

REC PLAYMAKER: NATHAN STOUGH

Participating in youth recreation programs through the City of Tempe is more than just a fun family activity. It teaches new skills, inspires ambition, and provides a foundation for youth to explore their interests and pursue their passions. Nathan Stough, a former participant in the City of Tempe Youth Sports Program, found exactly that when he joined a flag football team eight years ago. Now, Stough is the varsity football coach at Tempe Preparatory Academy, his alma mater.



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“I was enrolled in one of the first flag football programs that Coach Keyon [Cornejo] began. It’s cool how that process began so early.”

Once Stough realized his passion for the sport, he began to seek out other opportunities to get involved. Recalling his experience playing flag football, he asked to volunteer as an assistant coach with the City of Tempe, and later went back to Tempe Preparatory Academy for other prospects. As an assistant coach for the junior high football team, Stough helped the team win the championship with an undefeated season.

“I wasn’t always the biggest player, so I had to make up for that with my passion and my drive. I was extremely coachable [as a player], and I was always trying to learn as much as I could. One of the reasons why I have been so successful [as a coach] was because I can connect with the players and I know what they are feeling. I have a better position than a coach who has been out of the game for so long.”

Of course, Stough’s proximity in age to the players is also a perk. His ability to relate to the players as a relatively young coach creates a special relationship between him and the players.

“The players have a different level of respect for me. It’s a unique relationship. Because I have the attribute where I can relate to them and have a different type of relationship –they respect me as if I was a team captain. That’s something that I think is really good and it helps me be a better coach than if I didn’t have that attribute.”

Stough’s experiences as a player, volunteer assistant, and now varsity coach have shaped his coaching technique and style. He credits his success to the aphorisms of his former coaches.

“I had a coach who said ‘one mess up, we all mess up.’ I took that and applied it to everything – when I played, when I coached junior high, and now when I coach at the varsity level. Something my varsity coach always implemented in us was passion, discipline, and courage, which has helped me become a leader on the team. As a coach, the best way to learn is being a player first – those two go hand-in-hand.”

Without a doubt, Stough’s personal goals for the future revolve around football. Based on

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his experiences, he aims to continue working as a coach rather than as a player.

“Because of the fact that I knew I wasn’t going to play in the NFL someday, my work ethic really got me in a place where I love football so much. If I can’t play it at a higher level, I want to be around it, I want to coach it. I see myself being a coach for the long-term.”

Given that Stough started his football career through the City of Tempe, it is only natural for him to end up back where he started. He attributes his success to the relationships he formed and the skills he acquired during his time with Coach Keyon at the City of Tempe.

“I have to give credit to Coach Keyon because without him, I would not have loved the game as much as I did. That flag football team started it all for me. Coach Keyon gave me all the opportunities to become a better coach, expand my love for the game and help me get to the level I am right now. If I didn’t have the flag football experience with Keyon, I wouldn’t have had the experience to get the varsity job or the junior high job back in the day.”

With a strong passion for the sport and a dedication to working with young players, Stough finds the experience incredibly rewarding.

“One of the biggest things is the passion for the game. [It is rewarding] to be able to see the young players develop not just as players but also as men, and to experience the same joys and the attributes that come with football. Football is a way for young boys to become young men as they learn leadership, teamwork, and everything you need to learn in the job force.”

Stough’s unique coaching style and overall outlook of the game have contributed to his success as a football coach. His transition from being a player to a varsity coach has provided a unique perspective where he can relate to the players and encourage personal development. He views the sport as a stepping stone to bigger opportunities, whether football-related or something entirely different.

“Football isn’t be all end all. It’s one step getting you ready for life. It’s one step into what the real world is like today, and it’s a joy. It’s an outlet for young men to be able to go out and be a team and exercise and have fun. It’s just a joy to be around [the game]. The atmosphere of football is such a joy and it’s so thrilling. There’s nothing better than watching these guys score a touchdown. It brings so much joy and it’s self-fulfilling.”