



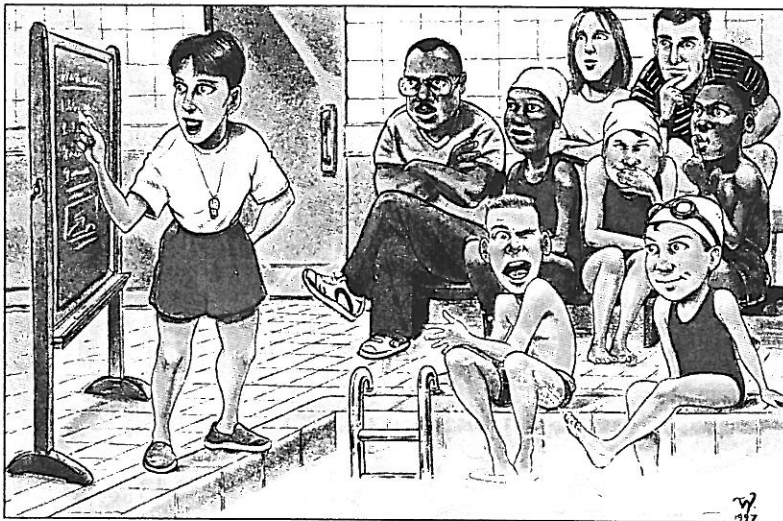
Begin Every Season With A Team Meeting

Here's a suggestion for anyone who already is, or is about to become, the head coach of a youth league team: Before the season begins, call a "team meeting" for your players and their parents. In fact, make the team meeting an essential part of your very first practice.

Why a team meeting before any of the kids have run a lap or done any calisthenics? Simple. This is the ideal opportunity for you to let everyone know what your coaching philosophy is, and how you'll be implementing it. This could be the most important strategy session you have with your team the entire season.

Start the meeting by inviting everybody to take a seat while providing some personal background on yourself. Then have the players and parents introduce themselves. After all, they'll be spending a lot of time together in the coming weeks. Finally, spend the next 15-20 minutes going over the following important items:

- Explain your coaching philosophy. Do you plan to emphasize winning, participation or learning? Or will you do a combination of these? Tell everyone up front so no confusion or hurt feelings will cause problems later on.
- Go over the league rules about the minimum amount of playing time players can anticipate.
- Explain what you expect from the players as members of a team. Tell them about being on time for practice, or why they should call you if they can't attend a practice or a game. Ask if anyone has special concerns, such as medical or health problems, or knows of any conflicting vacation dates.
- Go over your feelings about sportsmanship. Let kids and parents alike know the kind of behavior you want and, likewise, the kind you won't tolerate. Be specific: "After each game, win or lose, we always give our opponents a rousing cheer and then shake their hands."
- Direct some special comments to the parents. Let them know the parental behavior you expect. Remind them that they're all role



GOING OVER GUIDELINES EARLY ON CAN PREVENT PROBLEMS LATER ON.

models for their kids. Explain to the Moms and Dads how you can be reached by phone if they have a concern or problem they want to discuss.

- Describe the team's medical equipment and emergency procedures. Find out if any parent has emergency medical training. Invite someone to bring a cell phone to practices and games, just in case emergency communication is needed.
- If you haven't already, this is also a good time to recruit assistant coaches and other volunteers. Don't be bashful; if you need help with the team's myriad details, ask for it.
- Distribute a one-sheeter of information that outlines your basic points about practice times and fields, games, phone numbers, team roster, etc.

Overall, the team meeting should be short and to the

point, but you should definitely emphasize its importance. In other words, to help ensure a smooth season of sports and fun, it's a good idea to make sure everybody starts off with a clear understanding of the coach's basic rules.

Sports psychology expert Rick Wolff is the father of three children and the author of Good Sports, The Concerned Parent's Guide to Competitive Youth Sports (Sagamore, 1-800-327-5557). You can send questions to him at Parents' Guide, P.O. Box 5574, New York, N.Y. 10185-5574.

Some Friendly Advice

- ✓ Use a scoresheet to keep track of all the players' positions and playing times. During the meeting, show a sample to the parents so they can see how you use it.
- ✓ Go over contingency plans in case of poor weather. Let the kids and their parents know how they can find out if a game is postponed.
- ✓ Be certain that all the kids have uniforms and equipment that fit properly and safely.