

Parent Tips for Approaching the Coach About Playing Time

By Dr. Chris Stankovich

A student-athlete is working hard but still isn't playing much, what should a parent do? Of course, parents can't make the coach play their son or daughter, but there are things parents can do to improve their child's chances for more playing time. Following are some ideas that athletic directors can share with parents.

The Coach as a Teacher

One of the many hats that coaches wear is that of being a teacher. Granted, rarely do you see "teacher" in the formal job description for coaches, but this is exactly what coaches do every day when working with student-athletes. In fact, coaches teach countless important things, including teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership, motivation, resiliency and so many more life skills and lessons it is impossible to count. Coaches, like teachers, are expected to help their athletes learn, grow and develop, making communication with parents an important part of the job.

The vast majority of interscholastic coaches not only see themselves as teachers, they embrace this role with pride. Accordingly, parents should approach coaches in similar ways they would approach their child's teacher when trying to learn what needs to be done to improve conditions. This means to view the coach (teacher) as an ally (not adversary), to respectfully ask for feedback, and to show appreciation for the time given to help their child improve for the future.

Tips for Approaching the Coach

Instead of immediately asking to meet with the coach, parents should watch their child and see how he or she interacts and plays with the team. Parents should attend practices and see if there are noticeable reasons why their child is not playing as much as they would like. Are there any off-field reasons playing in to the coach's decision, like grades, missed practices or other social issues? If a student-athlete is still recovering from an injury, could that be the reason he or she is sitting on the bench? Parents should consider holding off on setting up a meeting with the coach until all obvious factors are examined and dismissed.

If parents still believe playing time is an issue, they might request a meeting with the coach. Following are some tips that athletic directors could share with parents regarding meeting with the coach.

Be polite. Remember, most coaches are very busy and may find it difficult to schedule a meeting. Additionally, coaches know that the No. 1 reason a parent asks to meet is about playing time, and often these meetings start with a disgruntled parent visibly frustrated, often calling "politics" rather than trying to understand the coach's decision. Parents should be polite and respectful, and ask if there is a convenient time for the coach to meet for a brief meeting – in most cases, this approach sets the table for a productive eventual meeting.

Listen first, ask questions second. When parents meet with the coach, they should first provide the coach an opportunity to offer

