



“Dealing With Parents in the 21st Century”

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Several years ago we had a terrific young lineman on our football team: hardworking, very coachable, big and strong, who could run a 5.5 40.

His Dad, who had always wished that his son would be a running back, told me, “Coach, people don’t know this, but my son is really a sprinter.”

“You could be right about that,” we told him, “but when are you going to let him in on the secret?”

A few years later a chronically depressed girls’ basketball Mom

walked by after a game and quipped, “I don’t know why my daughter is not playing more; I spent \$150 on her shoes.”

“That’s it,” I told her. “You should have bought the \$200 pair.”

Every coach has his favorite stories about parents and their kids. The parents are just like the players. They come in all shapes and sizes, all abilities and attitudes, and have just as many dreams and aspirations for their kids (if not more).

The parents seem to fit into one of three groups:

The largest group—the 80% category—are rational and intelligent. They will support the team, players, and coaches, and work diligently for the success of the program.

The 10% group will be “overly involved” in their children’s activities.

The final 10% class will be wholly unrealistic about everyone’s potential.

A famous coach once said that there are really only two groups and therein lies the secret of good coaching—keeping the 50% of parents you don’t like away from the 50% upon whom have not yet decided.

PERCEPTION IS REALITY...

As a high school coach for the past 30 years, I have worked with thousands of students/athletes in numerous sports. Along with each kid has come a parent eager to see his son succeed.

How we as coaches interact with the young people and parents is critical to the development of the athletes and the success of the program.

How the parent perceives our care, concern, and interest in their child is just as important as the program itself. But it does not mean that they are going to be allowed to run the program and teams.

It does mean that our professional and dedicated coaches are going to take an interest in every student/athlete who is involved in the program and becoming a help rather than a hindrance.

PARENTS BOOSTER CLUB...

Most parents want to help make their child’s experience in high school sports the most memorable part of life.

We have a terrific Football Booster Club that gives the parents that kind of opportunity. Its purpose is to provide support for the team’s activities, disperse communication and information from coaches to parents, and

COACHING "Dealing With Parents in the 21st Century"

send out Spring and Winter Newsletters via Booster Web Sites and emails—giving our parents a preview of the activities, schedules, and expectations.

Weight training, conditioning, and quarterback training are also part of the Winter letter. The Spring letter will contain information on football camp, passing league, summer conditioning, how to register for fall sports, and the schedules for early fall practices and the season's games.

The Booster Club is also responsible for team dinners, some fund-raising, and the post-season banquet. Since membership in the Boosters is free, most parents will jump at the chance to join the Booster ownership.

We praise and reward the Boosters openly whenever possible and ply them with small gifts (team bumper stickers) in appreciation of their efforts.

We also put on a "Mom's Football" clinic, consisting of a pre-season presentation of equipment, basic football terminology, and alignments in their sons' positions on the field. Each Mom gets a rose as she leaves.

We also have a "Dad's Night" when the Dads get to come to the pre-game meeting, assemble on the track (out of the way!) for warm-ups, then return to the bleachers before the game.

PRE-SEASON PARENT MEETINGS

Recommended/required by most state athletic/activities associations is a pre-season parent meeting in which we cover: Coaches Philosophy, Team Policies and Expectations (for players and parents), Eligibility, Schedules (practice and games), Lettering Policy, and Procedure for Contacting Coaches.

Coaches are asked to verbally cover these areas and distribute printed handouts for parents to take home.

As part of the "Policies for Parents" is a school district policy that prohibits open discussion on playing time, techniques, strategies, practice organization, and play selection. We cover about 90% of what the parents want to discuss with a coach. A parent may rightfully discuss his child's attitude, work ethic, behavior, eligibility, efforts to improve, and how a coach treats his child, physically and verbally.

Following is our procedure for contacting coaches:

1. Player talks to his position coach.
2. Player talks to the head coach.
3. Parent may talk to the head coach.
4. Parent may contact the athletic director.

A parent who contacts a school administrator who has not followed this procedure is referred to the policy and then sent back to the coach.

INTERACTION WITH THE "CONCERNED" PARENT...

Prior to a meeting with a parent, we ask him to inform us of what issues he would like to discuss. We let him know the areas that we will and will not discuss.

We exclude the matters of playing time and strategies and confine the conversation to the parent's child—excluding the other children and other players, parents, or coaches.

Any time we do include them, we expect them to be present. We will also tell a parent that "Just because you are here, does not mean that your son or daughter will get any more or any less playing time."

Players may contact a coach at school via appropriate means such as written mail, phone calls, voice-mails, and e-mails. We can contact a coach by noon and get back to a parent within 24 hours.

Calls made immediately after school as coaches prepare for practice gets no response until the next

day. We request the parents to call only at school.

When a coach goes home, that is his family/personal time and should be respected as such. It is also not appropriate to talk to a coach immediately before or after a practice or game (emotions sometimes tend to run high after such an event).

Letters or e-mails must have a return address with a name or a subject line on the envelope. Without such identification, the contents will be disposed of or deleted. We do not deal with nor give credence to anonymous letters.

DOCUMENTATION...

We keep records of everything that happens during the year:

1. File of practice plans, in-season and off-season.
2. Attendance of every team meeting, practice, work-out, and game.
3. Phone/e-mail log of parent contacts. Documents of any situation that may be of consequence.

A coach never knows when he may need proof of some situation and who was present at the time.

STAY PROFESSIONAL...

Dealing with parents may sometimes be as challenging as coaching the team. Even in the most successful of seasons, some parent-coach situation will arise. "It's out there, around the corner - you don't know what or where - you just know it's coming."

You are the coach; you are in charge. You must be professional and remain cool, calm, and in control, even in the most heated of parental situations.

"Athletics not only build character, they reveal it."

If you as a coach have done your professional duty to educate parents on their responsibilities and expectations the path of the season will proceed much more smoothly. ■