult, they handled it. Jon let everyone know ahead of time that Chad, the nephew, would not receive any special treatment or any worse treatment just because of the family relationship. Jon, if he felt a problem existed, also made sure that it was brought into the open and discussed so that it could be dealt with.

During his time as a coach, Jon had the opportunity to coach both sexes. Girls and boys are different, but on the court they all ran the same drills and procedures. At different times in his career Jon felt that one was easier to coach than the other. The most difficult part of coaching both teams at once was trying to remember forty numbers and names. When he came back to coaching in 1990, he had only one girl who had ever played for him before, so he had to completely start over and teach the drills and the patterns. The same thing occurred when he took on the boys' team three years later, only he did not have even one player who knew his style. Because, as was mentioned, this was the time when the Utica and Ransom basketball programs were joining together, the players had had different coaches over the time, and all had learned different ideas and techniques. Jon said that they had to compromise on

how to do things, and in the end it worked out, and they did it his way.

At the very beginning of the girls' basketball program, the girls were easier to coach because they had not had a program before. They worked hard because they wanted so badly to play. The girls became harder to coach when they began to take the program for granted. The easiest people to coach were those who worked hard and tried to do what Jon asked of them at all times.

Feelings toward school and sports have changed over the years. Jon has always felt that athletics played a very important role in education as did all extra-curricular activities. Athletics can not only teach the students to compete and depend on themselves, but they can also teach them to use their abilities to develop a framework of a team. Athletics help to instill the belief that the team is the most important part, but the individual must work independently of the team as well as with the team to make the dream of winning a reality. Even though winning isn't everything, it is an important aspect of the game. To win, the player must give everything they have. If the individual gives all they have and still doesn't win the game,

they still have done all that they can do. Athletics can also teach the students not to accept or enjoy losing. The only time that athletics become a problem for students is when the student athlete becomes more important than the whole school. When a student began not to get their work finished or began to receive special privileges because they were an individual on a team was when athletics have become a problem. Athletics can be an important part of an education, but not the most important part.

After teaching his initial six years, Jon decided to go back to Fort Hays State University to obtain his masters degree in administration. He chose administration because he felt this was one of the few ways to advance in a school system. Although he has never worked on an administrative level, he will never rule it out as an alternative.

Then in 1980 he went back to Fort Hays State University again. This time it was to work on his guidance and counseling degree. He didn't get his degree in counseling, but he has enough hours to have a second masters degree. All he would have to do would be to take the required comps. This time his decision to take the courses that he chose were based upon an

opening. In the late seventies, the guidance counseling position was vacated. The administration at that time asked him if he would be interested in taking on the position and returning to school to complete the necessary class work. He agreed and went back to school. This college work was the most interesting and Jon feels the most valuable and practical to him. What he learned he could see an application for. As a guidance counselor in the Ransom High School he has the opportunity to help students choose their course of study after graduation. He doesn't recommend coaching to any of them unless they truly enjoy the game and are certain that that is what they want to do. Although it has been rewarding for Jon to coach, it has been tough at times as well. More and more, parents were trying to tell him how to do what he knew how to do. It was good to see the parents involved, but sometimes they became too involved. Teaching was very rewarding as well as very individualistic just like any other profession. Some people would find it satisfying and rewarding, and others would not. It would, of course, depend upon the person.

Students' attitudes have changed toward sports over the years. At one time, they were excited and felt proud to be on a



team. Today, many take the fact for granted and do not work as hard because they know that they will always be on the team and that the team will always be there no matter what. Jon wishes that it wasn't like this, but he truly feels that it is.

Jon has always been a high school teacher and coach. He never wanted to teach or coach at a higher level. He has always enjoyed the high school aged students and probably always will. During his years in college he has taken several classes, but none of them were coaching classes. He learned how to coach by playing the game and by being a coach. Jon feels now that it probably would have helped him if he had taken a coaching class, but it never fit into his program during college. Even without the training, he managed to lead his teams to several victories and state tournaments.

While coaching, the girls' team won the state championship in 1983; the baseball team was a state participant in 1969; the volleyball team was a state participant in 1989 and the track team has had a state participant for the last twelve consecutive years. In eight years (1967-1972, 1993-1996), Jon compiled a 91-73 record as a boys' basketball coach. As a girls' basketball coach for nineteen years (1974-1989, 1990-1996), he compiled a

record of 259-145. As a volleyball coach for twelve years (1981-1989, 1993-1996), he has a 192-141 record. No records were available for Jon's 5 years as a baseball coach (1967-1972).

As a coach, Jon feels that the single most important thing that he did was to stop trying to make each player a complete player. Instead, he taught them to find their talents and develop them to their fullest extent while still working on their weaknesses. By doing this, each player could excel in one area or more and be a good player. Jon had learned that when all of these players who excelled in one or more areas came together and played as a team, games could be won.

The people who influenced Jon's coaching styles included his high school coach, Willie Nucleon, and University of California Los Angeles coach John Wooden. Wooden coached his basketball team to ten national championships. Jon related with many of Wooden's philosophies including: having the players stay out on the court instead of going into the locker room before the game so they could practice a few more shots and not going into the locker room before the game to give inspirational speeches. Jon used these techniques while he was coaching and they worked well for him too.

Jon has had a successful career as a coach. Along the way he has received several awards from Scholastic Coach Magazine for the number of wins that he has had and in 1983 he was named Area Coach of the Year by the Hays Daily News. Jon is proud of his accomplishments but humble. He said that receiving Area Coach of the Year was an honor, but it was an unwritten rule that the coach of the team that won state was always named Area Coach of the Year. Jon felt that probably the coach of the team who was 0-20 worked just as hard as, if not harder than, the coach whose team won the state championship.

Over the years, Jon has touched many lives during his career as a coach, but he feels that he had the greatest impact on students in the classroom. Students who go on to college will often come back and tell him that what they learned in his science classes were of a great value to them in their higher education. Because of this response he is very proud of the work he has done in the classroom as well as the work he has done on the basketball court.

Basketball will always be both a love and a hobby for Jon Nuttle. His family will continue to discuss the local and professional teams around the dinner table and in conversation,

but the time has come for the man who has coached so many young people how to develop themselves into an active person to retire. He will be greatly missed but yet remembered by all who had him for a coach and a teacher for what he brought to the game and the classroom and his calm practical way of managing a room full of students both on and off the court.