

School Sports and School Coaches

If you've opened this document you are about to read a biased article. It contains fact, but it also includes my own strong opinions about school sports and school coaches.

I am biased because I know most of our local coaches very well; in fact, I hired many of them. I am biased because I was a coach, my father was a coach, and because the people who coached me were very influential in my life.

That same positive influence is my greatest desire for our coaches as they teach our young people in Forney.

Levels

There are few experiences that can stir emotion and stimulate behaviors like athletic competition. If you've been to a little league game, junior high, freshman or JV game, varsity game, or even a collegiate or professional athletic event, I expect you've noticed this.

There is as much difference from the bottom to the top of this scale as there is between riding a tricycle and driving a stock car. Both of these actions move you forward, but the age-related level is totally different, and so is the reason for travel.

The parent showing the tot how to balance on the tricycle is involved in teaching a skill surrounded by a myriad of other developmental lessons. He has to teach how to execute basic fundamental skills, think constructively, react appropriately, practice self-control, deal with failure, and hopefully enjoy riding so the child will appreciate success and wish to continue.

Once a paid adult is driving in a stock car race, he or she is a professional, and there is nothing being developed except the path to the win.

There is a similar differentiation in the scale of athletics and coaches. School coaches, like parents, have many teaching responsibilities, but they do their most important work within the environment of emotion and desire that surrounds team competition.

We should get to know the men and women who guide our local programs and understand what they are expected to accomplish. This helps create perspective. We must maintain an awareness of actions that help or hinder them in their important charge with our children.

Coaches are hired to facilitate success for kids, and though winning competitions is a big part of this, other developmental lessons are most vital. Positive, active support for the school coach translates directly to his or her ability to more successfully train kids. Attacking the coach for strategy, play calling, and playing time absolutely diverts energy from critical team goals.

Actions

This certainly does not mean that all coaches are perfect, and we should never settle for a bad employee in this excellent school community we share.

But let me tell you - I have known many of our FISD coaches for a long time, and we are fortunate to have some mighty good coaches.

Our coaches spend hundreds of hours with students day and night in all kinds of settings. They teach and demonstrate how to represent our school and community with pride. They advise, direct, mentor, discipline, and educate our children. They reinforce the values parents are teaching at home.

They are often the ones opening the school in the morning and closing it at night. They load up scores of kids on school buses and drive them to competitions all through the year, all over the state.

They teach kids to prevent injuries and assist with proper care if they become injured. They help kids make smart, healthy personal choices.

They monitor grades, classroom discipline, personal habits, and the ongoing development of our best and brightest students. They do the same for kids that are neither the best nor the brightest.

They train in best practices and become certified each year with the State of Texas to transport kids on a bus, perform CPR and First Aid, identify concussions, use an automated external defibrillator, teach ethics and follow UIL policy, and they master numerous other skills to take care of our kids.

They often spend forty hours per week coaching kids after their forty hours teaching a full load of academic classes.

It is pretty important that our coaches are good people, isn't it? It is indeed critical. It is also important that we support them as much as possible in their charge to build outstanding young men and women in our programs. Our children's lives may depend on it, developmentally, if not literally.

As Athletic Director I do not want a coach in Forney ISD that I would not want working closely with my own children.

Development

98% of the kids in school athletics are not going to play sports at the next level. That is the reality of school sports, though too much emphasis is often placed on "getting a scholarship." Whatever the individual athletic assessment of a child (talent level), the coach should focus a proportionate amount of energy on developing quality young men and women.

I believe there are many kinds of God-given talents, and that each individual child's are different. Athletically talented kids will have opportunities to play at the next level. These are usually won through the genetic lottery more than they are developed through the teachings of the coach. However, coaches can identify these kids and guide them, prepare them, teach them the fundamental skills to develop talent appropriately.

They can help them understand college entrance and grade requirements. Coaches can even sometimes help find places to play for less-gifted athletes with a genuine drive to be on a college team. Remember that even these kids are in the 2%.

The coach's primary job is to teach. Teaching the game itself is part of it, but personal development is the real lesson here. Athletics offers complex, multi-layered learning experiences.

In fact, in addition to social and physical skills, studies around the world have shown that social engagement and the kind of problem solving and development that takes place in athletics improves intellectual skill. There is much to gain *inside* school sports.

Other statistics-driven, scholarly research has shown clearly that student-athletes set themselves on a track to greater success in life beyond school.

Winning

In high school sports do we want to win? Heck YES! The vast majority of school coaches were athletes themselves; they have chosen careers in competitive sports. Winning is our goal. It is a great payoff for the hard work involved in athletics.

In a setting where talent and numbers are comparative (an even playing field), winning is a by-product of the teaching mentioned above. Our coaches will teach at a high level regardless of talent and numbers. It is fun and contagious when teams win, and it makes everyone feel good. We want to WIN IN FORNEY!

Championships, thrilling play, and potential scholarships in sports are great assets of the school sports program. They add to its value, but they are not why it exists. It exists to prepare kids for life, and that process is far more complex than a win, or a test score, for that matter.

People

So who are your Forney ISD coaches? Who does your FISD Athletic Department look to hire and how do we evaluate the work they do? Peruse this general information about our staff, check out their bios and contacts on this site, and learn about how they are evaluated.

Simply put, when we hire coaches we are looking for people who are *good for kids*. Candidates may be coaches who have skins on the wall or people who were great athletes themselves, or they may simply be people who have a great personal drive to make a difference in the lives of youngsters and our school teams.

Perspectives

Listed below are three phrases that over the years I have heard from a parent about a coach. Fortunately, these were exceptions. The silent majority maintains a realistic perspective and is very supportive of efforts to teach their kids.

1. "She is the worst coach in the world."

Seriously? Because there was this guy over in Scurry...

I'm kidding, but I really have known some bad coaches. They are out there. Surprisingly, some of them have a lot of wins. Bad coaches don't try to build young men and women of character. They tolerate bad habits or break kids down without building them back up. Some would sell a soul for a win, just probably not their own. They won't last here in Forney.

A tactical error or a playing time decision does not make a coach bad. All coaches make mistakes, and some perceived mistakes are simply misunderstood by the spectator. Coaches play the kids they believe will give the team the best chance to win.

We would certainly never hire the worst coach in the world in Forney.

2. "Your coach is bullying my son."

This is a dangerous accusation. Bullying is real and must be taken seriously and eradicated in order to protect children. Unfortunately, there probably are some adults who bully children in a school setting, and that is outrageous.

However, holding a child accountable, demanding a specific behavior, singling a kid out in front of peers, or playing another in his place –these do not constitute bullying. These are evidence of coaching.

Athletics can be a microcosm of reality and a petri dish for life after high school. Bullying Bad. Competition Good. A child learning to manage his own problems in a safe, managed school environment is a useful practice for when life throws real challenges his way.

3. "That coach obviously doesn't care about kids."

This is a particularly low-blow because it's probably the worst thing that can be said about a school coach, and in Forney, it had better be dead wrong.

Our coaches goof up from time to time, but they care about kids, or we don't let them keep coaching here.

The particular coach referenced was spending more time with the child of the person who made this statement than he was with his own. The person who made this statement missed the boat worrying about his paddle.

Fortunately, I had lots of evidence to the contrary, and the coach cared enough about his kid to treat him the same regardless of the careless comment.

Every coach makes a bad decision now and then. We can sit in the stands and consider what we would do differently. I promise you that I do this every game I watch! That's part of the fun of sports.

Most coaches have played it, studied it, eaten it, drunk it, dreamed it, learned it, taught it, and lived it for years. If that's not enough, they are evaluated by school people who've done the same, and they are acutely aware that they are also evaluated every Friday night by spectators.

I would like to share a guideline for the evaluation process used for FISD coaches:

The expectations and objectives included in the Forney ISD Athletic Coaching Evaluation Process focus upon on three basic questions:

- 1) *What does the athletic program contribute to the total educational program of the school?*
- 2) *What does athletics teach the participants?*
- 3) *How do we objectively evaluate what is being taught in the athletic program and how well are the participants being taught to compete?*

The Bottom Line:

If your child's coach makes a mistake, know that he or she will mull over it for far longer than we will.

If your child's coach is working impressively hard, tell him or her you appreciate it.

If your child's coach mistreats a kid or needs correction, tell us. We will make the correction that is appropriate.

Most importantly, respect the coach so your child can do the same and flourish.

We will rise in Forney Athletics together!

Thanks for reading if you made it this far. Call anytime we may be of service.

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