

10 Ways to Maintain a Good Parent-Coach Relationship

By Jack Perconte

Most negative experiences in athletics involve tension between coaches and parents of athletes. Most of the time, kids are very content with playing, having fun and being around their friends. Usually, players become dissatisfied only after mom or dad have started grumbling about the way the coach is treating their child with playing time or position played. Once a parent has put this negative attitude in the player's mind they become a "grumbling" player towards the coach. This unhappy attitude can be prevented if parents and coaches develop a good relationship, especially at the beginning of the season. Here is how:

Suggestions for a successful parent-coach relationship:

1. Give team parents background information about all the coaches, especially about playing and/or coaching experience related to the game. (This should not have to be mentioned, but be honest about backgrounds.)
2. Express philosophy of coaching. The three ultimate objectives are winning, player development and fun. Specifically state where coaches stand on these three objectives. We suggest a 20, 40, 40 split on these objectives. Of course, it will always depend on the league you are participating in.
3. Explain your goals for the team and for the individuals for the upcoming season. I believe it is alright to play to win even at a young level, as long as it is kept in perspective. Remember, developing skills and having fun are always an objective. Dealing with winning and losing will create many teaching moments that will be important for kids to learn.
4. Discuss your philosophy about playing time and positions played. Let everyone know how you plan to run the team. For example, will players have to earn their position on the field or will you rotate the players? Give parents a chance to ask questions, and make sure your answers are clearly understood. Be sure to recognize and discuss the objectives of the league and level at which the team is playing.
5. Coaches should listen and discuss the parent's objectives for their own kids and for the team. Parents who have obvious different objectives than the coach may have to look for another team for their child if they cannot come to an agreement.
6. Discuss when and how the coaches can be approached during the season so there are no public confrontations. Set up a system where discussions are held away from the players, other parents and the crowds. There will be issues that arise from time to time, but let parents know that disagreements will be handled in a civil way away from the players.
7. Discuss coaching policies when players miss practices or games, so everybody is treated the same and all are clear about the policy.
8. Effective communication is the key to averting problems - make sure parents inform their kids about the coaches' philosophies.
9. As mentioned, troubles begin when parents start to grumble at home to the players about the coach. Insist to the parents that they approach you before getting upset and expressing that displeasure at home.
10. Most issues arise because the parent does not think the coach is being fair. It is important that the coach fulfill his or her philosophy that was initially expressed. Changing philosophy in the middle of the season will create problems. If a coach feels a philosophy change is totally necessary, they must discuss possible change with all parents first.

Finally, coaches should be role models and teachers to their players. It is easier to help players develop their skills and enjoy the game when the parents understand the reasoning behind the coaches' philosophies.