

Part V

Communication “Musts”

When all is said and done, there are a handful of things that we just have to communicate to parents beyond the school, district, and legal requirements for participation in athletics. Feel free to add to the list, but successful educational practices tell us that repetition is the key to learning, so say these things to parents every chance you get. Emphasize the underlined topics in your own way – often!

- Virtually every school has a Mission Statement as do many athletic departments. Share this at every meeting. This Mission should be the focus of every decision made in the program. Our school Mission is very different from a community or select athletic program’s Mission...so we need to help our parents understand why an athletic program exists. We know it is to teach life’s lessons, values, and characteristics, not to win championships or get scholarships. But we need to make sure parents understand why our program exists before they choose to allow their child to participate. They need to know so that they can “buy” into it.
- We need to model what good Sportsmanship looks like to our parents. I begin by telling parents that “if they can’t be a good sport for any other reason, then please do it so that everyone goes home alive tonight!” After the initial shock, then I give them the more positive reasons to do it. I stress the importance of modeling their behavior and how to accept even the bad calls that go against us. I enlist the 80% to help the 10% control themselves in our stands as well.
- Schools are a safe place to fail. When our kids fail in real life, there can be very serious consequences. You don’t want to fail behind the wheel of a car, for instance. But we learn more from our mistakes than our successes, so we need to help parents understand that we grow when we learn to handle our failures and get back up and try again. We should be rewarding effort and stick-to-it-iveness.
- Be a parent not a coach. Our kids have lots of coaches and many people can step into that role, but they only have one set of parents/guardians. This is a special role that only they can fill. Be a great parent.
- It is their son/daughter’s experience, let them go. We had our chance, now it is our kids turn to play and enjoy. Give them the chance to do it in their own way. Be supportive, don’t push.
- There is more to life than athletics. A career can be over in a second. An injury or an illness can put an end to a promising career at any time. Parents need to help their kids understand that athletics are important, but not as important as academics, friendships, families, and reputations.
- It is a Miracle that our kid’s arms and legs and brains work in concert so well to allow them to participate in athletics at all. Parents should take a step back and just appreciate how awesome it is to be able to go out and watch their son/daughter participate in a sport. Whether as a starter or a bench warmer, just be thankful for the opportunity to watch your kid play. It will all be over way too soon anyway.

Take every opportunity to stress these critically important points to your parent communities. You will discover that this will build a strong sense of community and support for your entire athletic program.