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“Let the games begin”

Game management issues for amateur coaches

- 1.) **BODY LANGUAGE AS A COACH** - Try to avoid crossing your arms and slumping your shoulders in front of your team, a confident-looking coach is contagious. **Smile** more than you **frown** and know that how you are physically presenting yourself, in the dugout and on the coaching lines, affects the morale of your players. Be aware of the **end of the game** body language, especially if you get your a** kicked. Observe you assistant coaches and players and remind them to convey a sense of optimism and confidence. Ask for feedback about your body language form parents that watch games and practices;be prepared for the truth..

As a coach, the hardest thing to do is not show negative emotion. This is the single most disruptive thing to do to the players on your team. You must always understand that the players or kids do not want to make errors, or not throw strikes when they are pitching, and, when they are hitting, swing at bad pitches. These are things that part of the game. The more positive body language and tone of voice you display the faster the player will respond to instruction and future performance.

- 2.) **UMPIRE RAPPORT** – Always introduce yourself to the umpire prior to the start of the game and suggest that your Catcher do the same. Foul language, sarcasm and constant moaning over calls should not be part of your in-game behavior.

You first should understand that the umpires are like your players. They will make mistakes on the bases and with balls and strikes. You should try to talk to them instead of screaming at them. First, this doesn't put the umpire on the defensive, and second it shows your players and the parents that you can handle the problem in a mature way. It sets a good example.

- 3.) **FAN-PARENT INTERACTION** – There is a time and place for coaches to converse with parents and fans. During the game is not one of them. Acknowledge each parent prior to game but avoid lengthy dialogue with any one parent. Remember to treat all parents the same: no special treatment for the star

parents, etc. Let parents know in your pre-season meeting, that playing time and other performances issues will only be addressed privately and not on the field.

You should always treat fans and parents with respect. After all, you are teaching their kids how to play the game of baseball. You should make it clear to the parents that when at practice or the game the coach should do the coaching and the parents or fans should support the kids in a positive way. No coaching from the sidelines. If the parents or fans have some ideas on how the team is playing or suggestions on how things could be done differently, the coach (es) owe it to the parents or fans to at least listen to what the parents or fans have to say. However, at no time should the parents or fans give ideas during the game. Everyone has an opinion, but you should stick to your coaching philosophy at all times.

- 4.) **COACHING THE BASELINES** – There is a time and a place for teaching mechanics. Avoid instructional conversations with your players while coaching the bases. A quick reminder or hand signals (refer to the Body Talk signals in the Instructional Manual) should be the most instructional talk conveyed. Positive body language, (good posture, confident voice, hand clap, fist gesture, nods) are crucial for you players to see during the game. Get feedback from your players and your other coaches on signal calling and the angles you take in the coaches box to communicate signs and position yourself with oncoming runners. All players reaching base should immediately acknowledge how many outs there are by pointing fingers at the coach. Keep all offensive signals simple and slow down on the giving of signals to your players.

You should always know the outs, the score, and the inning of the game. That tells you what to do during the game. For example, if you are down by one run in the last inning with a runner at second base and less than two outs and your guy gets a soft base hit to left, you would not take a chance on sending the runner because he can score from third on all types of things, i.e. pass ball, sacrifice fly. You also should always be positive with your players because they can see you. Another thing is to always try to think one hitter or two ahead. If you can do that, your decision-making process will be much better and you will give your team the best chance to win.

- 5.) **VISITS TO THE PITCHER'S MOUND** – Know your players. Pitchers are creatures of habits. Know from past games, how quickly your pitcher can “lose it” and how you can nip the problem sooner by a proactive mound visit instead of a crisis mound visit (bases loaded, no outs). Some need a challenge; others need a hug and a pat on the back. Be part of the solution when you visit the mound, appear calm and confident that your pitcher can get through the inning. Even when taking pitchers out, stay positive and let the pitcher know that a change in pitchers is not personal. Spend more time talking about tempo, rhythm and breathing patterns than hard-core mechanics. Always leave the mound having the pitcher believe he can work out of the jam. If you are planning on taking the pitcher out and the bullpen pitcher is ready, don't get talked out of taking the pitcher out. Always go with your first gut feeling and don't second-guess the decision.

Visiting the mound should be done by feel. You can tell if the pitcher is tired by his pitches or the look on his face, and also the situation of the game. The best time to visit the mound is **before** things get out of control. When talking to the pitcher, you should not sound like it's the end of the world if the batter gets a hit.

You should ease the pitcher's mind by telling him to let the hitter hit the ball and allow the fielders to help the pitcher out. The last thing you should say to the pitcher as you are leaving the mound is that he can do it. Always be positive and never negative.

- 6.) **PROPER USE OF THE BULLPEN** – Avoid the constant warming up of the pitchers and not bringing them in the game. The constant up and down throwing done in the bullpen fatigues many pitchers. Remind all pitchers that they must throw from the stretch, throw their secondary pitches and be mental ready when the call to come enter the game. Remind all pitchers to jog to the game mound and give the impression to the opposing team, that they are ready and confident.

Using the bullpen is the hardest thing to do when you are managing. You must know how to use the bullpen. You must know who can handle the pressure of coming in the game in the middle of the inning or who can come in to close the game out. One important rule of using the bullpen is to always try to bring in a pitcher with some room for error. For example, don't bring in the closer when one mistake can lose the game. Bring him in the game at the start of the inning with the lead. He will be more relaxed and perform better.

- 7.) **ESTABLISHING ROLES FOR EACH PLAYER (GAME OR SEASON)** – I really don't think that players should have roles. They should always be ready to play when called upon to do so. If they are not getting game action, they then have to work hard during practice so when they are called upon they are as ready as they can be. The only roles that should be established are the closer and maybe the starting pitchers in higher ball. In youth baseball, there shouldn't be any roles.

- 8.) **DEFENSIVE POSITIONING AND MOVING THE DEFENSE** – Review the hand signals you will demonstrate to your fielders when moving them is necessary. (One motion equals three steps for the outfielders, on motion equals one step for the infielders). Remind your players to have a pre-pitch "creep" prior to each pitch.

There shouldn't be much movement of the defense during the game, because the pitchers don't have the control to throw the ball where they want to so moving the defense does no good. You should pay more attention in getting the players to play in the normal position, because in youth baseball all of the infielders play on the infield grass. Outfielders should play to the opposite field when their pitcher is a hard thrower. The lefty shift that you see should not happen. A straight-up outfield is better than the shift. Another good idea for the outfielder to do is, with two strikes on the hitter, the off outfielder should play a few steps in to protect for the flair base hit. He should not let the ball fall in front of him.

- 9.) **POST GAME MEETINGS WITH THE TEAM, WIN OR LOSE** – Take notes during the game to have accurate info for you post-game meeting. Present criticism without personal attacks and embarrassing the players. Remember the Oreo cookie rule in chastising players; for every criticism, surround it with two compliments.

The post game meeting with your team should not be just about the negative in the game, win or lose. You should point out the negatives, but don't dwell on them. Always point out the positives, even in a bad game or situation. Remember

it is always easy to find the negative in any situation, good or bad. Therefore, you have to find the positive, because you are not only teaching the baseball, but you are also building the self-esteem.

- 10.) **GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR ASSISTANT COACHES** – During the game, be specific in what you want the assistant coaches to do (warm up the pitchers, pre-game infield, scorekeeping, etc).

You should have a game plan for your practice and game time. Don't try to do everything yourself. You will burn yourself out, and you will be taking away from the players' progress. You should include your assistant coaches during practice. Give them a group of either pitchers, infielders, outfielders, or hitters and outline what you want done. It gives them a chance to teach their specialty areas and gives you your time to get more out of your practice time. During the game, remind the assistant coaches that they should always feel free to suggest something to the head coach at any time. They will feel much more inclined to go the extra mile for you at any time during the season.

- 11.) **BUILDING A LINE-UP** – In building a line-up, you should have speed and someone who can bunt at the top of the line-up (first or second). The third through fifth batters should be players who can put the barrel on the ball hard most of the time. The sixth and seventh hitters should be good on-base guys that rarely strike out. They should be some of the better hitters, because they will come up with runners more often on base. It would be great if you had all good hitters, but the fact of the matter is you probably will not. Therefore, with these suggestions, your line-up will have a better chance to score some runs than putting all of the best hitters at the top of the line-up.

- 12.) **MANAGING THE BLOW-OUTS** – In managing a blow-out, the most important thing to do is not show the players that the game is over. Your body language must not show that you are getting beat. You should try to still tell the kids that they are still playing the game, and don't allow them to give at-bats away or not be ready to make a play in the field. After the game, explain to the players that anyone can play to their potential when everything is going well. Also explain to the players that they will become better players when they give everything they have no matter what the score. Also, explain to the players that most of the players as they get older are judged as a player anytime they are on the field. Therefore, they should always play the game the way it is supposed to be played, **hard**, no matter what the score is.

If you are ahead by a significant amount of runs and the game is entering the middle innings, empty the bench and remind your players that stealing bases is inappropriate.

- 13.) **COACHING YOUR SON OR THE STAR OF THE TEAM** – When coaching your son or the star of the team, you need to make them understand that they are part of a team and not the whole team. You, as the coach, have a tendency to be more critical of your son, and not so critical of the star player. That is the reason why it is imperative you treat the star player or your son the same as everybody else on the ballclub. If you don't and show them special treatment,

you will create a negative attitude amongst the players and parents of your ballclub. If your son or the star of the team makes a mistake, you must address it the same as if anybody else on the team made that mistake. When your son or the star of the team does something good, you must congratulate them the same as another player. If the star player does not come to practices and all of the other players on the team come to the practices, the players at the practice should start the game regardless of the magnitude of the game. That reinforces the "everybody is the same" philosophy and builds unity amongst the players and the parents. It sets a good example that no one is bigger than the team or the game.

- 14.) **GOAL SETTING FOR PLAYERS** – Goal setting for players should be very simple. What I mean by that is that pitching and defense will win games. It is important to explain to your players the goals are as follows: 1) If you play a six inning game and execute 18 outs with the least amount of errors, you will win more games than you will lose. 2) From the pitching standpoint, the goal for the pitcher is to let the hitters hit the ball. What I mean by that is too many times the pitcher tries to throw the ball with velocity rather than throwing strikes. Encourage the pitcher to let the hitters hit the ball and the defense catch it.
- 15.) **PRAISE AND CRITICISM, HOW MUCH AND WHEN?** – During the course of the game, there should be more praise than negative criticism. During your practice time, that is where you should address the negative criticism and work on it to develop it into positive. The game is hard enough to play for kids. Therefore, the more positive criticism and reinforcement you can give them the better the kids will become as players and people.

Practice Guidelines

- Maximize the number of swings for your players by having multiple hitting stations, if possible. (on-deck, batting practice, T or soft-toss, Full-group dry)
- Plate discipline and On-base percentage starts with hitters taking pitches in practice and swinging at quality pitches. Demand "game eyes" in practice.
- Keep throwing lines in order with progressive distances moved; long toss during the season is suggested pre-practice activity. Demand game concentration rather than the social catch mentality that youngsters engage in.
- The game is won or lost at first base, spend more time practicing the putout at first base.
- Demand game speed in IF/OF work; foot speed, glove work, ball transfer, pivots.
- Reflect on the previous game and address defensive issues first in practice.
- Remind your players to always swing the bat with **game intent** in all practice swings.
- Keep practice up-tempo and moving, practice time should not exceed 90 minutes.
- Allow pitchers to get throwing in on the mound; from the set, breaking balls, etc.
- Schedule early work or late work with players that need individual skill work.

- Leave practice with all players loaded with confidence. Finish with game sprints within the base lines; first to third, scoring from second, full speed through first base.
- The Ball Field is a sacred place
- Post Practice Agenda
- Notepad for Feedback
- Avoid one ball, one player practice
- Old people jog, young players sprint
- Proper use of tee/soft toss
- Close with consistency and positive message
- Never underestimate the effect of being called "Coach"