

42 years on fire

I had previously written this blog to celebrate the retirement of **Mike Krzyzewski** and his illustrious career at Duke University. However, his young team just keeps winning and winning and are now in the Final Four. When a team comes together and starts pulling in the right direction, anything is possible.

Coach K is wildly regarded as one of the best basketball coaches of all time. While at Duke, where he coached since 1980, he and his teams have won five national championships, 13 Final Four appearances while winning the ACC tournament 15 times and the ACC regular season title 13 times.



For me, however, my admiration of Coach K has little to do with the titles and his team's many accomplishments. Coach K has always been, and always will be, my favorite coach because of his connection with the student-athletes who play for him.

Sure, some will argue that Coach K has a dirty mouth and a grumpy demeanor. While he's not afraid to let a few F-bombs fly out of his mouth during a game, what makes him special is the way he leads and instills upon his talented individual players to play tough in-your-face, man-to-man defense, and more importantly, to play together as a team.

I will never forget these special moments:

- In 1992, Duke faced Kentucky in the annual March Madness tournament. Duke was down by 1 point with only 2.1 seconds in overtime. Coach K diagramed a play that had one of his best players, Grant Hill, inbound the basketball and throw a pass nearly the entire length of the court to Christian Laettner. As the clock expired, Laettner's shot was dead perfect and Duke was headed to another Final Four. According to a 2002 poll compiled by USA Today, this game is **ranked number one on the list of the greatest NCAA tournament games** of all time.

- Duke winning back-to-back National Championships in the 1990-91 and 1991-92 seasons. Coach K's teams may not have possessed the most talent on the basketball court, but they played intelligent, team basketball
- My absolute favorite Coach K and Duke memory is the "**miracle minute**" of 2001. Duke was playing at the University of Maryland and found themselves down 10 points with only 55 seconds to play in regulation. Coach K gathered his team during a commercial break and spoke to each individual player and then collectively as a group. From my vantage point watching the game on TV, I could see the fire in his eyes and his intensity. When play started again, Duke guard Jay Williams scored 8 points in 15 seconds. Another player tied the game by hitting two clutch free-throws to send the game into overtime. In overtime, Duke's defense stifled Maryland so badly that they didn't score a point in the last minute. My favorite Duke player of all time, Shane Battier, sealed the win with a ferocious block.
- Lastly, nearly 100 of Coach K's former players were in attendance for his last home game against the University of North Carolina. To me, this is a profound testament for the love and respect his players had for him.

For those of you who know me, you know that I'm short. And I'm definitely not a basketball player. However, if I had a son, I would want him to play for Coach K. Even if he just sat at the end of the bench and never played a minute, just being around Coach K for four years would make him a better person. It would be awesome and special for us both.

Thank you, Coach K. I'm slapping the floor of the basketball court (actually, the carpet in my office) with both hands as I get into my defensive position. Good luck against Carolina, anyone but Carolina!

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