

Respect in Sports

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A newsletter for everyone interested in supporting a positive youth sports experience.



The Sports Alliance of Minnesota is a coalition of sports organizations whose mission is to provide tools for creating a positive sports environment.

The creation of a positive sports environment begins with active engagement of all participants—players, parents, coaches, administrators, game officials, spectators, and community members.

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Appreciate Officials -- "If it were easy, everyone would do it" Kevin Merkle, MSHSL

This quotation has been used by coaches, and others, as a motivational tool. I've seen this painted in large letters on the wall in the strength training room – a reminder that working out is not easy – and that's why it can provide athletes the opportunity to gain an edge on their competition.

This same quotation can be used in the recruitment of officials. One of the reasons we must constantly work to recruit and retain officials is that it is not an easy job. If it were easy we would have plenty of officials. Officiating is not for everyone. To be a successful an official must have the ability to make tough decisions quickly and decisively; in high pressure situations; knowing that no matter what call is made someone will disagree. Some people don't like that pressure; don't like "being yelled at," don't like the travel, the evenings and weekends away from home, and the other challenges that come with being an official. It's not easy and it's not for everyone – all the more reason to appreciate and respect those that take on this challenge. Coaches, players and spectators need to understand how difficult it is to be a good official, and learn to better appreciate the services that officials provide.

For the complete article, click here:

"Blueprint for Better Coaching"

Dr. David Hoch, recently retired as Athletic Director at Loch Raven High School in Baltimore County, Md. recently wrote a coaching guidebook titled "Blueprint for Better Coaching." Follow the link below to an interview with Dr. Hoch that was published in Athletic Management magazine.. A former coach and long-time mentor to coaches, Hoch shares his thoughts on getting started in the profession, dealing with adversity, and how to avoid common pitfalls and mistakes.

To read the interview and find a link to his book, click here:



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Appreciate Officials -- "If it were easy, everyone would do it"

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Officiating is one of the jobs where you are expected to be perfect and then improve. Officials can know the rules, interpret those rules, make the correct calls, apply the correct penalty – while using the proper signals and communicating professionally – only to have someone disagree. Many times officials are placed in situations where they have to make a call that is not black and white. They have to see the play, interpret the rules and decide on the call in a matter of seconds. While officials strive to be perfect, mistakes are inevitable – in fact, in some sports calling the perfect game is nearly impossible.

Unfortunately these mistakes may impact the outcome of a game, or the performance of an individual or team. Such incidents actually provide two of the major values that can be taught through sports: teaching participants how to deal with adversity; and that (just as in the real world) things are not always fair. Winning is not the sole objective to participation in youth sports -- what is important is the process of practicing, playing, taking part, building relationships, and learning lessons that will assist later in life. Learning to deal with the wrong call is one of those lessons.

Experienced coaches know that all the calls will not go their way and that over the course of a game or a season the calls will tend to balance out. They teach this concept to their players. The best teams learn to deal with these negative occurrences and do not allow the ups and downs that will occur during a game affect them. Instead they only deal with those things which they control.

Being an official is not easy. This is a job that requires training, study, and lots of practice. Officials study rulebooks, learn mechanics, practice their skills, have meetings before and after every game and are under constant evaluation by coaches, fans and other officials. They travel, purchase uniforms and equipment, and spend many hours away from home – all for a fee, that when computed to an hourly wage, would be less than what most of us would be willing to work for.

Officials always strive to do their best – why would they want anything less? Just like players and coaches, they strive for perfection, and just like players and coaches, they will make mistakes. Appreciate their efforts – appreciate the difficulty of their job and remember: *"If it were easy, everyone would do it."*

Dr. David Hoch, recently retired as Athletic Director at Loch Raven High School in Baltimore County, Md. recently wrote a coaching guidebook titled "Blueprint for Better Coaching." The information below is from an interview with Dr. Hoch that was published in Athletic Management magazine.. A former coach and long-time mentor to coaches, Hoch shares his thoughts on getting started in the profession, dealing with adversity, and how to avoid common pitfalls and mistakes. You can order a copy of "Blueprint for Better Coaching" through the following link: https://payments.momentummedia.com/store/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=319

What's the biggest mistake you see young coaches make?

Having a lack of understanding and appreciation that administrative and organizational tasks are so important. A new coach is so filled with enthusiasm that they just want to conduct a practice session and shout instructions during a game. But before an athlete can step onto a field or court, the coach has to have things such as the permission form, physical form, and inherent risk form signed by both the parent and athlete and an emergency card and perhaps other paperwork. These documents are necessary for risk management and the "eligibility" of the athlete.

Next, a coach has to have a system in order to maintain accurate records and to be efficient with the different processes, like issuing uniforms. And many of these things and the time involved can simply overwhelm a new coach.

What did you find most difficult when coaching?

There were always two things that caused me the most trouble and that I found extremely difficult. The first was making cuts to a squad. Even with 24 years of experience, this was agonizing for me.

Nowadays the term "selecting the squad" should be used instead of making cuts. Every young man or woman who tries out for the team wants to be part of it. And yet many times you can't keep everyone. You know that some young people, and perhaps also their parents, will be extremely disappointed or upset at not making it. This is a difficult time for sure.

And of course, it is always difficult to deal with misguided, challenging parents. To me, this is the most time-consuming, emotional, and difficult part of coaching. There is no doubt that this represents--and has for decades--the number one problem in coaching youth sports.

Learning techniques to deal with this small segment of individuals is absolutely essential in order to survive and thrive in coaching.

In the chapter titled "Communicating with Athletes," you mention that coaches sometimes need to take different approaches with different athletes. What do you do with a player who seems to not understand your instructions?

First, the basic idea of taking different approaches with different athletes is really just an educational principle. Young people learn at different rates and may do best with different styles or approaches. In a classroom, for example, there are some students who may learn best with hands-on teaching and being in a small group. Others may need visual aids and there are those who thrive with individual attention. No one style and approach works well for all.

Since athletics is an integral part of education, and teaching and learning are vitally involved, a coach needs to use varying approaches. It is important for a coach to understand that each athlete is unique and he or she has to find the best method to relate to that person.

For example, in my last coaching stop at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, I wanted two basketball players to move two feet away from the foul lane as starting points in one of our offensive. One of the players, a hard working, intelligent and good player, did not make this adjustment after repeated reminders.

During a game, I even had to call and use a timeout in an attempt to correct this seemingly very small adjustment. During halftime, I diagramed the change on the blackboard and still nothing changed. This player did not move off the block at all during the second half.

It was only in practice the following day when we finally 'physically and visually' connected and the light bulb came on for him. The player wasn't being obstinate, he needed to actually 'see' and understand the reasoning for the move. This example helped me, perhaps more than the player, to reinforce the concept that everyone learns, hears or communicates differently.

How do you deal with a player you feel doesn't like or respect you?

I think these are two distinctly separate issues. A player doesn't have to like me in order for us to have a working relationship and for the team to move forward. However, a lack of respect can be a more difficult hurdle, since this feeling could spill over to others on the team.

The lack of respect could be the result of the athlete being confused or not understanding the coach. This possibility emphasizes the importance of reviewing the concepts of good communication and to try different methods in order to bridge this possible gap.

And of course, the lack of respect could also be the result of poor communication tactics used by the coach. If this is the case, the coach, possibly with the help of others needs to learn from his or her shortcomings and develop a more acceptable and successful approach.

In the chapter titled "Working with Others," you talk about how a coach should interact with officials. What should coaches do when the official seems to be making really bad calls?

During games, there is really only one acceptable approach. A coach can quietly and politely--and without yelling and throwing a tantrum--ask for an explanation after a call. During this quick meeting between the coach and official, it is possible to offer a suggestion such as, "Would you please look for ..."

The overriding reason that this is the way the things have to be done with "bad calls" is that the coach can influence the athletes and fans by his or her actions. A coach has to be under control, exhibit sportsmanship, and be a role model. This isn't easy. And furthermore, it took me many, many years to begin to even understand this fundamental tenant.

It is really important coaches understand, that officials are human and they are trying their best. If an official makes a mistake, it isn't intentional and not much different than those made by players and coaches.

There is also a system in place for most leagues, counties, and associations in order to document and report officials who make blatant mistakes or who need improvement. These reports are forwarded to the assigner or supervisor of officials. Future assignments or suggestions for improvement will be made based in part upon these reports.

In many areas of the country, there simply are not enough officials. It is important, therefore, to identify weaknesses, prescribe steps for improvement and learn to treat them with respect. Remember, a game cannot be played without officials.

Coaching is a very emotional job. When you coached, what was your solution to dealing with a bad day at practice or a disappointing game?

I was absolutely the worse example. Win or lose a game, I would come home tied up in a knot. Usually my wife would have fed the kids early and upon the sound of the garage doors, she would gather them and announce, "Come on guys we're going to the movies or the mall."

Diane knew that I was on an emotional edge after a game and just needed to be alone for a few hours. When they got back from the movies or mall, she got the kids ready for bed and I would head off to my home office because win or lose, I would never be able to fall asleep.

Lying in bed tossing and turning didn't make much sense. Therefore, I'd watch the game tape or review a scouting tape in preparation for the next game until I started to nod off--usually around 2 a.m. I really wish that I had some guidance from a textbook or mentor to provide a better alternative.

It took me years to realize that taking a four to five mile run was the best approach for reducing the enormous tension and pent-up emotions after a game. It isn't always possible to fit a run in, though, when you get home at 11 p.m. or later. Having an elliptical machine or treadmill became an essential family room piece of equipment.