

Up Front Communication with Parents of Young Athletes

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INTRODUCTION

If you coach young athletes, one of your major roles is to deal with the parents of the athletes that you coach. It is a role that cannot be ignored, side stepped or trivialised. To be fully effective, you should approach this role in an organised, comprehensive, professional and up front manner.

One strategy that can be used to achieve this is for you to develop what I will term a “Coaching Information Kit”. A Coaching Information Kit (CIK) is a handout that aims to inform parents about all important aspects of your coaching operation. To be most effective, it should be handed to a parent on their initial enquiry about your coaching.

THE BENEFITS

The process of developing and using a CIK has a number of benefits:

It forces you to get organised.

The process of developing a CIK is as important as the product. It makes you think extensively about how you want your coaching to operate and the type of details you need to provide to enquiring parents. Having all of the information in writing means that each parent receives the same information and there is less chance of you forgetting to communicate some of the details.

It lays everything out on the table

Providing a parent with CIK before even beginning the coaching process allows them to get a feeling about whether or not you are the right coach for their child. You are basically saying, “Here’s what I do, take it or leave it!” After reading that you coaching does not suit their needs and the enquiry mercifully may go no further. This saves a lot of time later on—yours and theirs! Alternatively, this approach will logically attract people compatible to your philosophies and coaching style. Essentially, the CIK acts as an early “filter”. Being up front also helps to prevent later misunderstandings about such things as procedures and conduct. Everything is spelt out clearly in writing to all relevant parties.

It makes coaching more satisfying and enjoyable.

Many coaches grumble about things such as athletes being absent from training without notice, athletes turning up intermittently, parents putting their children through extra training outside the coach’s program and finding their athlete is attending another coach’s training without their knowledge. These coaches

shouldn't grumble. It is often their fault that they have not properly or clearly communicated their expectations. Many parents unknowingly cause frustration for a coach by not following accepted etiquette or procedures that a coach figures that they "should know". It is not good enough to expect people to know how to act in a coach/athlete, coach/parent relationship. It may be their first one! Tell them how to act! Avoid all the potential problems by taking a few proactive steps and set the boundaries right from the start. It will make your job a lot easier and much more enjoyable.

DEVELOPING AN INFORMATION KIT

Below are some major pieces of information that you will want to consider including in your CIK.

- Coaching Mission Statement
- Your Coaching Background
- Coaching Philosophy
- Athlete Training Progression
- Organization and other information
- Athlete/Coach Etiquette
- Coaching Fees
- Contact Details

The Coaching Mission Statement

Your coaching mission statement is your formal statement of purpose as a coach. It focuses on what you want to be and what you want to do as a coach. It is the key criterion by which everything you do with your coaching is evaluated. You will see the value of giving such information to the parents of athletes you may potentially coach. Presenting parents with your coaching mission statement is vital in communicating your approach to coaching.

To develop your coaching mission statement:

- List your most important coaching-related values (up to twenty). Examples may include: fun, positive experiences, leadership, full potential growth, improvement, healthy lifestyle, etc.
- Narrow these down to the seven most important to you. If you could only have seven which ones would they be?

Craft a statement based on these values until it reflects your coaching. It should be strong and clear. It is not something you usually write overnight; it may take many sittings and many revisions over days, weeks or months. Persist for at least half an hour at the first sitting, then revisit it the next day.

NOTE: Your coaching mission statement is not set in stone. You may add to and alter it as appropriate.

Coaching Background

Include here all of your coaching qualifications and experiences. It is nice for parents to know who you are and what you have done. This is probably the most modest way to do it.

Coaching Philosophy

Some people use “philosophy” and “mission statement” interchangeably, however I believe that, while your coaching philosophies should reflect your mission statement, there are subtle but important differences. Your coaching philosophies are principles or beliefs that make you how you actually coach (e.g. “All young athletes should avoid early specialisation”.)

Athlete Training Progression

This provides parents with some idea about how you plan to progress the young athlete as they advance through the age groups. It provides information about what they will be doing at each age and how it fits into the overall picture. It is very important to provide parents with a “big picture” and educate them to look long term.

Organisation and Other information

This is the nuts and bolts of your coaching. Ideas to include here include:

- How athletes join your sessions
- If you have maximum numbers in a session
- When, where, what time and for how long you train
- What to bring
- What to do if an athlete cannot attend
- What happens in very hot or wet weather
- What if an athlete is sick or injured
- Expected athlete behaviour
- Directing enquiries

Athlete/ Coach Etiquette

Discuss here:

- Procedures for moving between Coaches
- Ceasing training
- Working with other coaches
- Undertaking additional sessions

Coaching Fees

- Do you charge a fee?
- If so, how much?

- How is it to be paid?
- What do they get for their money?

Contact Details

Include here relevant phone numbers and even a postal address.

Up front communication—an early setting of the boundaries—through the use of a coaching information kit, can avoid many problems often associated with coaching.