

# WHY SHOULD YOU HAVE A PRESEASON MEETING WITH PARENTS

Have you ever been to your child's youth sporting event and seen a parent act inappropriately? Ever watched a parent yell at the umpire or referee (who happens to be a teenager), throw up their hands in disgust when their child strikes out or misses a key shot in the game, or storms off in anger because another child on the team (other than their own) screws up at an important time in the game? How often have you been frustrated by these actions and wished you could do something constructively without making a fool of yourself as well? Well, part of the answer lies with the purpose of this month's article.

I recently had lunch with an NFL coach, who has been a head coach and part of a Super Bowl champion staff. We discussed the importance of communication between himself, the other players and the other coaches on his staff. He told me that the most important aspect of being a coach has to center around being an excellent communicator. However, he told me that most NFL coaches are poor communicators because they assume that their coaching staff is on the same page with them. He emphasized that this couldn't be further from the truth. It was surprising for me to hear that he stated that most teams don't take the time to make sure everyone is on the same page, because they assume so, rather than work on it.

As parents, teachers, coaches and businessmen, we all know that open and honest communication is one of the key components of a successful business, family or team. Organizations that take the time to effectively integrate new employees into a company almost always take the time to explain the company mission statement and company policy during the interview process. This can help future employees decide if this particular company is a place they would like to work.

In youth sports, I have always encouraged and emphasized that coaches take the time to set up a mandatory preseason meeting with parents. There are several reasons to set up and have this meeting. First, it gives the coach an opportunity to explain his/her philosophy about why they are coaching, as well as to discuss the practice and game schedule. Second, it gives the parents an opportunity to talk with the coach about their goals for the season, if the coach is more interested in winning and losing, or in teaching and learning technique. But, most importantly, it will give both parents and coaches alike, the opportunity to discuss whether or not this is an appropriate team for the young athlete to participate on. It is the perfect time to discuss the significance of sportsmanship and behavior by coaches, parents and athletes. I feel that this is the best time for a coach to discuss what types of behaviors are acceptable or not acceptable by all. I strongly emphasize that coaches and parents should discuss not just the behaviors of the young athletes, but also the behaviors of the parents in the stands and the coaches as role models. I believe this is where a coach should discuss the do's and

don'ts of interacting not just with the athletes during a game, but also with the coach and officials.

By taking the time to explain proper sideline behavior on and off the field, it will usually eliminate unruly behavior by all. You can develop a game plan about who should speak with the officials during and after a game ( this should almost always be the coach). It can make parents aware of how their behavior can not only make a fool of themselves, but more importantly, embarrass their child. In the end, it can help make youth sports not just a positive learning experience, but also an enjoyable one for coaches, parents and athletes.