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## Presenting Your Coaching Philosophy to Parents

By The National Alliance For Youth Sports and Greg Bach

Presenting your coaching philosophy to parents makes you an approachable and likeable coach. Let the parents know before the first practice how you're approaching the season and what you want your focus to be. This reduces the chance of having misunderstandings that can sabotage the season and smother the fun. After all, some of your players' parents may be looking at the season from a point of view entirely different from your own.

### Determining playing time

How much time players get in the field accounts for the most disagreements between coaches and parents. Several factors should dictate the amount of playing time kids receive — most notably what type of league you're coaching in and the age of the players. Your job is to explain your process for delegating playing time well in advance of stepping on the field to reduce the chance of problems arising.

You can enter the season with a general plan in place regarding playing time, but compiling an outline of how many innings each player will play is impossible. Try to let everyone understand what you're aiming to achieve.

Sometimes you have to deliver news that won't go over well with parents. Let them know that you understand the disappointment and that although they may disagree with you, they need to maintain their composure, control their emotions, and accept your decision as the coach. It's your job to determine who plays where and how often kids get into the lineup.

Be sure parents know that you're always available to speak to them in private about any decisions you make regarding their child. Having an open-door policy signals that you're willing to do everything possible to work with parents every step of the way.

### **Rotating the rookies**

Parents who sign up their children for a beginning-level program have a right to expect that the coach will spread out the playing time evenly among the kids on the team. You should reinforce this goal during the preseason meeting. (Of course, some parents may forget your discussion as soon as they see their child taking a turn on the bench.) Let them know that giving kids an equal opportunity to play, have fun, and learn the basics of the game is what the beginning level is all about. Relegating certain kids to the bench or getting them into the game for only an inning or two will quickly drain their interest in the sport. Inform parents that you will carefully track each player's number of innings on the field so that they are evenly distributed as fairly as possible, and that you'll do your best to give kids an equal amount of time at all of the different positions on the field.

If you decide to institute a policy that states the kids who regularly attend practice will share the bulk of the playing time — and you should — make sure you explain the policy clearly during your meeting.

### **Fielding the veterans**

If you're coaching a team that features kids ages 12 and older, your policies on playing time may be much different. At advanced levels, playing time is more often tied directly to ability. Parental eyes are extremely prejudiced, and most parents view their child as the better player when he's competing against another kid for a specific position.

Share with your parents that you understand how they feel and that you realize they won't always agree with you. Speak from the heart that delegating playing time is one of the most difficult aspects of your job.

### **Creating your lineup: Who plays where (and why)**

Some parents, when signing up their youngster to play baseball, are already envisioning where they think he should play in the field. Mom and dad were catchers in their heydays, so Junior should be a catcher, too, right? Naturally, position assignment often doesn't play out as they'd hoped, particularly when half-dozen dads think their sons should be playing shortstop. The pre-season meeting is the time to set the record straight. Where a child plays depends on his age, his interests, and his abilities. It'll be up to you, through your practice observations, to evaluate all of your players, assess their skills, and fit them into the right spots to mold a team together.

Let parents know what your plans are for evaluating the kids and that you'll make your decisions based on what's best for the team. If you have a time frame in mind to announce the starters — after the tenth practice, for example — be sure to share it with the parents and kids so they fully understand the process.

## **Emphasizing the importance of model behavior in the stands**

Sometimes the childish behavior at youth baseball games doesn't take place on the field; it takes place in the stands, with parents as the culprits. Crazy parent behavior may make for entertainment in the movies, but in real life, it only leaves the children embarrassed.

Be very clear and straightforward during the meeting about how you expect parents to behave during games and practice. Emphasize that parents need to be models of good sportsmanship before, during, and after games, regardless of who wins or loses or what transpires on the field.

Let the parents know that children are easily distracted and don't perform as well — or have nearly as much fun — when faced with negativity from the stands. Make it clear that you won't tolerate the following actions:

- Yelling at umpires
- Shouting instructions
- Arguing with coaches
- Criticizing players

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