

Coaching Philosophy - Page 2

Dealing With Parents

Dealing with parents might be the most difficult part of being a coach. Research suggests that it's the single biggest reason that coaches quit. It's a common problem, but one that can be difficult to solve. In my experience as both a coach and a parent I have found some common mistakes that coaches make that can bring on the wrath of a parent along with some ways to deal with a parent that is causing you grief.

Communication - Parent Meeting

I believe that communication is the single biggest reason behind coach/parent problems. Many coaches don't take the time at the beginning of the season to hold a parent meeting and discuss with the parents how he/she is going to run the team. Hold a parent meeting right away. This will give you a chance to communicate your philosophy with your parents. The topics should include the importance of winning; how you are going to distribute playing time; how are you going to determine who plays where; what skills and values you are going to emphasize. Try to hit all the areas that are important. If for example you don't start a player if he is late or missed a practice, let the parents know that. It's important that they are aware of team rules and expectations. By holding this meeting right away, you have the opportunity to try and move players to a different team if you don't think it will work out. Let parents know that if they don't agree with how you are going to run the team, then this is the time to try and get the child moved.

[Sample Parent Letter](#)**Be Consistent**

Stating your philosophy is one thing; implementing it consistently is another. Make sure you make rules for your team that you can follow up with. It is very frustrating for a parent to be told one thing and then see something else happen. I went through this myself last year with the team my son was on. We were told by the coach that all players would get a change to play many different positions and playing time would be distributed equally. The coach said that the emphasis would be on building skill not winning. Well, after 3 loses to start the season, the coach abandoned his philosophy and had the best players play more and play the most important positions. He would simply rotate those players around those positions. You can imagine the grumbling in the stands as parents began to realize that their child was going to play outfield all year and hit near the bottom of the order. There were complaints and it ended up being a frustrating season for many parents and the coach.

The lesson here is make sure you can live with the guidelines you set down. By sticking to what you told the parents at the beginning of the season, you will alleviate a number of parent problems.

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Listen to Parent Concerns

I've seen many coaches with the "I'm the coach, don't question me" type of attitude. With some parents it can be difficult to not

get irritated and show this type of attitude. Many parents won't say anything unless they are angry about something. When they finally do, they often are worked up and at that point can be difficult to deal with. I've found that when dealing with difficult parents, it's important that you listen to their concerns and take a real interest in what they are saying. Don't feel like you have to defend yourself right away. Sometimes listening to the concern and telling the parent that you will think about the situation and get back to them is enough to diffuse the situation. Just by doing that you validate the concern and show that you're open to suggestions. Parents want to feel like their input is taken seriously and that they have a say in what's happening with their child. You then can take the time to analyze the comments and see if there's any validity to the concerns. When you call the parent or talk to them at the next practice they will most likely be much calmer. It will also give you a chance to calm down. Parent complaints at the end of a game can be infuriating. Remember that you are a role model to the kids. If you can't handle the situation without getting upset, then it's best to tell the parent that you have to go and you will call them later.

If the parent is complaining and you don't like the attitude they have towards you, take them away from the crowd and the kids and let them know that you don't like the way they are talking to you. Let them know that you want to work out any concerns that they may have, but if they can't do so in a calm manner than maybe you should discuss it at another time.

Get Parents Involved

Getting parents involved can really help in avoiding potential parent problems. If you think that a parent is going to be a problem, try to get that parent involved in some way. If that parent only shows up to games, have him/her keep the score book, chart the hitters, or warm-up the next pitcher. If they feel like they are part of the team, they will often be less likely to complain. They also will have less time to focus on how their child is being "treated unfairly"

If the parent makes it to practices, have them help by working with some of the kids. They may soon find out that coaching is more difficult than it looks from the bleachers.

Document and Inform the League

If you think you're going to have a situation with a parent that you may not be able to resolve, document all the conversations that you have with that parent. What's their complaint; were they insulting or angry; what was your response. This way if you have to go to league administrators about the parent you can accurately describe exactly what has gone on. This will help the administrators in not having to take sides over a he said, she said type of argument.

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