

“Communication within the Athletic Triangle—Athletes, Parents, and Coaches”

Challenges in athletics today:

- 73% of kids who start playing sports as young kids quit by the time they're 13.
- Hard to get officials to participate—they're not treated well
- Parent complaints
- Violence at contests
- Coaches keeping fewer kids on the team, or quitting entirely
- Fewer qualified coaches
- Bad sportsmanship
- Who are good role models?

Why is communication so difficult?

- People don't always listen well
- Have different perspectives on how things should be done
- They are operating outside of their appropriate roles

Why are parents the way they are?

- Children of the 60's
- Many parents have coached, think they know how things should be
- Parents feel their kids are special
- Their kids can't afford to fail
- “No” is not an acceptable answer
- Trophies for participating is standard these days
- Scholarships make a huge difference to kids
- “Curling parents” are sweeping the broom ahead of their child's path to make sure the ice is clear and their child will go far

What about the kids?

- “60 Minutes” did a show on 11/11/07 called “The Coming of the Millennium.” Millennial youth have been told they are “special” and “all winners”.
- Kids in their 20's have grown up with the expectation that they will automatically win and will be rewarded for showing up.
- “Our parents really took from us that opportunity to fall down on their face and learn how to stand up” was a comment from one such child.
- When you fix their problems, the message is that they aren't competent to help themselves.

Why do high school sports exist?

- To work with others—“We vs. I”
- To be successful—we don't always win but we succeed when we strive to win
- To develop sportsmanship
- To improve skills and strengthen self-image
- To enjoy athletics
- To develop personal health habits

Things parents do that their kids really appreciate:

- Come to games
- Bring snacks
- Be proud even when they didn't win
- Cheer with everyone else, not individually
- Make friends with other parents

Lessons for parents:

- Be a parent, not a coach
- If all the kids on the team had more playing time, we would run out of minutes
- Let your kids go...it is their experience, not yours. Let them ask you for advice or tips, don't force it on them.
- Help your kids understand that athletics isn't everything....Encourage them to be a student, be a whole person.
- Teach them that attitude is everything...if you change your attitude, you'll change your life.

During Q&A segment:

Discussion about kids specializing in one sport at a young age these days. Tom's comment was that it is best not to specialize...many skills translate across sports, and many of today's top athletes grew up playing multiple sports. Also, by specializing, you play year-round with the same kids and don't learn to play with different teammates, and you often just play the same position and don't get a chance to experience different roles.

Discussion about fans taunting opponent teams. Athletic Directors have to take charge with their fans to teach them what the decorum at the school should be. At Seattle Prep, Tom had fans hand a Tootsie Pop to fans that couldn't control their emotions. This worked to convey the message in a gentle fashion. At UPrep, Rebecca commented that she has told fans and students that you should "Cheer, not jeer."