

Part II

What Do We Have in Common with Parents in our Athletic Programs?

One can create a list much longer than mine, but I think there are five common factors between coaches/athletic administrators and parents that provide the basis for positive communication and great experiences for our athletes.

- First, think for a moment about the titles that are associated with our roles. There is a common respect given just because of the title. Coach.... When one addresses a person as Coach, there is a sense of respect and honor that naturally goes with that title. We think of the great coaches in our lives fondly and remember all life's lessons learned from them. At the same time, we need to remember that some have discredited the title with their actions and understand why some parents are hesitant about totally "releasing" their sons and daughters to us. What about the titles, Mom and Dad? Aren't those endearing terms that indicate love and respect to most of us? We ought to understand that those are the most difficult job titles on the face of the earth as we have no practical experience at them until they are thrust upon us at the birth of a child.
- Parents are doing the best job they can with the knowledge and skills they have. Isn't that also true of coaches who try to do what is best for the athlete? Both sides of this athletic equation want only what promotes the interest of the student-athlete.
- Both Coaches and Parents believe that their "charges" are life-long learners who continue to grow with every experience and can learn to master that which they continually practice.
- No one can deny that the purpose of athletics is to teach life skills and that this reinforces exactly what the Parents are trying to accomplish at home as well.
- Finally, I realized some time ago that Parents do what they do because they love their kids. Coaches do what they do because they love working with kids and trying to motivate them to become more than what they thought they could be. If both Parents and Coaches love the kids, why can't we find a middle ground where we can work together to make it a better experience for all? Why do we seemingly have to make it into a competition where we force our athletes to make a choice between listening to Mom and Dad or to the Coach?

Let's build on the positives. We all want what is best for the student-athlete. Let's demonstrate that by communicating effectively with their parents rather than isolating them. Let's find ways to make the Parents feel like a part of the program instead of an outsider. Let's help define their role so that they understand how to behave and how to support our Coaches. Let's thank them for their support and encourage them to be positive role models and to demonstrate the best of sportsmanship at our contests. They aren't the enemy. They are co-conspirators in the process of trying to make Men and Women out of our student-athletes.