

---

FIVE POINTS OF EMPHASIS THAT  
COACHES WOULD LIKE TO  
SHARE WITH PARENTS

By:

**Todd Howey (CAA)**

---

# INTRODUCTION

I sent out an email to a large number of coaches and asked them to answer one simple question, *“What is the one thing you wish parent’s understood?”* I was somewhat surprised that most of the responses I got were very similar in theme.

There is no doubt that parents can and do play a role in their child’s junior high and high school athletic careers, but the big question is *“What type of role is that going to be? Positive or negative?”* After reading the responses from over 100 coaches, I was able to capture the spirit of their answers in what I felt like fell under five points of emphasis:

## **FIVE POINTS OF EMPHASIS:**

1. PARTICIPATING IN ATHLETICS IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT
2. MAKING SACRIFICES
3. PARENTAL INTERACTION WITH GAME OFFICIALS
4. ESTABLISHING MUTUAL TRUST
5. EMPOWERING STUDENT/ATHLETES TO DEVELOP PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

I am almost certain that there is nothing in this booklet that is going to surprise any parents. It is all common sense and the ability, although very tough at times, to allow your child to work through his/her own challenges and trials. Coaches are not perfect; they are going to call the wrong play, forget to call a time out, play the wrong kid and get confused...possibly all in the same game!

But let there be no doubt that they all are trying to do what they think is right. Coaching is tough, but not as tough as parenting. It is with full recognition of that fact that this booklet was created.

# # 1

## Understanding that Athletic Participation Is A Privilege, Not A Right

I heard a coach say one time that Club Sports is a “necessary evil.” On one side of the coin, it can be seen as a way to develop players. On the other side of the coin it can lead a player and/or parents into thinking that if they pay the money and put in the time, then they have somehow purchased their kid playing time and a spot on the varsity roster. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Being a member of a “select team” plays a very small role, if any, when a public school coach is deciding on his or her roster. Regardless of how many volleyball tournaments your kid has played in, or how many baseball games you can cram into a summer, the fact remains that the best players are going to play whether they played club ball or not. Neither your role in the booster club or even if you have given up all of your weekends to work on the softball field will change that.

Many coaches will tell you that club sports have gotten out of control and can do more to hurt kids than help, primarily in the attitude department. The reason for this feeling is that many parents have lost perspective by placing unrealistic performance expectations on their kids. I can assure you that nothing disrupts an athletic team more than a club sport coach directly interfering with the philosophy and coaching style of your child's school coach.

Although you and your child may feel your club coach is better, the fact remains that the school sport coach takes priority and telling your school coach, **“but my club coach told me to do it this way.”** will only create conflict and resentment. Obviously choosing to play a club sport over an in-school sport is a personal decision that the parents and their child make jointly, but do not expect favors or even ask the school coach to make special concessions so your child can participate in both, that simply cannot happen.

If your child does decide to play a club sport that directly overlaps with an in-school sport, then the in-school sport should come first and the club sport second...always. If for some reason that is not possible, then it is best to totally commit to the club sport and not participate in the school sport at all for the sake of fairness to everyone involved.

Anyone with a checkbook can be on a select team these days, so the word “select” can be misleading. This is much more prevalent at the 7-14 year old level and for some of those youngsters, it would probably do more good for their self-esteem if

they spent their summer playing whiffle ball in the back yard and pick-up basketball in the driveway.

Club sports can be a very good experience by providing an opportunity for your child to compete at a higher level, thus developing and testing their skills against quality competition. If your child has the skill and ability to play at the collegiate level, club ball can provide additional opportunities for your child to be "noticed" by a college scout or coach, but that is not guaranteed.

Occasionally a student/athlete is invited to play on an elite traveling team that consists of legitimate college prospects and the need to specialize becomes more pressing. Just be sure to weigh all the consequences before your child decides not to participate in a school sport in favor of a club sport, and never forget that there is nothing quite like playing for your school. Any club coach that promises your child a college scholarship is horribly misinformed, and is misleading you and your child.

The main issue with club sports is this; school sports come first, and if your child decides to play on a club team that directly interferes with a school team, then either put the school team first or do not participate for your school team at all. No high school coach should require a kid to play club ball or make it a pre-requisite to be on his or her team.

Although coaches do want your child to be playing somewhere, that still does not afford your child a special right to be on their high school team; because being on a high school athletic team is a privilege and not a right that can be purchased by a parent thru club sports or volunteerism. You bet be involved, but be involved **unconditionally**.

Your child is chosen by a public school coach to be a part of a select group of student/athletes that very few get to be a part of. It is a special privilege, and a coach at any given time can take that privilege away if your child chooses not to follow the rules and expectations developed for that team. Many times seniors are given privileges that underclassman are not given. Those privileges can be looked at like a "reward" for staying committed to the program, and giving such privileges is a choice made by a coach.

Seniors, however, have no right to a starting position or playing time. Just because they have stuck it out does not guarantee anything other than a fair opportunity to earn a spot. Again, athletics is a privilege, and both student/athletes and parents need to understand that they are all privileged to be a part of something that is bigger than themselves.

## # 2

### Making Sacrifices

There are very few excuses for missing a practice or game. One of the most important things a student/athlete can do to make a team and possibly earn playing time is to be at practice, on time, every day.

Nothing makes a coach more upset than a student missing a practice for a doctor's appointment that could have been made for another day or time. I have heard of kids missing games and practices for everything from hair appointments to vacation and those types of excuses simply do not fly.

Poor excuses demonstrate a lack of commitment, and there is no room for that when others are counting on your child to be there. Coaches work many hours beyond the time that people see them at school or at an athletic event.

Game plans, practice schedules, scouting reports, travel arrangements, off-season plans, coaching philosophies, assignments, player personnel, laundry, and improving facilities are only a few of the duties that occupy their time. Often these hours can be upward of 80 hours per week. I have seen many coaches change careers because they did not understand the time commitment that this profession requires. So understand that everyone involved; players, parents, coaches and their families are making sacrifices.

When your child is on a team, remember that being a member of that team is a privilege, and greater sacrifices are expected to be made by the student/athlete as well as the parents.

Your child will have to practice every day after school and possibly early in the morning before school begins. They will practice on Saturdays and possibly even on holidays, and they are always expected to BE ON TIME! Less study time is going to be available to them, yet your child must pass their classes to be eligible to play.

Do not expect favors or shortcuts because your child is an athlete; expect challenges beyond what the other students face in school. Sacrifices will be necessary and they **will** cramp a student's social life.

There will be parties they should not go to, there will be places and people they should not hang around, and there will be things everyone else seems to be doing that they should not do! Heaven forbid they may even have to cut their hair and shave off their beard. Just do it.

The story goes that the great Bill Walton showed up at UCLA one year with a full beard and moustache. He told Coach Wooden that it was his right to express himself in that way. Coach Wooden told Walton that he admired him for standing firm in what he believed, and then he told his All-American center that they were going to miss him around the gym. Walton shaved, and never tried to fight that battle again.

Sacrifices will be required, mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially. Coaches open the gyms and weight rooms over the summer for a reason: to give kids an opportunity to make a sacrifice.

Understand that parents can also be great advocates because they are sacrificing time and money. Parents need to acknowledge the fact that sacrifices are expected, and encourage their child to make those sacrifices with a positive attitude. One keg party can destroy the dreams of a bunch of kids if they are not careful.

## # 3

### Parental Interaction with Game Officials

Although it may seem so, merely paying an admission fee does not give a fan the right to verbally abuse an official, regardless of how bad the official may appear to be. It is not “part of the game” like many believe.

Some of the ugliest incidents school administrators deal with stem from a fan or fans losing their composure and saying and/or doing things they always regret later. There is simply no room for negativity coming from the bleachers, because it does absolutely nothing to enhance the playing experience for the kids.

Officiating is more than likely going to be below average at the sub-varsity level, but then again, so is the play. Most officials are just learning the game at that level, and negativity from the bleachers hampers development and creates a hostile environment for both player and official.

In my many years of playing, coaching and administrating, I have never seen an official blow a game. I have, however, seen officials blow calls; but an entire game, no. You can ask any coach and they will tell you that an official **NEVER** lost a game for them.

Coaches are paid professionals and they will handle the officials in a professional manner. That is the only way acceptable if we are truly trying to teach young men and women how to handle conflict and controversy in a positive way.

I remember watching a group of 11 year old kids playing in a basketball tournament one day in Liberal, Kansas. The post player for the other team cleanly and clearly stuffed the shot of a player on our team. It was a clean stuff and without a doubt, he had “*all ball.*” The official blew his whistle and called a foul on the player, sending the kid he stuffed cleanly to the line for two shots. In response to the official, the 11-year-old boy threw his hands in the air and screamed, “*Are you crazy?*” The official blew his whistle again and gave the kid a technical foul, which he deserved. After that foul, the young man then grabbed the ball and slammed it on the ground, thus forcing the official to blow his whistle yet again and giving the kid a second technical foul as well as ejecting him from the game.

What did his dad do? Dad boldly stood up and screamed at the official, “*He is right ref, you suck! That’s ok son, you had all ball!*” Instead of that dad disciplining his kid for treating an official disrespectfully, he takes his son’s side and gives his kid a lifelong lesson in how to be a poor sport. A lesson was learned, just the wrong one.

The sad part about that story is that the kid was just acting like his dad. They both acted like two year olds, and that kid only became a bigger poor sport than he already was. Screaming at rookie basketball officials or wearing out an umpire from the bleachers is not going to make them better officials, it will only make them quit.

That answers the question about why we have such a serious shortage of qualified officials in local chapters in all sports. They simply get tired of the hatred that is spewed onto them game after game, night after night when they are only trying to do the best they can.

Officials make very little money for their services and most of them do it because they love athletics and enjoy being around kids. Many of them are accountants, insurance salesman, electricians, preachers, struggling college students, and most importantly, they are all human.

They are going to make mistakes and that will never change no matter how much you yell. Some calls will go your way, some will not, but I promise that there is no conspiracy and they want to make the right call just as bad as you want them to. Support the officials, and let the coaches do their job. The only thing that should be yelled from the stands is this:

**ENCOURAGEMENT!**

*Sideline Suggestions for Parents:*

**10 THINGS KIDS WISH PARENTS WOULD NOT DO**

**1. Don't yell out instructions.**

During the game, I am trying to concentrate on what the coach says and working on what I have been practicing. It is easier for me to do my best if you save instructions and reminders for another time.

**2. Don't put down the officials.**

This embarrasses me and I sometimes wonder whether the official is going to be tougher on me because my parents yell.

**3. Don't yell at me in public.**

It will just make things worse because I will be upset, embarrassed, or worried that you are going to yell at me the next time I do something "wrong."

**4. Don't yell at the coach.**

When you yell about who gets to play what position, it just stirs things up and takes away from the fun.

**5. Don't put down my teammates.**

Don't make put-down remarks about any of my teammates who make mistakes. It takes away from our team spirit.

**6. Don't put down the other team.**

When you do this, you are not giving us a very good example of sportsmanship, so we get mixed messages about being "good sports."

**7. Don't lose your cool.**

I love to see you excited about the game, but there is no reason to get so upset that you lose your temper! It is our game and all the attention is supposed to be on us.

**8. Don't lecture me about mistakes after the game.**

Those rides home in the car after the game are not a good time for lectures about how I messed up – I already feel bad. We can talk later, but please stay calm, and do not forget to mention things I did well during the game!

**9. Don't forget how to laugh and have fun.**

Sometimes it is hard for me to relax and have fun during the game when I look over and see you so tense and worried.

**10. Don't forget that it's just a game!**

Odds are I am not going to make a career out of playing sports. I know I may get upset if we lose, but I also know that I am usually feeling better after we go get a coke. I need to be reminded sometimes that it is just a game.

*Sideline Suggestions author unknown.*

## # 4

### Establishing Mutual Trust

Coaches love kids, and they are sincerely trying to develop character and build self-esteem in your child. They do that by stressing the importance of hard work, commitment, encouragement, teamwork and how to be a true sportsman regardless of the final score.

Life skills are being developed every day in practice because athletics and the coach/player relationship can be a wonderful tool in teaching the things that matter.

Coaches are professionals, just like many parents are accountants, dentists, entrepreneurs or engineers. The coach studies the game through clinics, videos, magazines, visiting colleges, and talking with other coaches.

Coaches are constantly trying to improve their teaching and coaching methods in an attempt to give their players (your child) the best opportunity to be successful. Many coaches have worked their way up from the junior high ranks to reach a lifelong dream of being a head coach, and the reward for many is to be constantly questioned and criticized by parents and patrons.

Watching sports or even playing the game does not make anyone an expert, because it takes time and study just like any other profession one might choose.

Based on all the concerns coaches hear from parents about playing-time, playing favorites, picking the same kids that made the team last year, placing kids in the wrong position, etc... it is important for each parent to understand that coaches are **FOR** kids, not **AGAINST** kids.

Coaches are trained professionals, and although they are going to make mistakes along the way, it is crucial for parents to realize and accept that the coach is sincerely trying to keep the best interest for every child in mind.

Parents need to encourage their child to perform his or her role to the best of their ability regardless of what that role may be. As a parent, you should build up rather than tear down the program. Successful programs that I have been a part of have communities that are willing to turn their kids over to the coaching staff when they reach the age of junior high and high school athletics.

There is an old saying in coaching that states, “**That is coming from the dinner table.**” What this means in coaching lingo is that the attitude that the child has taken on, be it negative or positive, comes from the dinner table. If the parents sit around the dinner table second-guessing the coach and running down other players, then rest assured that a negative attitude will be reflected in their child.

Just the opposite holds true for positive dinner table discussions. If the parents are supportive of the coach and other players, then that attitude will be reflected in their child.

By no means, run a coach down in front of your child. What good is that going to do? If you as a parent have a legitimate concern with your child's coach, then follow the proper procedure and meet with that coach privately during their office hours.

Never under any circumstance, approach a coach before, during or after a practice or game because emotions are high and such meetings rarely produce good results.

Trust the coaches to do their job professionally, honestly and as fairly as possible. You are not going to agree with some of the decisions they make, but try to look at the big picture and remember that the awesome responsibility given to a coach is not taken lightly.

Coaching is no different from the medical field in that you are going to have some bad doctors, just as there are going to be some bad coaches.

Occasionally, not very often though, a coach can do a poor job and parent's concerns are legitimate. Any good administrator is going to take the proper steps needed to improve that situation as quickly as possible because that is the right thing to do. **However, one thing that every coach needs to remember is this; just because you tried to do the right thing for a kid, does not mean that you necessarily did the right thing for that kid.**

Coaches will make mistakes, hopefully they will possess enough maturity to recognize the mistakes they made and take responsibility for them and their resolution.

Parents' placing their trust in coaches does not give the coach a free pass on accountability, but as long as the coach is sincere in their efforts, then an explanation should not be hard to come by. **COMMUNICATE!**

## # 5

# Empowering Student/Athletes to Develop Problem-Solving Skills

There is no doubt that every parent should be involved in their kid's life, but then again, there is a point in athletics when you are going to have to let them land where they land.

Manipulating situations, trying to get in good with coaches or trying to solve your kid's problems for them is the wrong thing to do. In most, if not all situations, when it comes to a conflict between a player and their coach, if the parent would simply direct their child to meet with the coach personally first, then things usually get resolved.

If in fact we are raising our kids to become strong men and women, and then we have to let them learn to communicate and handle their own business.

Certainly, the parent should instruct their child on what to say and do, but the "let me fix it for my kid" attitude generally is not well received by coaches.

I have seen it time after time that when a player who was not getting a chance to play just rested on the sure-fire method of *"hanging in there and working hard,"* that things worked out better for them than they could have imagined.

Instead of parents verbally running down the coach in public or the child showing up to practice with a poor attitude, the athlete hung in there and worked hard and eventually it paid off.

I cannot tell you how many scrawny B-Team players end up being the varsity starters, so tell your child to hang in there and keep working.

Junior high athletics can be a very difficult time for kids and their parents just because of the sheer number of kids participating. You can have upward of 140 kids trying out for football per grade level, and obviously, that is going to create some difficult playing time situations for some kids.

For any parent to think that a junior high coach is going to be able to place every single kid on the correct team or in the right position before the first game is reflective of not knowing how tough being a junior high coach is.

Learning exactly which kids need to go where will take some time, possibly the entire season. In football for instance, many towns will have 2 or 3 different football teams kids can play on prior to entering the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. If you have three teams, then that means you have three different starting quarterbacks that played every down, three different running backs that scored touchdowns, three different kids that led their team in tackles and three different kids that started every game at free safety.

Along with that, you have three different sets of parents that feel their kid should be starting because he did on the 6<sup>th</sup> grade league team.

The key to junior high athletics is this...**stick it out!** It takes time to work through the large numbers and to learn exactly what kids can and cannot do, not to mention that kids grow at different rates. Many of the “giants” in junior high never grow another inch in high school. Stick it out because 20 – 30% of the team will develop other interests prior to entering the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Any parent that wants to set up a meeting with a coach to discuss playing time at any level is generally wasting their time, because playing time is something that is decided by the coach.

The best approach for that would be for your son or daughter to set up a meeting with that coach and ask, “*Coach, what do I need to improve on so I can get more playing time?*” Instead of a parent barging into a coach’s office and accusing them of everything from favoritism to racism, instructing their child to meet with the coach is a much better method and usually produces positive results.

I am not saying your child will get more playing time if they meet with the coach, but at least the child is fighting his or her own battles and knows exactly what the situation is.

**Many of the struggles and challenges kids deal with early in life can motivate them to do things we as parents never thought possible.**

If we as parents try to “fix it” for them, then we are protecting our children from conflicts and struggles that are meant to strengthen them. Many times coaches are simply challenging kids to do more and work harder.

Is a coach verbally abusing your child? Is a coach physically threatening your child? Is your child being picked on or treated inappropriately by a coach? If not, then let your child work out their problems. That is one of the many benefits athletics provides; an opportunity for little boys and girls to develop into young men and women.

# CONCLUSION

## “I SURE ENJOY WATCHING YOU PLAY”

Nothing is more disturbing for a coach hearing a parent yelling negative comments from the stands, whether they are directed at the coach, the officials, their own kids, or even worse, at someone else’s kid!

Without a doubt, the most embarrassing thing for a kid to endure is their parent yelling instructions at them while competing in a contest. Screaming at your child to “*keep your head in*” or “*shoot the ball*” is simply out of line.

Parents need to remember that it is not just about their kid, but a total team effort. There is a good chance the coach does not want your child to “*shoot the ball*,” so yelling such things only adds pressure and creates confusion.

Do not be like the parent that stood up at a football game and screamed repeatedly at the offensive line, “*come on guys, you gotta block!*” After about the 5<sup>th</sup> time this parent screamed the obvious, the head coach walked over to the rail and sarcastically screamed back, “*You gotta block, really? We haven’t thought that! Thanks for your help coach!*”

The bleachers are for **ENCOURAGING** kids, not coaching or criticizing kids. Far too many parents put extra pressure on their kids when they come home from a game or practice because they feel the need to correct mistakes their child made.

I was fortunate to have parents that put absolutely no pressure on me whatsoever. I can’t put it into words how much I appreciate that today.

What kids need when they come home is encouragement, not disappointment. When your child comes home, tell them this: “*I sure enjoy watching you play.*” If they didn’t get to play, say “*I sure enjoy going to your games,*” or one of my favorites, “*You are still my favorite player.*”

The last thing your child wants is to be lectured and coached by mom or dad in the middle of the living room after the game. If they want to talk about the game, then let them bring it up. It’s just not that big of a deal in the scheme of life, so don’t overemphasize it, thus sending a message to your child that their self-worth is directly tied to how many points they score in a basketball game.

The chances of your child getting a scholarship are slim to none at best, so love your child and encourage them to keep trying and giving 100%. It is not difficult to do that, but it does take a conscious effort from you as a parent to make a point to build your child up regardless of how bad they played or how embarrassed you as a parent got after watching your child drop the game-winning pass.

Focus on the positive and avoid pulling out the negatives. Don't be like the dad that chews out his son as soon as he walks in the door for missing a crucial free throw in a big game.

Focus on how hard he played and the 7 assists that he had in the game. Is a missed free throw really worth damaging the self-esteem of your child? Stay consistent by treating your child the same way whether they strike out three times or hit the game winning homerun.

There is nothing more ridiculous than a parent treating their child based on how they performed in a game. I have personally seen parents ignore and ground their children because they missed a ground ball or struck out at a crucial time.

Treating kids based on how they performed on the athletic field can be emotional torture for a child of any age. If they are led to believe that their self-worth is tied up in performance on the athletic field, then that is a dead-end street that only causes children to put pressure on themselves by trying to please mom and dad.

You bet, talk with your child after a game, just be careful not to instruct because they get plenty of that at practice. Not all kids are going to get to play all the time and be the stars.

Most kids are role players that get little recognition, so that in itself is reason enough for a parent to treat their child as if they are a champion.

Enjoy the ride with your child; high school only comes around once, so do your best as a parent to focus on.....and engage in.....the positive things that come from being part of an athletic team.

###