

Helping Schools with Mentoring Non-Teacher Coaches

By Dr. David Hoch, CMAA

All schools should have and conduct a professional development program for their coaching staff, and this expectation is well-defined in the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association's Leadership Training Course 723. One of the elements of this growth and development effort is mentoring, and this aspect is not just for new, beginning coaches, but it is also vital for individuals who have served in their position for a number of years. There is always something more to learn, review and improve upon.

Since many school districts have to increasingly rely more on non-teacher coaches, this presents another element and a challenge with respect to schools' mentoring programs. Even if teachers are new to coaching, they understand how the school day is organized, how to deal with students, what the protocols and expectations are for a school or the district.

While non-teacher coaches were students themselves at some point, they may not be familiar with the organizational and procedural aspects of a school. This means that in addition to the normal mentoring efforts with all coaches, those coming from the community would need special, additional attention and guidance. The following represent considerations and items that should be included when mentoring coaches who are not teachers.

Provide non-teacher coaches with a clear explanation of the education-based athletic concept, and what their role is with the team and the athletic program. While they should prepare their team for competition and strive to win, the ultimate goal is the growth and development of student-athletes. Also, point out that coaches in the school's program are not evaluated on wins or the lack thereof, but rather how they relate to and nurture their athletes.

Explain to or remind coaches not employed fulltime by a school that their athletes are indeed students first. This means that they have to attend and participate in class, complete homework assignments and study for tests. While coaches should expect complete effort during their practice sessions, these academic responsibilities also take time and effort, and represent the No. 1 objective.

Help non-teacher coaches understand that while they should encourage the academic achievement of their student-athletes, they should never attempt to pressure a teacher to alter grades or to provide special treatment for their players. Even asking a classroom instructor to complete a biweekly progress report may be a major intrusion, since most teachers are overwhelmed with paperwork.

Teachers can certainly encourage athletes, but unrealistic requests or pressure should not be placed upon teachers.

Point out that students also have family and possibly religious commitments in addition to their academic expectations, and they also need sleep in order to function both on the field or court, and in the classroom. It is critical, therefore, that coaches restrict practice sessions to two hours. Hopefully, this is already a protocol in your school district.

Emphasize that all coaches, just like teachers, have to respond to phone, text or email messages from parents. In many districts, this needs to be done within 24 hours, and coaches as all school employees also have to be courteous in their interaction with parents. This is simply a professional expectation.

Stress that foul or inappropriate language can never be used while coaching or interacting with their athletes, parents, opposing coaches or anyone connected to the athletic program or school. While this educational expectation is not restricted to non-teacher coaches, teachers should already understand this premise, whereas coaches with no previous connection to the school may need this explanation.

Help coaches who are not teachers understand that they cannot or should not restrict their athletes from playing another sport or participate in performing arts, or other school activities. For the benefit of the student and the overall program, multi-sport participation and involvement in other activities is the goal of your athletic program.

Point out that even though the efforts and passion of coaches are focused on their sport, all sports are vital and important to the students and the athletic program. This means that coaches need to cooperate with other coaches, and share athletes, equipment and venues. Regardless of the size of the crowd at games, or media interest, no sport is more important than any other.

Suggest to non-teacher coaches that they should try to attend school plays, musical performances and other activities in which their student-athletes may also participate. In this manner, they can develop a better understanding, appreciation and working relationship with their athletes.

Clearly explain that coaches must maintain an appropriate working relationship with their student-athletes, and communicate in a proper and professional manner. While an email or text mes-



sage can be used to communicate items such as bus times, uniform requirements and similar updates with the entire team, coaches generally should not send messages or meet alone one-on-one with individual athletes.

Outline post-game expectations. This means that coaches need to call in the box score after a game, and this needs to be done not only after victories but also when a contest results in a loss. While coaches should answer questions honestly if they are interviewed in person or on the phone, they should take a moment before responding.

Coaches should always avoid blaming officials for a loss, be as positive as possible when reviewing the play of their athletes, and save their critical comment for a private setting. It is vitally important that coaches understand that they represent the school, and they need to serve as a positive spokesperson.

There is one more consideration that comes into play when you have non-teacher coaches on your staff. Since they have jobs outside the educational arena, you may have to be imaginative and resourceful to find time for your mentor to meet with a new or inexperienced community coach, or for you to help this individual. It may not be ideal, but you may have to use more email messages, schedule Zoom meetings, find time perhaps after a game or a Sunday evening to meet.

Mentoring non-teacher coaches can be a challenge, but the effort is essential and can be successfully accomplished with a little thought and creativity. **HST**

Reference

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