



THE HOOP SCOOP

Strengthening Community Through Sport



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COACHES



Coach Jim Fitzmaurice is the heart of what makes Great Falls Basketball a meaningful experience for players and families. His positivity, dedication, and knack for making every player feel seen and valued ensure that his players leave the court with much more than basketball skills—they leave with lifelong memories. Thank you, Coach Jim, for everything you do!

Q: What's been your proudest moment as a coach so far?

A: Josie's team (my daughter) won a championship not too long ago. However, I am proudest whenever every player gets to score a bucket and we win or lose with poise.

Q: Favorite basketball movie?

A: Hoosiers

Q&A with Jim Fitzmaurice

Great Falls Basketball is powered by dedicated volunteers who share their love for the game with young players, and few embody that spirit more than Jim Fitzmaurice. A former Commissioner of GF Hoops and currently serving on the board as Secretary, Jim has made a lasting impact both on and off the court. Coach Jim exemplifies the values that make GF Hoops special. We sat down with him to learn more about his coaching journey, philosophy, and favorite basketball moments.

Q: What inspired you to start coaching youth basketball?

A: Watching former GF Hoops board member Philip Nickles graciously and expertly coach my son Jacob when he was in elementary school. I believed that if I could make an impact a fraction of what Philip did that year, I knew it would be worth it.

Q: How would you describe your coaching style?

A: Championships are great, but success boils down to just two questions I ask during each practice and game: 1) Did you get better at the sport of basketball? 2) Did you have fun? If all of my players love the sport of basketball, that will pay a lifetime of dividends.

Q: What's your go-to phrase or motto that your players hear all the time?

A: Any John Wooden quote. I love, "If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?"

Q: Do you believe in playing every kid equally, or do you lean towards winning when it comes to game time?

A: One of the reasons parents love GF Hoops is that the rules require playing equity. A good strategy and plan will help you achieve that while giving your team its best chance of winning.

Q: Dream pick-up opponent: MJ or LeBron? **Q:** Advice to a youth coach?

A: MJ, all the way!

A: YouTube is your friend.



Spotlight on Matthew DeVito: Youth Coach Extraordinaire



Matthew DeVito is no stranger to the courts of Great Falls Basketball. A senior at Langley High School, Matthew has been part of the program since moving to Virginia in the 5th grade. Over the years, he's transitioned from player to referee and, most notably, to youth coach—a role he's embraced since the 9th grade. His journey through the program has been one of dedication, positivity, and impact, making him a standout figure in the Great Falls Basketball community.

In early 2024, Matthew was honored with The Live Like Lilly – Be Positive – Award, an accolade that recognizes individuals who, like the late Lilly Joy Kishore, embody making a difference in the world through their positive actions and soulful kindness. Matthew's approach to coaching reflects these qualities, as he strives to instill a sense of joy and sportsmanship in his young players.

"I started refereeing in 8th grade and coaching in 9th grade," Matthew shares. "My favorite part of being a coach is finding the positive after each game. Ten-year-olds are competitive, and winning is everything to them. I remember this from my own days in elementary school. As a coach, I try to shift the main focus from the scoreboard to how we are playing and improving as a team."

For Matthew, it's not about championship titles (though he admits he'd love to win one someday); it's about **ensuring his players walk away with memories of a fun and positive season.** "I hope my players remember our seasons as being fun and positive," he says. His dedication to emphasizing growth, teamwork, and enjoyment over results embodies the spirit of Great Falls Basketball and resonates deeply with the program's values.

Matthew's commitment to his players, his positivity, and his passion for basketball make him a shining example of what Great Falls Basketball is all about. We're proud to have him as part of our coaching family and look forward to seeing the impact he continues to make, both on and off the court.



Matthew with his 5th grade team last year. Beyond his coaching achievements, Matthew is a true advocate for youth sports. "I would encourage anyone who loves sports to apply to be a youth coach. It is a fun way to stay involved in hoops while helping out in the community,"

GF Hoops Youth Leadership Scholarship – 2025

Great Falls Basketball is continually interested in the development of our youth. To that end, in 2015 we introduced the Matthew Poyner Youth Leadership Scholarship. The scholarship is designed to help college-bound high school seniors in our program defray some first-year college expenses.

This scholarship is named in honor of Matthew Poyner, who passed away suddenly in his sleep 2015. He was a beloved member of our community and a student at Langley High School. He was a young man of great intelligence tempered with a great empathy for everyone he met; people were drawn to his optimism and love for life. Matt was dedicated to his studies, his family, his friends, and his community. He was also a believer in giving back to his community and he served Great Falls Basketball for multiple years as a player, referee and coach. For all of these reasons, we have named this scholarship after him.

There will be four \$1,000.00 scholarships awarded this year to four deserving seniors. Any high school senior currently in our program as a player, assistant coach, head coach, or referee may apply for this scholarship opportunity.

The award will be given to high school seniors who have distinguished themselves as leaders and dedicated members of the GF Hoops Community.

Look for a future announcement from gfhoops for links to the application and deadlines!

Fun Fact: The longest basketball game ever lasted 78 minutes (6 overtimes) between Syracuse and UConn in 2009.

Who's the Coach? Moms, Dads, and Teens Take the Bench

When it comes to coaching younger players, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. The two most common coach archetypes for youth teams—parent coaches (the Moms and Dads) and high school-age coaches (the Teens)—each bring their own unique flavor to the sidelines. While their styles may differ, both can have a lasting impact on their pint-sized protégés. So, who's better? Let's break it down.

The Parent Coach: Your Sideline CEO

Parent coaches come with a distinct advantage: experience. They know how to plan a practice, run drills, and (mostly) get kids to listen. They often emphasize fundamentals and teamwork, and they're not afraid to toss in a life lesson or two.

"Coach Sarah always says, 'How you practice is how you play,'" says 9-year-old Ben. "I don't know what that means, but she says it a lot."

Parent coaches can be nurturing, treating players like their own kids, which is great—until they are coaching their own kids. Cue the awkward talks on the car ride home. **"My dad says, 'You're better than that!' when I miss a shot," shares an anonymous 5th grader. "Thanks, Dad, super helpful."** Still, parent coaches provide structure and a sense of accountability that kids need to develop discipline both on and off the court.



The Teen Coach: Your Big Kid Buddy

High school coaches, on the other hand, bring the energy and relatability of someone who was just in the younger players' shoes. For little ones, a teen coach is part mentor, part older sibling, and part superhero. **"Coach Jake can dunk!" 8-year-old Lily gushes. "He's the coolest person alive."** Teens bring fresh ideas to practices, often creating fun games that kids can't wait to try.

However, teen coaches can be a little less, shall we say, organized. **"Coach Maya spent the whole practice teaching us how to do trick shots," says 10-year-old Lucas. "It was awesome... until we lost the game 42-4."** While teens might lack the years of experience that parent coaches have, they excel at making the game fun and inspiring younger kids to stick with the sport.

The Verdict: Both Have Their Place

So, who's the better coach? That depends on what you're looking for. Adults are ideal for teaching fundamentals and instilling discipline, while youth coaches bring fun, energy, and the ability to connect with players on their level. If you're lucky enough to have both on the sidelines, you're hitting the jackpot.

At the end of the day, whether it's a clipboard-toting dad shouting plays or a teenage phenom showing off their crossover, the best coach is the one who makes the game memorable. **As 11-year-old Emma puts it, "It doesn't matter who's coaching, as long as we get popsicles after the game."**

Building More Than Skills: The Life Lessons of Youth Basketball

Youth basketball is about more than just learning the game—it's about developing valuable life skills that last far beyond the season. Here are five key lessons players gain on the court.

- 1) Teamwork and Collaboration:** success in basketball requires players to work together toward a common goal, teaching the value of cooperation and trust.
- 2) Handling Adversity:** missed shots and tough losses help players learn resilience and how to keep a positive attitude when faced with challenges.
- 3) Discipline and Responsibility:** showing up to practices, following through on commitments, and maintaining focus builds habits that benefit kids in all areas of life.
- 4) Communication Skills:** players learn how to express themselves effectively—whether calling plays, giving encouragement, or asking for help.
- 5) Joy and Passion:** basketball fosters a love of the game, encourages kids to find joy in what they do, and emphasizes having fun over focusing solely on winning.

This season, let's celebrate the lessons kids are learning on and off the court—skills that will help them succeed far beyond basketball!

Did You Know?

LeBron is the only player in NBA History to score over 10,000 points, grab 10,000 rebounds, and dish out 10,000 assists.



Sportsmanship: Why It Matters

In sports, good sportsmanship is just as important as physical skills—it's essential for the development of life skills like teamwork, perseverance, discipline, and respect. Coaches, parents, and athletes all play a role in fostering sportsmanship by modeling positive behavior, teaching respect for the game, and encouraging humility, self-control, and accountability. Through sports, young athletes can learn critical life lessons such as handling adversity, embracing failure, and developing resilience.

Sportsmanship goes beyond just playing by the rules—it's about creating a culture of mutual respect, where athletes show courtesy to teammates, opponents, coaches, and officials. Athletes who embody sportsmanship maintain a positive attitude, even in defeat, and encourage others to do the same. This kind of behavior not only benefits the individual player but strengthens the entire team dynamic. It's also a reminder that the true value of sports lies in personal growth and the pursuit of excellence, not just in winning.

By fostering good sportsmanship, we help athletes understand the importance of accountability and integrity, ensuring they carry these values with them in every competition and aspect of their lives. The responsibility to teach and model sportsmanship falls on everyone involved in the sports environment—coaches, parents, athletes, and fans alike. When we actively reinforce the principles of respect, discipline, and teamwork, we help build a positive culture where the joy of the game and its life lessons are truly appreciated.

This article was originally posted by Nicola Leach on July 23, 2020, at [AWP Now](#)



Live Like Lilly Award: Honoring Sportsmanship, Joy & Kindness

Positive sportsmanship is at the heart of Great Falls Basketball, fostering teamwork, respect, and joy on and off the court. The Live Like Lilly Award was created to honor the legacy of Lilliana Joy Kishore, a remarkable young woman who embodied these values in every aspect of her life.

Lilly and her family were deeply rooted in the GF Hoops community, serving as a player, referee, and coach for many years. She was a shining example of selflessness, positivity, and soulful kindness. Lilly's infectious love for the game, her teammates, and her community left an indelible mark on all who knew her. Tragically, her time with us was cut short in 2021, just after she graduated college.

One of the defining aspects of Lilly's life was her mother's pre-game advice to "play with Joy," a heartfelt nod to Lilly's middle name and a reminder to approach every moment on the court with enthusiasm and positivity. This simple yet profound sentiment became a hallmark of Lilly's life and inspired the creation of the Live Like Lilly Award.

Each year, this award recognizes players who demonstrate exceptional sportsmanship, encourage their teammates, and radiate positivity—players who, like Lilly, focus on lifting others up and bringing joy to the game, regardless of wins or losses. Coaches, referees, and members of the GF Hoops community nominate individuals who embody what youth sports are truly about.



Winners of the Live Like Lilly Award are honored at the GF Hoops Championship Weekend with a special ceremony and plaque, ensuring their contributions to their teams and community are celebrated.

Let us continue to honor Lilly's legacy by encouraging our players to "Live Like Lilly, Be Positive, and Play With Joy."

Fun Fact: In 2006, astronauts aboard the International Space Station played a basketball game in zero gravity!