

Dealing With Sport Parents: the Good, the Bad and Ugly



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The Importance of Working Effectively with Sport Parents

- *"I like to think that if success is going to be in any program, it's not only what a coach can do. It takes the parents. We need their support. It's basically their students, their athletes, and their children."*

- Successful High School Coach

Questions to Consider

- What is the role of parents in educational athletics?
- What are the characteristics of the under involved, over involved and optimally involved sport parent?
- What is my role as a coach in working with sport parents?
- How can I effectively work with sport parents?

To Begin...

- What would you like to learn in today's presentation?



Introduction to Effectively Working with Wrestling Parents

- Coaches are concerned that parents are well-intentioned but ill-informed.
- Some parents are:
 - Pressuring their child,
 - Second-guessing the coach,
 - Interfering with the educational athletics experience,
 - Over-involved in child's sport.
- While other parents are:
 - Under-involved and provide no support.

Introduction to Effectively Working with Wrestling Parents

- Parents in H.S. Sport represent a paradox, over- or under-involved.
- Optimal Parent Involvement: Need to be involved yet not too involved.
- Coaches magnify this issue by ignoring or not working effectively with parents.

Introduction to Effectively Working with Wrestling Parents

- Experienced coaches realize that they must educate parents to help them reach their educational athletic goals.
- Behind most great athletes is at least one supportive parent.
- Parents have a legal and ethical responsibility to be involved.

Purposes

- Learn how to effectively educate and involve your athletes' parents in your program.
- Learn skills to effectively handle problems with sport parents.
- Learn to view sport parents as a resource versus necessary evil.

How Well am I Working with My Athletes' Parents?

- How Well am I Working with the Parents on My Team?

1

No/not at all

2

okay/sometimes

3

4

5

excellent/always

Understanding the Role of Parents in Educational Athletics

- Providers of the Sport Experience
- Interpreters of the Sport Experience
- Role Models



Providers

- Parents provide the opportunity for their children to play.
- Active lifestyle and play with child.
- Support.
 - Transportation.
 - Finances.
 - Scheduling.



Interpreters

- Children often adopt parent's sport goals.
- Parent's perspective is often the lens through which the child interprets success and failure.
- Influence emotions, stress, & satisfaction.



Role Models

- Parents often serve as the model of:
 - Physical activity,
 - Sport participation,
 - Emotional reactions,
 - Behavior/ Sportsmanship.



Role of Parents Discussion

- Understanding the role that parents play as providers and interpreters of the sport experience and as role models, how should this information influence your interactions with these parents and their athletes?

Identifying the Characteristics of Wrestling Parents

- First, think about the **most supportive parents or optimally-involved parents** you have had on your team. What types of characteristics did they have that made them good sport parents?
- Second, think about the **least supportive or 'problem' parents** that have been associated with your team. What types of problems did they present?

Characteristics of Sport Parents

- Over-involved
- Under-involved
- Supportive/Optimally-involved parents



Over-involved Parents

- Most visible negative influence.
- Really care about child's sport experience.
- However, espouse attitudes and behave in a manner that negatively influences their child and the team.

Under-involved Parents

- Do not actively support child in sport.
- You are providing 'baby sitting.'
- Some under-involved parents do not hold child responsible for poor behaviors.
 - Don't see the value of sport in developing the child.
- Provide little support & may leave the child searching for a caring adult.

Supportive/Optimally-involved Parent

- Don't forget about the positive parent and their support and influence.
- Trust, support, and appreciate coaches.
- Reinforce coach's messages.
- Well informed and monitor child's sport experience.
- Understand fine line between pushing and supporting child.

Supportive/Optimally-involved Parent

- Will monitor practices and matches to make certain safe and fun learning experience.
- Will approach you about concerns.
- Can help to keep misguided parents in line.
- Great source of support when you involve them in the team.

Characteristics of Sport Parent Summary

- Problem parents often unintentional and misguided.
- Create extra work for the coach.
- Remember, majority of parents are positive sources of support (60% or more).
- Even the best parent may lose perspective and become too emotionally involved at times.
- Need to work with parents!

Do's and Don'ts of Effective Sport Parenting

- From interviewing and surveying coaches, parents, and players we have learned guidelines for effective sport parenting.
- No parent will be able to do all of these all of the time.

The Role of the Coach in Working with Sport Parents

- *Parents as an Educational Resource versus a Problem: In What Ways can Parents Help Me Coach More Effectively?*



The Role of the Coach in Working with Sport Parents

- The coach should be *proactive* in working with sport parents so that they feel informed, involved, and important in their child's sport.
- Effective coaches involve parents and treat them as a resource not a distraction!
- The key to working proactively with your athletes' parents is education.

Tools for Working with Today's Sport Parents

- Preventive Medicine Approach
 - Educate Parents from Day 1!
- Crisis Management Strategies for Dealing with Problem Parents.
 - Extinguishing fires before too much damage is done!

Preventive Medicine Approach

- Hold a Working *WITH* Parents Philosophy.
- Know Your Coaching Philosophy & Convey It.
- Be a Competent and Wise Coach.
- Be a Caring Coach.
- Conduct Parent Education.
- Generate Parental Support.

Working *WITH* Parents Philosophy

- **Understand what a parent wants from a coach.**
 - To be in the information loop.
 - To hear good things about their kids.
 - To see their kids play.
 - To be included & among friends.
- **Parents are sources of support that improve your program.**

Know Your Coaching Philosophy

- **Know why you're coaching your sport.**
 - What you believe the purpose of sport to be.
 - Your goals for your team.
 - Analyze what is most important:
 - Physical development.
 - Psychological development.
 - Social development.
 - Fun.
 - Winning.

Know Your Coaching Philosophy

- Communicate your philosophy to parents.
 - Write it down and hand it out.
- Set clear expectations for behavior by players and parents.
- Your actions must coincide with your philosophy!

Be a Competent & Wise Coach

- Communicate with parents.
 - Open Door Policy.
 - 24 hour rule.
- Be fair.
 - In conducting tryouts.
 - In defining a player's role.
- Avoid sarcasm (especially at banquets) & profanity.
- Coach, alcohol, and parents don't mix.

Be a Caring Coach

- **Care about your players.**
 - Remember “you are coaching someone else’s miracle” (Feldkamp).
- **Care about what parents have to say.**
- **Treat everyone with respect (assistants also do the same).**
- **Follow-up with parents/athletes the same day an injury occurs.**

Conducting Parent Education Meetings

- **Essential to developing good coach-parent relationships.**
- **Important to emphasize:**
 - Goals and mission for the team.
 - Rules and regulations.
 - Times that are appropriate for parents to communicate with you.
 - Expectations for parents (code of conduct).

Conducting Parent Education Meetings

- **Emphasize that your goals are similar: To develop the athlete and the person.**
 - Work together instead of against each other.
- **Have parents sign a behavioral contract. Commit to the code of conduct.**
 - Makes sure they understand team rules and behavioral expectations.

Conducting Parent Education Meetings

- **Hold periodic meetings throughout the season.**
 - Keep your finger on the pulse.
 - Team dinners so you can informally interact with parents and reinforce philosophy.
 - Emphasize often the need for parents to attend.
- **Those that cannot attend should receive a letter & code of conduct.**

Components of a Pre-Season Parent Meeting

- Introduce yourself and your coaching staff, as well as your qualifications.
- Explain your objectives for the program and your philosophy of coaching.
 - Educational athletics approach.
- Briefly cover rules and regulations.
- Discuss health concerns (wt. management, infections)
- Indicate when and where parents should contact you if they have concerns or questions.

Components of a Pre-Season Parent Meeting

- Specify your policy on playing time.
- Indicate how parents can help their child be successful.
- Discuss team/school rules regarding eligibility.
- Have the parents sign a code of conduct.
- Question and answer period.

Generating Parent Support

- Genuine listening.
- Engage parents as members of the team.
- Involving under-involved parents.
 - How would you involve them?



Generating Parent Support

- Involving under-involved parents:
 1. Hold a “special person night” where a child’s guardian is honored at the game.
 2. Hold an “honor’s night” where players are honored for academic and athletic pursuits.
 3. Offer a promotion of “serving for pizza” where parents can serve a volleyball in the designated portion of the court and win a pizza.
 4. Offer 2 for 1 ticket nights.
 5. Involve parents in creating programs, and holding pre- and post-game meals. These volunteers receive free admission.
 6. Provide city bus passes to assist parents in traveling to games.

Generating Parent Support

- Eliminating safety and fairness issues.
- Developing a parent advisory board.
 - Clarify their role.
 - Their role is NOT to give advice on player selection or team decisions.
- Assigning a parent liaison.
- Holding realistic expectations: You can't please everyone.

Crisis Management Strategies for Dealing with Problem Parents

- At times you will have to confront a disgruntled parent.
- Three fundamental guidelines:
 - Allow the parent to express his or her feelings.
 - Be business-like and non-emotional.
 - Hold a private meeting.

Crisis Management Strategies for Dealing with Problem Parents

- Private 1-on-1 meetings.
 - Think.
 - Understand.
 - Care.
 - Be tentative, yet professional.
 - Proceed gradually.

(Martens, 1987)

Crisis Management Strategies for Dealing with Problem Parents

- Perspective taking.
 - Having the parent look at a situation from a different perspective (e.g., the official, an athlete) often alleviates issues.
- Removal of the parent.
 - Know beforehand that you have administrative support.
 - Warn first – violation of code of conduct.
 - Be professional.

Crisis Management: Handling Parent Problems on the Run

- **'Problem' Parent Scenario 1:** Kristen's father is always pressuring her when her team loses. He preaches that her team does not have an attitude of "winning at all costs." To Kristen's dismay, her father second-guesses the coaching staff in front of the team following a tough loss to their closest rival. The coaches do not appreciate the tirade, especially in front of the team and other parents. As a result of her father's pressure, Kristen decides she will not tryout for basketball her junior year.

Ex. 5.2, p. 23

Crisis Management: Handling Parent Problems on the Run

- **'Problem' Parent Scenario 2:** Kevin is an excellent running back. He has been selected all-conference for two consecutive years. Unfortunately, Kevin's parents do not attend the games and rarely pick up Kevin following practice. In fact, the coaches have driven Kevin home several times because he did not have a ride and neither of his parents were home. The coach notices that Kevin does not talk much anymore and has begun to isolate himself from the team. When the coach asks Kevin how things are going, Kevin replies, "who cares, my parents don't!"

Ex. 5.2, p. 23

Crisis Management: Handling Parent Problems on the Run

- **‘Problem’ Parent Scenario 3:** Michael’s mother loves to talk about Michael to anyone she can find. In fact, she told several parents that Michael will be receiving a scholarship to a major Division I school as long as he plays like he should. Michael starts the season slowly and develops a nagging injury that bothers him all season. Michael’s mother tells him that she is disappointed that he has had only 6 touchdowns in 4 games and that he needs to demand the ball from the quarterback. “Michael, you are the best player on the team, so you need to act like it.” When Michael’s mother picks him up after a practice or game, the car ride home turns into a critical analysis of every play. Michael feels that he can never do anything good enough and begins to ignore his mother again.

Ex. 5.2, p. 24

Crisis Management: Handling Parent Problems on the Run

- **‘Problem’ Parent Scenario 4:** Eduardo, all-conference shortstop for the varsity baseball team, was recently reported to be at a party drinking alcohol. Coach Johnson decides to talk to Eduardo’s parents because he is concerned that Eduardo is getting into trouble more often than in the past. When Coach Johnson approaches Eduardo’s mother and father about the alcohol incident, they reply, “Sure, we know about it. Kids do it all the time. What is it going to hurt if Eduardo has a beer or two? We don’t understand why the school is punishing him. Everybody else is drinking!” Coach Johnson has noticed in the past that Eduardo’s parents never punish him for the wrong decisions that he makes or for his poor grades in school. A rumor has started that Eduardo has been hanging out with a group of kids known for drug abuse. Coach Johnson is greatly concerned for Eduardo.

Ex. 5.2, p. 24

Crisis Management: Handling Parent Problems on the Run

- **‘Problem’ Parent Scenario 5:** Bill Smith, a parent of one of your players, attends all of his child’s games and practices. He played basketball in high school and loves the sport. Bill is very supportive of the team and wants to see them do well, especially in terms of winning. However, he tends to get overly involved in the games and gets very upset with the officials’ calls. Bill will let the official, as well as everyone else at the game, know when he thinks his daughter’s team has been “wronged” on a call. Your policy is that you and your assistants are the only ones who talk to the officials, not the players or their parents.

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Summary

- Parents are integral to the high school sport experience.
- It takes time and effort, but you must work with parents.
- Using the preventive medicine strategies will help reduce time spent on ‘putting out fires.’
- Make a commitment to involve your team’s parents as sources of support.

Thank You!

- Questions

