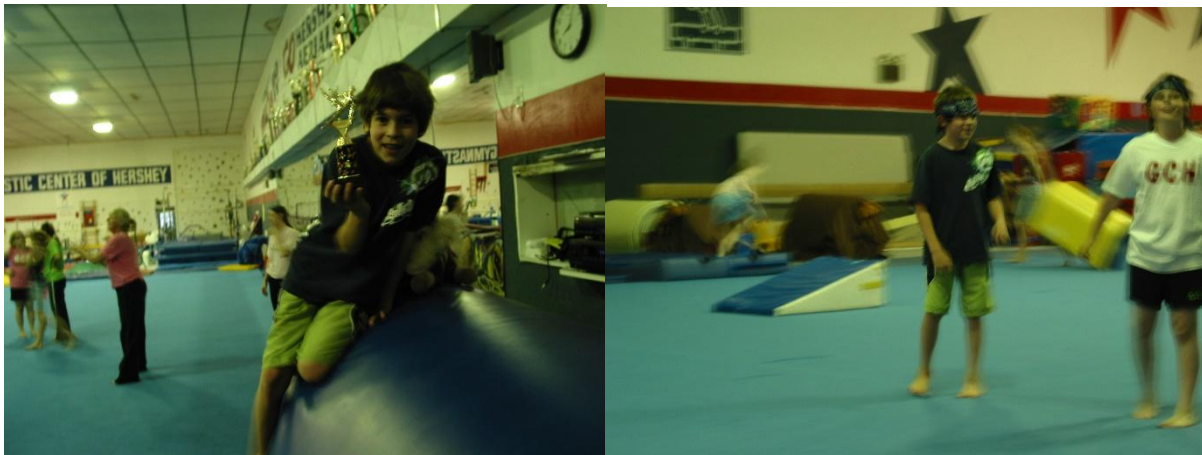


Seeking My #1 Coach

Joseph J. Wunderlich IV

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Ever since I was young I have always enjoyed jumping around like nobody's business. When my mom would take me to the playground in kindergarten I would climb up onto the big wooden train and jump off, scaring the other children's mothers as my mom had to explain, "It's fine, he always does this..." at least that's how I imagine the conversation might have sounded like. Even today not much has changed. Anyway, in elementary school I signed up to practice at the gymnastics center of Hershey (pictures below). The coach I had there was an older man in his 60s who was very flexible and had a history in competitive gymnastics as an athlete. He was mellow and kind but didn't take the initiative to hone each student's skills even though this was a small class, though we were only young kids so it can be hard to discipline high energy kids who want to start doing flips and tricks like action movie heros right off. Overall this coach was average. Often an older women (left picture wearing the pink shirt) would substitute when our main coach was not in. She also had a history as a competitive gymnast and would later teach at the second gym I practice at. She was the first person to teach me how to preform a standing front flip and still teaches to this day.



Later when I was an early teenager (6th-7th grade) I was less interested in gymnastics and had just begun practicing parkour, which is similar, but more focused on jumping and climbing. This was around my first year at a new, private school. My gym teacher Mr. C was a martial artist and had a daughter involved in a gymnastics school called Accelerations Gymnastics Academy. When he caught word that I was interested in parkour he mentioned a parkour class that gathers on Thursday nights. I signed up as soon as I could. This class had no formal teacher, it was more of a free-for-all where you could jump around on the equipment. Apparently this class existed because several parents had kids who were as crazy as I was and loved to jump around but needed a safe place to do so. This class was not on the gym website, but there was an open gym on Saturdays that was nearly 100 people running a muck. I obviously chose the Thursday parkour open gym. There were about 4 other people in this class on my first day, all older than I was for once; two sixteen year old wrestlers who happened to be brothers, Jesse and

Leo, some 200 cm tall basketball player who happened to be friends with the brothers, a kid named Porter who was about my age and height but could run up a wall and backflip off of it (I'm not making this up), and a short, stocky spanish kid who didn't speak english. Jessie was the first person to talk to me. He shook my hand and introduced me to himself and his friends. He told me all about how he learned parkour from watching youtube videos of famous tracer David Belle, and his "philosophy" about parkour or something. He took the time every Thursday for about 6 weeks to teach me the basics and stuck with me until I got them all perfectly. After a while I began to see myself jumping noticeably higher and reaching new heights I never thought I could reach. After taking this class for about 2 years I was jumping roof to roof like a stunt double in a james bond movie.

Soon after I turned 14 he had decided to leave the class to practice wrestling for his school team full time. I said goodbye and continued to practice what he taught me every day. Stretching and meditating. I owe a great deal of who I am today to him. He was a great coach and a great friend.

For a while It was just Leo, Porter, and myself, though we eventually outgrew our gym and we went our separate ways. It was time to go. I left because I was beginning to have back problems from working nonstop without resting, porter started MMA, and Leo had to study for high school graduation. It was the end of the prime time of my parkour career so to speak.

Between my parkour hiatus, I tried out several gyms around the country. Some in PA and one in California that was once again just a class of ten 6th graders where I was the oldest. The instructor was just a short 30 year old man and his 18 year old son, neither of them did much at all. I think I might have made the instructor mad because all the kids listened to me instead of him, they saw me doing some turning flips and wanted to learn what I was doing more. I practically ended up teaching that class.

It would be several years until I began parkour or gymnastics again officially.

Verdict on Jesse Campanella

Despite only being a few years older than me, he taught me better than most teachers I've ever had , it could have been because we were closer in age, making it easier to relate to him but I believe it was more than that. I really looked up to him because he taught me more than just how to jump around fashionably, he taught me how to treat women correctly, study habits, etc. His teachings really stuck with me longer than anyone else. I actually practice the stretches we did together almost every day, to this day. I'll never forget him.

Initiative: 10/10 **Social Skills:** 9/10 **Creativity:** 6/10 **Teaching Experience:** 7/10

This next part of the story is not in chronological order, this is simply where I transition to basketball instead of gymnastics.

Back in Elementary school I took a basketball camp for 3 summers in a row with the famous EC basketball coach Bob Schlosser. On my first day I walked into a crowded gym at the Elizabethtown high school, worried this would be another case of the 100:1 student teacher ratio, but I was impressed at how well Mr. Schlosser maintained the class each day, making every day exciting and never having any periods of time where you are just sitting around wondering “duh.... wat do I do next? By having sub-groups where another separate coach would take charge, in much the same fashion that LCBC (the church I attend each Sunday) has life groups of 6-12 people that you are familiar with each day. I was always engaged and I would take the class again if it were for older kids, in fact it was so fun I’ve even considered volunteering as a coach, that it a different subject entirely. I’ve also taken a basketball class at collage my first simester



last year (2014) which made me love basketball again.

Verdict on Bob Schlosser

Coach Schlosser’s coaching method is one of my favourites for two reasons. Firstly, he manages a mass of kids in an organized but not constricting or linear way, having the mass of children devide into separate, indivudually coached groups, but coming back together for larger group activities so that no one is ever unengaged in some way. Secondly, unlike some coaches that always seem like they have their hands full, coach Schlosser seemed approachable if you wanted to talk to the head of the whole works.

Initiative: 9/10

Social Skills: 9/10

Creativity: 7/10

Teaching Experience: 10/10

Last year after a nearly 3 year long hiatus, I decided to make a comeback

So about a year ago my father discovered a brand new parkour open gym at the Prestige Gymnastics Center in Lancaster. For once the schedule was in my favour, they had an open gym nearly 2 hours long and in a gym more than quadruple the indoor square footage. It was also closer than the previous gym. This seemed like the circumstances were just perfect to start back up again so we visited.

“Woah”. The first thing I see is 2 asian kids about my age doing double rotation flips, triple horizontal butterfly kicks, flip up to headstand then backflip. To the right of these ninjas were some more teenagers breakdancing like you’ve never seen, I thought Jesse from Accelerations was good, some of these kids were doing moves that were baseline Damien walters standards. The 10 meter ceiling wasn’t high enough for the heights these people were getting. I walked up to the main square of the building where all the action seemed to be and guess who I met, Leo from Accelerations as well, I spoke with him for a bit before I tore of my shirt like the hulk and went all out (that didn’t actually happen). I took this class for several weeks meeting dozens of people just like me, but who taught me new things every day. I learned how to finally preform a butterfly kick, b-twist, and wall-backflip, that third one was a doozy. There were many coaches in here, one of which I would end up taking a gymnastics class with soon enough. I was in heaven



After a while I became conditioned to the borderline olympic training that I was getting every Saturday and decided to try out a gymnastics class here as well. I signed up for the Boys Advanced Freestyle Tumbler Class on Wednesdays.

I was the oldest in this class, and had the most trouble learning the moves at first as I had the most leverage to work against, me being the tallest. All of the children in this class besides myself were at least 10 or 12. Our coach by the name of Michael White, a man about as tall as me (180 cm or so) but a bit stronger looking taught this class. He was a very unthreatening coach who seemed genuine and to the point. The class was serious, and it was more difficult than any other discipline I had ever attempted to go all out in. He taught the class in a very relaxed way, I never found myself just sitting around waiting for what to do next, and this I think is one of his best coaching qualities. He would tell you (while working on doing a somersault over the vault) "Just do it however you want as long as your hands are in the right place and your back is straight." I didn't feel like it was a chore, it was rewarding because he didn't tell you exactly what you needed to make it perfect, you had just a general, vague estimate. After a while I got a feel for it and did it perfect every time without him needing to even watch. After he saw that you were doing it well he worked on the next person. I also admire that felt much less like a class and more like a father teaching a bunch of kids. I would occasionally get scolded for setting a bad example by running up the wall and doing a backflip or something, as some of these kids who looked up to me were crazy enough to try it as well. With larger teams it becomes more difficult to teach to individuals all the time. What coach Michael did here was reminiscent of my private school education before college. I can imagine that coaching a whole football team might be closer analogous to a public school class where the student to teacher ratio is 30:1.

Occasionally I felt like when he was focusing on a certain part of the group which he split up, he would have the other students and myself doing something unrelated to just keep us preoccupied until he can work something out, though I rarely got bored waiting for him to come around. This is my only complaint.

We started the class with generally the same routine. If you were one of the first to arrive you would run back and forth across a 21 meter or so track leading up to a vault until the rest of the group arrived. Then the group would stretch for about 5 minutes. After this there is no longer much of a set routine. Each day was generally set up to practice 1 – 2 events that are similar in the muscle groups that they target. For example, one day we may work on pommel horse and vault. These days we would work do back and core stretches. Then the next day I had class we would practice parallel bars and rings, which I always had the most trouble with. In gymnastics you can't just pick one event that you are good at like you would in track and field per se, you need to train in at least 4 events for men. I was great at the floor routine and vault for instance, but the rings and high bars were impossible for me since I am lanky and have very poor upper body strength. When I was feeling like giving up on these parts coach Mike would keep pushing me when he knew I could keep going, but when he knew that I could not physically go any farther he would tell me to do something simpler and simpler until I could build up. For example, when our group was doing 8 full pull ups in sets of 4, these little kids were outperforming me and I was getting pretty upset by that. So he had me do chin ups, which even still proved too difficult. When I could barely even get up and hold for longer than 10 seconds, he saw that I was beginning to get pissed off, so he decided to just let me just practice the high bar routine that we were going to do eventually and were training for today. I did what he showed me to on the first try. The exercises that were supposed to train me for this I could

already do without any training. My long arms and legs make it difficult to do lifting but I could easily get enough momentum by swinging. He saw this and decided to let me do without the strength exercises for a while. I asked him why I still needed to do them when I could already do the high bar just fine. I found out later about the 4 routines you need and that being well rounded payed off. Sometimes for fun at the end of class we would train for Ninja Warrior (Sauske in japan), a difficult obstacle course that is televised, by making up crazy routines for one another to do, and then we time ourselves to see who can do it the quickest.

5 weeks of this AND Saturday night spine crunching parkour was beginning to really tire me out, though it turns out it was beginning to actually hurt me more and more afterward.

I began physical therapy several months ago to fix a seriously painful back problem I was having for nearly a year after I started all this. It was solved by not doing any more spinning kicks/flips, not spending all day at the bloody computer, and by stretching more often, but only AFTER I worked out. I normally would stretch a bunch before I exercised but it turns out not only was that pointless, but I only undid my stretching by tightening my muscles again right after. I was beginning to come to a realization that I wasn't really a kid anymore, or kid-sized anyway. I was as tall as some of the coaches by now and trying to do front flips (or front tucks officially) became painful. As I mentioned before I'm pretty narrow, and there is a reason why olympic gymnasts are shorter, generally speakin, as a smaller body can rotate easier. Not to mention there is less strain on your back doing floor routines, which was one of the events that I could actually do well in the first place.

I was talking to my coach after a few weeks of taking his class that I might want to join the gymnastics team, some of the team gymnasts were in the gym at the same time I took my class so I could talk to them once and a while at the end of class about what it took to get where they are.

Then last christmas I tore open my knee on a sheet metal ventilation duct on my uncle's roof in california trying to get a better look at the fireworks at night. I had several stitches put in and had to walk with an immobilizer for about 2 weeks before I could walk again. My uncle is in a wheelchair because of an accident that happened when he was 18. I learned quickly just how important being able to move was to me. What's worse is the medical bill, it's thousands just to get a hospital room to begin with. God bless that wonderful women who fixed my knee on christmas night. That takes some real dedication, unless of course she didn't celebrate christmas but now I'm just rambling.

This year I made the final decision to end my gymnastics and parkour career for good. I'm to old to be doing this stuff now that I have too much leverage to work against, and medical bills are more debilitating than some of the injuries. I bid coach Michael and my fellow classmates farewell. One kid in peticular named Jonah Lee was the hardest to say goodbye to. He looked up to me more than anyone else, even the crazy asian ninja kids that always were in the spotlight. He ran up to me every Saturday open gym to greet me. I would often teach him Jesse's moves and sometimes he would teach me stuff he made up. I think I finally know how Jesse felt teaching me what he knew. I'm confident now that I have successfully passed on my knowlage, and I hope that he does the same. After all, isn't that what a coach is supposed to do? Isn't that what a father is supposed to do? I think so anyway.

Verdict on Michael White

Initiative: 5/10

Social Skills: 7/10

Creativity: 6/10

Teaching Experience: 7/10

Final Verdict

It's difficult to choose the best of 3 completely different people, but there can be only one. This honor goes to the leader that, simply put, helped me achieve what I couldn't have alone. Because of his history with me from a young age, being a close personal family friend, and having a strong initiative that demands the best and nothing less, my personal #1 coach is...

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#1: Coach Bob Schlosser

Congratulations, and thank you for all you've done

#2: Jesse Campanella

#3: Michael White