

Open Letter to Parents

While I was developing a letter to post here for parents to read, I came across an open letter to parents from another football coach. The letter said everything I was planning on saying so I am borrowing it from the January issue of "Coach and Athletic Director."

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"Open Letter to the Parents of Football Players"

Coaching is a high-pressured job. Whether the pressure to win is coming from the school or community or whether it is self-induced by the coach doesn't lessen its effect.

Every coach wants his team to be successful. Every coach worth his whistle is a student of the game he coaches. The coach has probably spent years developing a philosophy and a "teaching style." The average workweek for a high school coach is 25-35 hours on coaching duties alone. Out-of-season (there is never an off-season) the good coaches attend clinics, read books, watch videos, and attend college spring practices.

Many coaches, because of their competitive natures are emotional and intense. Fans see these coaches as "screamers" who spend too much of their time yelling and chastising players. But the great majority of these coaches are completely loyal to their athletes. They are strong advocates and willing mentors for all of their players.

Parents, in particular, can be critical of coaches. A coach has perhaps 50+ players and 10 assistant coaches to consider with every decision he makes. The greater good of the football program itself is a prime consideration.

Parents on the other hand, are concerned about only one athlete. When their son is unhappy or the parent believes that he isn't being treated fairly, conflicts can occur. Too many fine coaches have left the sidelines because of parental interference.

Parents would do well to remember a few simple facts:

- The coaches are in a better position and certainly more knowledgeable in determining who plays and how much.
- The best players play.
- Even the players who do not start or play many minutes are important to the team.
- Hard work and discipline have their own rewards.
- Commitment and self-discipline are not "bad" words.
- Parents, not coaches, set the standard for their son's behavior.
- Unless you have actually spent time studying the game (and not just watching it on TV), don't presume you know enough to be critical of the coaching staff.

Coaches are visible, and their work is put on public display weekly. Many people watch football on television and think they understand the sport. How many parents would like people going to their place of work, observing their performance, and then publicly and privately criticizing the job they do?

When players complain to parents, and parents react by being negative about the team or the coach, they are undermining team cohesiveness and discipline. In our "Me First" society, some parents seem to prefer being their son's friend rather than his parent. Your son has plenty of friends. He needs a parent to provide discipline and guidance.

Parents who really wish to be a positive factor in their son's athletic experience would be best served making sure their son does his part. Understand that few players will be "scholarship" athletes. Don't overestimate your son's potential and form unrealistic expectations. Help reinforce that in a team sport, the team is the top priority and personal goals come second.

I am always confounded when players make a bad decision and are punished and parents complain or try to intervene on their son's behalf. Parents often make excuses or point out other players in an attempt to justify the behavior in question. Why not make your son accountable for his decisions and help teach him that in life he will be judged by his actions.

Know who your son's friends are and what they are doing. When your son does make a mistake, hold him accountable for his actions. Making excuses or ignoring unwanted behavior only encourages it. Being strict with your son now will save much regret later. Reinforce the coach's philosophy and encourage your son to get involved in all team activities. Understand that football is a hard game with intense physical and mental demands.

Under no circumstances should you allow your son to quit! Once a person begins the process of quitting whenever he is challenged, quitting becomes a habit that gets easier and easier to repeat. Have a house rule that if your son starts an activity he must finish it.

Anytime a problem has to be addressed by the parent and the coach, make an appointment to see the coach personally. Find out the coach's view of the situation. The story you heard from your son may or may not be completely factual. Parents and coaches should act in concert to help in the development of the athlete.

As a parent no one has a bigger role to play or a better opportunity to affect positive behavior from a son than you do.

By Jeff Shutter, Quarterbacks Coach Franklin & Marshall College