



Champion Coach Note: Coaching Athletes, Managing Parents



This week's note comes to us from Notre Dame Social Foundations of Coaching student Sean Hannon with advice on balancing the dual role as a leader of athletes and a manager of parents.

"I don't look at myself as a basketball coach. I look at myself as a leader who happens to coach basketball."

-Mike Krzyzewski

Coaches have a unique responsibility when it comes to coaching. They not only have to do the best job they can as a coach, but they need to also manage the parents of the young athletes they coach. As the Play Like A Champion Coaches Manual says, "Parents and coaches want...their children to become Champions. (But) While the coach has an obligation to look after all children equally, parents have an obligation to look after their children first..." (p. 54). Therefore conflicts might arise between coaches and parents. However, there are ways to stop conflict from happening and ways to mitigate it if tension does arise.

1. Get the parents to be on the same page as you
 - Get parents to support the good of the team and ALL of the children
 - Meet with parents before the season so they know what they can expect from you and how you like to coach
2. Manage parents' expectations
 - Happiness is all about managing expectations. Parents will be happier if they know what to expect coming into a season with regard to the success of the team, the playing time for their child, etc.

3. Discuss how parents should act

- Do not tell parents what to do, but instead open the floor for a discussion on how to properly go about cheering at games, encouraging but not yelling at their children, etc.
- Remind parents this is their child's time to shine. They had their own chance when they were younger, so encourage them to be parents and not live vicariously through their child
- Remind them that their children act the way their parents act. If parents scream at officials, players will too. Promote positive behavior from parents. Let them be fans and parents, but not additional coaches

4. Set guidelines for parent and coach communication

- If they have an issue with you as the coach, have them discuss that with you in private, not by yelling during a game
- Let parents know when you will be available to talk (i.e. after practices and games), but keep it reasonable (i.e. no calls after 10pm)
- Be a good listener, make eye contact, and be thoughtful yet truthful
- Talk with them after the season to discuss their child's experience so you can grow as a coach
- Lastly, when someone is upset, give them time to cool off, say you will talk with them the next day. When you do talk with them, let them vent and then be mature in your response. Be calm, and do not let tempers get the best of either one of you.

If you follow these steps, coaches, parents, and players should be set up to all have an enjoyable experience.