

Team must come first: Ghisetti selected as Honor Coach

Neil Tarpey/The Times-Standard

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A select group

Troy Ghisetti recently became the 12th member of a select group.

Only a dozen coaches from the Humboldt-Del Norte Conference -- in all sports combined -- have been named as North Coast Section Honor Coaches.

Ghisetti, Arcata High School's head baseball coach the past 13 years and the school's athletic director, was notified in May that he had been chosen as an Honor Coach.

"For me, it's an accomplishment for all the players who have done a nice job at Arcata High School," said Ghisetti.

The award was presented to him before his team's final contest -- the NCS Class 2A title game -- at Albert Field in San Rafael.

"It was nice receiving the award at a championship game with my team," said Ghisetti.

The eligibility criteria for nominees for an Honor Coach award include: quality (being an outstanding coach), length of service (having coached the sport for at least five years at the interscholastic level), maintaining professional standards of conduct, and contributing to the school and the community.

The nominee's name is put forth by a coach or administrator within the NCS and then evaluated by the Honor Coach committee, according to H-DN commissioner Charlie Lakin.

Although one boy's coach and one girl's coach may be selected yearly for each fall, winter and spring sport, in some years no selections are made in a sport.

What former players have to say

In regards to Ghisetti's coaching ability, several former players appreciated how he prepared them for games, put the team ahead of individuals, and really cared.

"He knew how to structure a good practice," said Greg Fisher, who played for Ghisetti in 2004 and 2005, and is now pitching in his second season with the Humboldt Crabs. Besides "everyone getting their hacks," defense and strategy were a top focus, according to Fisher.

Fisher played for Ghisetti before moving up to College of the Redwoods and CSU Monterey Bay.


"He really pushes the players," added Fisher. "I saw the passion he had, and I wanted to be a better player. He takes an average team and brings them to their potential."

Ghisetti considers practice to be invaluable.

"You want to get better every single day," he said. "And it's the quality of the practice that's important. So I'm excited and ready to go."

Another Crabs pitcher, 2006 AHS alumni Alex Leisten, was impressed by Ghisetti's ability to assess talent in forming a team.

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"He finds the best spot (for players)," said Leisten. "He has a good eye, seeing what people can and can't do, and then building a team around that."

Another H-DN baseball coach/athletic director, Mack High's Dustin Dutra, noted Ghisetti's professional conduct and ability to address the mental aspects of the game.

"One thing that makes him such a good coach is that he has very high expectations, not only of himself but of his players," said Dutra. "His teams are mentally tough and well-prepared."

"The McKinleyville-Arcata rivalry is very competitive, regardless of which team has the better overall talent that particular year."

What does Ghisetti appreciate most about his fellow H-DN coaches?

"In the H-DN there's a lot of respect for each other," he said. "We value sportsmanship, we don't try to run up the score."

The team must come first

Ghisetti believes that the team must come first.

"I hold my kids to a very high standard, not just our code of conduct," said Ghisetti. "But I've had to boot a few kids."

"The players don't always know how good they can be. I tell them that the team is a store and we're selling a product to the people who watch us. We want the players to buy into the product."

Dutra explained that Ghisetti's role as an athletic director requires him to focus on all of the school's programs, not just the baseball team. But an advantage of being one of the school's coaches is

that it simplifies communication in that sport for the A.D.

When it comes to communicating with his players, particularly in practice, the Ghisetti humor plays a role.

"He makes it really fun for everyone because you bond with him, not only as a player but as a friend," said D.J. Hancock, who played on the 2008 team that finished 17-9. "He's always having fun, but you always know when it's time to get serious and get to work."

"If you meet him halfway he helps us to the max," said Hancock.

Maybe the Ghisetti humor could be considered wacky.

"He's probably the goofiest coach I've ever had," said Fisher. "I think he drinks too much coffee in the morning and it stays with him all day."

Coaches who influenced Ghisetti

Like any excellent coach, Ghisetti brings to the table things that he has learned from other coaches.

When he joined the Arcata High baseball team, then coached by Dennis Pontoni and Al Figone, Ghisetti's first role on the team was "the designated runner."

No, not a pinch runner in actual games, but the glorious job of chasing down balls in batting practice and running them back to the coach on the pitcher's mound.

Ghisetti eventually became the starting second baseman for Arcata, where he graduated in 1986.

What did Ghisetti learn from Pontoni and Figone?

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"Definitely the value of discipline and hard work," said Ghisetti.

Also, the use of video as a teaching tool, as Figone recorded practices and games, and reviewed the tapes with players, breaking down the situations and discussing strategies.

Ghisetti later played at College of the Redwoods for the Corsairs' winningest and longest-tenured baseball coach, Tom Giacomini.

Then it was off to study at Humboldt State, where Ghisetti fulfilled his physical education practicum requirements by serving as an assistant for the Jacks' softball coaching legend Frank Cheek during the 1992-93 season.

Cheek played ball with Troy's father, Frank Ghisetti, who for decades has continued to volunteer for the Arcata little leagues.

Ghisetti is the third of four children born to Frank and Connie, who passed away five years ago from cancer.

What were Ghisetti's responsibilities while Cheek supervised him?

"There were about 15 things that he had to do," said Cheek, such as "preparing the team for practice, scouting reports, strategy, and he had to give a presentation. And he helped me get the field ready."

How did Ghisetti do as his assistant?

"He did a good job," said Cheek, "or I would have gotten rid of him."

Ghisetti's players know the value of his coaching pedigree.

"The thing that makes him such a good coach is his experience learning from other coaches," said Hancock. "He has the desire, and is willing to help kids."

Learning to be a better coach

Learning from other coaches is an ongoing process for Ghisetti.

"I don't think that I'm much better. That's why I go to coaching clinics every year and pick coaches' brains," he said.

Every third week of November, Ghisetti attends a top-notch coaching clinic held annually in Tahoe. Ghisetti noted the outstanding quality, mentioning that five years ago the main presenter was Augie Garrido, the University of Texas' head coach, who led the Longhorns to NCAA titles in both 2002 and 2005.

After more than a decade as the Tigers' head coach, what does Ghisetti need to get a handle on?

"Refining what you know. Learning about strategy. Rolling the dice," he said.


For example, Ghisetti always eschewed the idea of a runner stealing home. But when a clinic pointed out the value, the Arcata skipper acknowledged the wisdom of his assistant coach Justin Kosinski and told him to incorporate it into Tiger practices.

What does he consider to be his strengths as a head coach?

"Getting to know the kids, allowing the team to succeed, allowing them to succeed," he said.

What does he get to know about his players?

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"You get to learn each of your players' personality, character and see their potential," he said.

And in terms of meeting his own potential, Ghisetti is quick to give credit to his wife, Kristie.

"My wife takes a lot of stress off me, taking care of the kids and doing the daily stuff. She's been behind me," said Ghisetti.

Kristie and Troy have two children, Jordan, 14 and Ryan, 11.

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