

# Preseason Parents' Meetings



By Dr. David Hoch

If your athletic department doesn't already host seasonal preseason parents' meetings for all sports, it is time to consider holding your own. Why? This pro-active event may go a long way toward eliminating many of the concerns and problems that you have to deal with during a season. Of course, if you already have one, perhaps you can tweak and improve yours.

The more that you can explain to parents during these sessions that may increase their understanding of your approach, the less problems you should encounter. While you won't eliminate all complaints, parents' meetings will help.

While preseason meetings usually take place a few days before the first sessions for tryouts and are typically held in the auditorium, gym or cafeteria, be creative and do what works in your setting. This might mean meeting around a picnic in your stadium or in an outdoor amphitheater. Use what is unique and appropriate for your school and if you have the possibility, change settings occasionally.

What should you cover at your meetings? For the past 14 years, we've required our coaches to cover the method for selecting (cutting) their squad, their team rules, the criteria for earning a letter and sportsmanship expectations for both athletes and fans. Why these four items? They represented 98 percent of our complaints, confrontations and problems over the years. It only makes sense to thoroughly cover those topics that usually cause the most headaches.

## In addition, you may want to cover:

- ☑ Academic requirements to maintain eligibility
- ☑ How you determine who starts and how much an athlete plays in a game
- ☑ Selection and role of captains
- ☑ Attendance expectations at practice sessions and games for your athletes

- ☑ How practice sessions are conducted, including the length, when they normally start and end, and the expectation that no fans are allowed
- ☑ Responsibility for issued uniforms and equipment
- ☑ Procedures for how and to whom the athlete should report injuries
- ☑ Risks (injury or death) of participating in your sport
- ☑ Your style of play – both offensively and on the defensive end
- ☑ Commonly misunderstood or new rules of your sport
- ☑ How and when to contact you if mom or dad have a question or a concern

Since each setting and situation is unique, you should also include any item that may represent a concern in your community. Perhaps you will need to cover fund-raising issues or what your expectations are if an athlete misses practice to go on a family vacation. If you are new to the school or in doubt about some of these specific issues in your area, ask some fellow coaches or your athletic director. They should know and be able to offer some good suggestions.

In order to be organized and as efficient as possible, you will want to photocopy your handouts for team rules, schedule and contact information – phone number or e-mail address – and anything else that you want to distribute to your parents. It would also be wise to stack everything in the order in which you will use it and prep your assistant or junior varsity coach to handle the distribution at the appropriate time as you continue with the presentation.

Of course you want to leave some time at the end of your presentation to answer questions. Your goal is to have the parents leave with all of the answers to eliminate potential misunderstandings and problems. Also, you want to be careful during this part of the evening that one parent does not

take over and dominate the time or comes into the meeting with a hidden agenda.

If you find that one or two parents begin to dominate, suggest that they can set up an appointment to meet with you at another time. Also, if any issue becomes extremely problematic or it is something that you cannot easily answer, find your athletic director to help. If your athletic director is not in attendance, ask the parent to schedule a meeting with him or her.

Instead of simply standing in front of your group of parents explaining the procedures and features of your program, you might consider some other approaches. A PowerPoint presentation with film clips really holds the audience's attention and using guest speakers for certain topics helps to keep them fresh. For example, you may want to consider involving your athletic trainer or school nurse at your meeting to cover injury prevention and the protocols that have to be followed if an athlete is injured.

Since your presentation may create a vital first impression, it is extremely important to plan what you want to say and how you want to approach the various topics. Attempting to communicate everything off-the-cuff may not be in your best interest. You want this presentation to be as informative, positive, enthusiastic and professional as it can be.

Finally, to put a little accountability into your efforts, have mom, dad and the athlete sign and return a policy sheet. This document should state that they have read and agreed

to abide by your team rules, the school's athletic code of conduct and any other procedures that you deem necessary. Obviously, you will want to keep the policy sheets on file.

If any parent misses the meeting, consider sending home all of your materials that you distributed at the meeting. It is also important to have every athlete return the policy sheet signed by both parents. The only exceptions would be if one parent was deceased or divorced and living out of the area. Without having both parents sign off, you leave yourself vulnerable that one parent could cause a problem and claim that they knew nothing about the expectations.

With a little planning, time and work on your part, the preseason parents' meeting is an extremely important proactive effort. The more information that you are able to present, the less problems you should encounter. It certainly is worth the effort. **□**

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