

## **Building Relationships between the Coach and the Athletic Administrator**

Over the past thirty years as a coach as an athletic administrator I have conducted countless interviews and meetings with coaches. Some of the interviews have been in the form of post-season evaluation meetings and many have been in the form of job interviews for potential coaching and teaching candidates. Others have been nothing more than casual conversations away from the heat of battle. I have been intrigued by how both groups approached methods for building relationships between the coach and the athletic administrator.

During the past year I spoke to several coaches that asked almost identical questions of me. These coaches asked for a definitive list of expectations I had of coaches and coaching candidates. I was able to give a general answer, but had never been forced to sit down and construct an itemized written list I could share with members of the coaching staff or potential employees. During the course of time I decided it would be beneficial to produce a list of the most important expectations I had of any coaching candidate or member of my staff. I asked for ideas from athletic administrators around my league and state. The responses were as varied as the respondents, but several key points kept coming up in every response I received. The feedback I collected became the basis for my list of expectations.

A second idea was also spawned by the concept of a priority list for athletic administrators. It occurred to me that a listing of expectations that coaches have for their athletic administrator could also be a beneficial tool. I asked several of the coaches from my staff and neighboring league schools to offer input and examples. The response I received also varied widely. Many concepts were the same as those found on the administrative list and several common threads appeared in numerous responses. Many were unique and insightful expectations that I feel every athletic administrator should take into consideration and use in developing lasting positive relationships between members of the coaching staff and the administration.

It is my firm belief that open lines of communication and mutual trust are the keys to a strong relationship between all stakeholders in a sound athletic department. The bonds formed between motivated members of the staff and those in charge of the administration of athletic programs can help all parties survive the bad times that eventually come to us all. These bonds can also help staff members enjoy the great highs that occur when working with young student athletes. The more tools that are available to those that serve student-athletes, the stronger any athletic department will become in its attempts to serve.

Over time, a list of "Top Ten" expectations has evolved from this project. These guidelines can be beneficial for both coaches and athletic administrators. The goal of this endeavor was to produce a simple and concise set of guidelines for coaches to offer some sort of idea of the types of things that athletic directors expect of them. At the same time, a

functional list of expectations from coaches can serve to give athletic administrators guidelines for developing positive and informed strategies when dealing with members of the coaching staff.

Both lists generated were produced from a wide and varied group of individuals. Responses came from coaches and athletic directors operating in both similar and dissimilar environments and settings. No attempt was made to list any of the expectations in order of importance. The order of importance, as the expectations themselves, will vary greatly between individuals and settings.

The lists in their final form are by no means the definitive answer for all parties involved. These lists are submitted for the sole reason of creating a mechanism for dialogue between the coaching staff and athletic administrator. Priorities for different sub-groups will vary widely. The coach and/or athletic administrator should feel free to use these lists as a starting point for consideration of points of view shared by many stakeholders in athletic programs. Additions and/or substitutions to both lists are both encouraged and welcomed. The major focus for producing such documents is simple. Any tool that can help build positive relationships between members of the athletic department is desirable. The resulting gain in understanding can do nothing but help the experience for the student athlete as well as the coach and athletic administrator.

### ***10 Things Athletic Administrators Expect from Coaches***

#### ***1. Put Your Athletes First***

Winning is great, but if students are put first in all of your decisions, positive outcomes will result. Regardless of wins or losses, student-athletes and their long-term success should be the bottom line.

#### ***2. Be a Role Model for Loyalty, Honesty and Integrity***

Young people today are starving for positive role models. Your influence on student-athletes will be felt far beyond the playing field and far beyond the time your athletes are in school.

#### ***3. Constantly Strive for Professional Growth***

All coaches owe it to their school and their athletes to strive to constantly stay ahead of the learning curve for their sport. When a coach stops learning, he/she stops growing.

#### ***4. Make Playing for You a Positive Life Experience.***

Interscholastic athletics are still contests played by students. Positive experiences gained in the process will stay with participants long after the cheering of the crowd subsides. It is often a good idea to stop and ask one question. Am I having fun and are my athletes having fun? The answer may surprise you.

#### ***5. Be Organized, Efficient and Timely***

Some of the best coaches in the world lose effectiveness by displaying a total lack of organization. A better sense or order is always a steadying influence on athletes and staff.

#### **6. *Be a Leader of Your Program***

Many coaches do a good job of managing their program. The great coaches manage the details, but also project a vision of how great the program and its athletes can become. The ability to have a vision and focus the efforts of the group toward that goal separates the average coach from the great one.

#### **7. *Be a Positive Force in the School and Community***

Athletics are an important part of the school and community. Good coaches always try to remember that as important as athletics are, they are still only a very small part of the entire educational community. Coaches that immerse themselves in the total framework of the school and community model a well-rounded view of educational athletics. This sends a positive message to the team members as well as all those associated with the program.

#### **8. *Be Knowledgeable in the Rules and Regulations of Your Sports***

Ignorance of school, state or national rules can often ruin positive performances on the part of a school, its coaches and the athletes served. It is a major duty of all coaches to well versed in all rules and regulations, in order to give athletes the best chance for competitive excellence.

#### **9. *Enjoy the Ride***

Coaches have a tendency to become subject to tunnel vision. Those who last the longest have a unique ability to get the job done, but to have fun along the way. If you do not enjoy what you are doing, you will not do it for very long.

#### **10. *Always Put Yourself in a Position that Can be Defended***

One of the first things I tell every new coach is to never put me in a position where I cannot defend you or your actions. Those that make intelligent decisions in dealing with people and abide by standards of common sense when interacting with students, never are in a position where they cannot be defended by an administrator.

### ***10 Things Coaches Expect from Athletic Administrators***

#### **1. *Bring Your Concerns to Me Directly***

The last thing any coach wants is to hear about problems with the program or job performance from a second-hand source. Whether the news is good or bad, timely and direct feedback is preferred by all coaches.

#### **2. *Be a Friend, but Do Not be my Buddy***

A positive working relationship is great. A concern about personal well-being both in and out of the athletic arena is appreciated. But a relationship that becomes too close and too personal can cause problems with objectivity that can cloud sound professional judgement for both parties involved.

#### **3. *Let Me Coach My Team***

If you want to coach my team, take off your dress clothes and put on a whistle. There are enough

second-guessers in the crowd. Another coach in the front office is not a positive for the coach and/or the student-athletes. You hired me to coach, so let me coach.

#### **4. *Help Me do my Job***

The easier the administrator can make it for the coach to get down to the business of coaching, the better the product on the field and the better the experience for all stakeholders. A good athletic administrator keeps paperwork and busy work for his coaches to an absolute minimum.

#### **5. *Take the Time to Care***

One of the greatest gifts an athletic administrator can give a coach is to take the time to truly care about the program, the staff and the athletes in that program.

#### **6. *Help Me Lead my Program***

Many coaches are chased out of the profession because parents and athletes are allowed the power to run the program and make decisions. The great coaches and the great programs have one leader at the top of the pyramid. These great leaders are allowed to lead by strong administrators. Most parents are only concerned of the welfare of one person, not the group.

#### **7. *Push Me to Stay Ahead of the Learning Curve***

Coaches, like athletes can often become complacent and comfortable. The great ones work to get better every day. Strong administrative emphasis on professional development and growth will aide the coach in becoming more proficient, which will help athletes to make similar improvements.

#### **8. *Be Professional, Organized and Efficient***

Just as with good coaches, an organized and efficient athletic administrator can avoid pitfalls and problems that might prevent programs, teams and athletes from maintaining maximum progress toward all goals. Your coaches and athletes should never have to suffer because your lack of organization.

#### **9. *Be a Visionary***

Many people can do paperwork and manage details. Coaches are looking for administrators that can see beyond the day to day and envision advancements in programs years and even decades in the future. A visionary administrator can encourage and produce visionary coaches. Together, those that look ahead to future greatness often create a self-fulfilling destiny.

#### **10. *Construct, Promote and Defend a Chain of Command***

A sound and stable athletic department should be founded on a sound and well-defined chain of command. All coaches, parents and athletes should be made well aware of the order in which any concerns should be addressed. Deviation from the chain of command can often result in chaos.