

COACHES ARE EDUCATORS!

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Purpose of Interscholastic Athletics

The purpose of interscholastic high school athletics should not be winning championships, developing collegiate players, or the entertainment of others. **The purpose of high school athletic programs is the education of the young people involved so they will be more productive citizens in society!** Schools do not sponsor interscholastic athletic programs only to win championships! If winning championships were the only reason to have a program, many more schools would fail in their mission every year, than would be successful. Interscholastic athletic programs must be part of a school's total educational program. While every participant should be taught to strive to win, someone loses in every athletic contest, and only one team wins the championship. Winning cannot be the only goal of athletic programs with an educational philosophy. Coaches are the keys to the educational process that takes place in athletics. Putting too much emphasis on winning means some very valuable lessons about life are not being taught. High school coaches must make winning and losing an educational experience for the participants!

Many people proudly say, "athletics and activities are an integral part of education" or "they are the other half of education". If this is true, each coach must ask him/herself, "What educational goals have I set for my program?" **Each school, athletic department, and coach should have established expectations and measurable objectives with regard to their program.** Those expectations and objectives can be based on three basic questions. 1) What does the athletic program contribute to the total educational program of the school? 2) What does

athletics teach the participants? 3) How do we objectively evaluate what is being taught in the athletic program?

The Iowa High School Athletic Association believes athletics provide a great educational experience because they can teach important values for dealing with the circumstances of life. The values taught through interscholastic athletics include teamwork, sportsmanship and citizenship, respect for self and others, caring, dedication, commitment, trustworthiness, loyalty, responsibility, integrity, fairness, and doing ones' best regardless of the outcome. These values are often called "intrinsic" because they may not be included in the lesson plans coaches prepare, but they are very much a part of what a successful coach teaches. By learning these values, student-athletes will become better lifelong citizens and more productive members of society. Athletics can teach these lifelong values, but only if coaches teach and model those behaviors and accept nothing less from each student-athlete on his/her team.

Approximately ninety eight percent of high school student-athletes do not participate in college! One in 24,000 high school student-athletes makes it to the pros! **If we fail to teach the values that are important throughout life, we have taught 98 percent of student-athletes skills that are useless in their life beyond high school!**

Positive athletic experiences don't occur by chance. They are the result of a structured educational environment created by the coach. In order for positive experiences to take place within this environment, it is imperative for coaches to understand two basic concepts: 1) **Athletics can be a great educational experience for everyone involved!** 2) **Winning is only one goal in athletics, not the only goal.** One of the goals of athletics is higher student-athlete achievement. In order to be successful, teachers and coaches should have high expectations of their pupils, use systematic approaches to teach comprehension and understanding of skills and techniques, know and understand their students' abilities, know their subject matter, vary their teaching strategies, handle discipline through prevention and the use of positive consequences whenever possible, and listen to their students-athletes. Teachers and coaches who apply this concept will produce students more capable of dealing with life's challenges.

Certainly, coaches who don't teach their players to "play to win" are not doing their jobs. Likewise, coaches who only teach their players to "play to win", are not doing their jobs. Coaches must help each athlete set reasonable goals for him/herself and teach the student-athlete how to be a better person as a result of their interscholastic athletic experience. While only a fraction of one percent of all high school student-athletes will participate in athletics at the collegiate level, **every student-athlete can benefit from interscholastic athletic programs that are based on sound educational concepts.** Coaches who are true educators assess the talents of the entire team and determine how each student-athlete can contribute to the team's success.

Benefits of Interscholastic Athletics

Research has proven organized athletics can be very beneficial to young participants. **Students who participate in organized athletic programs, with an educational focus, often perform better academically in school and have more success later in life than nonparticipants.** Research from across the country indicates that students involved in high school athletic and activity programs are absent from school less than nonparticipants, have higher GPA's, experience fewer discipline problems, use drugs less, and display better sportsmanship and citizenship.

A 1987 survey of Fortune 500 individuals at the vice-president level, or above, indicated that 95% of those corporate executives participated in sports during their high school careers! Participation in high school sports and activities was a better predictor of success for these individuals than were grades or SAT and ACT scores!

The American College Testing Service (ACTS) has defined success as self-satisfaction with employment and participation in a variety of community activities two years after college. When predicting this type of success, ACTS has stated, "The one yardstick that could be used to predict success later in life was achievement in school activities. Not useful as predictors were high grades in high school, high grades in college, or high ACT scores."

One way coaches can help ensure interscholastic athletic participation will provide lifelong benefits for student-athletes is to teach goal setting. **By teaching student-athletes to set personal goals, a coach greatly increases the opportunity for individual and team success.** Another advantage of teaching goal setting is student-athletes are able to evaluate their own performance based on the goals they have set for themselves. When coaches teach student-athletes how to set athletic goals, it is easier for the students to apply the same principals to setting life goals.

In order to reach a goal one must acquire knowledge regarding the goal, develop the skills necessary to achieve the goal, and maintain a positive attitude while working toward the goal. With the proper knowledge, skills, and attitude, success in athletics, and life, is almost a sure bet!

Attaining a goal = skill development + knowledge regarding the goal + positive attitude

Reasons Students Participate in Interscholastic Athletics

Student-athletes become involved in high school athletics for a variety of reasons. **In surveys conducted by the Iowa High School Athletic Association, high school student-athletes indicate FUN as the number one reason they participate in sports!** After fun, the list continues with teamwork, being with peers, self-satisfaction at setting and achieving goals, self-discipline, good sportsmanship, pride, and self-confidence. Surveys of high school student-athletes across the country show similar results, with winning being far down the list of reasons why student-athletes participate. Coaches with a “win-at-all-costs” attitude are simply out of touch with what most student-athletes in their programs want, and expect, from the interscholastic athletic experience.

IHSAA surveys show student-athletes appreciate their coaches most when they are fair, consistent, positive, able to communicate well with players, respect all players as individuals, and are good teachers of skills and technique. What student-athletes do not appreciate about coaches is “playing favorites,” thinking their sport should be the athlete’s whole life, thinking a loss makes the coach look bad, not playing substitutes when the team is winning or losing by a large margin, expecting student-athletes to practice the year around, and giving too few compliments when the team or individuals play well. By reading the preceding two paragraphs, coaches should get a good indication of how student-athletes want to be treated and how they can be a successful coach “in the eyes of the players!”

Character Development and Sportsmanship

Coaches are significant adult role models in student-athletes lives and play an important role in the total development of the student-athlete. Coaches must help student-athletes build character. Teaching good sportsmanship teaches character. Character development cannot take place in athletics if a coach does not teach sportsmanship. Coaches should emphasize that behaviors are unsportsmanlike if they are unfair, dishonest, disrespectful, irresponsible, or do not take the feelings of others into consideration. **Encouraging, or allowing, unsportsmanlike behavior in athletics is not ethical and is not in the best interests of the interscholastic athletic program.**

Before coaches can teach sportsmanship to their players, they must evaluate how they feel about sportsmanship and its place in “the game.” Each coach should ask him/herself these questions:

- ◆ What does sportsmanship mean to me?
- ◆ Why is it important to me?

- ◆ Why should it be important to the student-athletes I coach?
- ◆ Am I teaching good sportsmanship to my players? How?
- ◆ Am I willing to sacrifice winning to teach the value of good sportsmanship?

Coaches do not expect student-athletes to become proficient at a skill until that skill is taught to them and practiced repetitively. **Whether that skill is a flip turn in swimming, a jump shot in basketball, or the display of good sportsmanship, it must be taught and practiced before an athlete can master it.** The following are a few examples of ways coaches can teach and role model good sportsmanship:

- Treat opposing coaches, players, and fans with respect.
- Abide by the rules of the contest in letter and spirit.
- Insist that players abide by the letter and spirit of the rules during contests and practices.
- Show support for any athlete who leaves the contest due to injury.
- Respect the judgement of contest officials.
- Display modesty in victory and graciousness in defeat.
- Reward good sportsmanship and penalize poor sportsmanship.
- Be generous with praise when it is deserved.
- Be fair with punishment when it is deserved.
- Help student-athletes improve their skills by pointing out mistakes and helping them improve instead of berating them for making mistakes.

Coaching and Ethics

The major ethical issue each coach must deal with is how to use the power he or she has over student-athletes. The way a coach uses this power says a great deal about his or her character. **Coaches with character will use their power to give athletes sincere praise and positive reinforcement, provide constructive feedback, discipline a player without humiliation or embarrassment to the student-athlete, and provide emotional support and guidance when needed.** By using these teaching techniques, coaches can expect student-athletes to exhibit improved performance, respect for the coach, increased self esteem, and increased confidence in their skills.

Coaches who lack character will use their power to coerce an athlete into doing something he/she does not want to do, humiliate the athlete into submission, use fear as a primary motivation for the athlete, and use student-athletes for the coaches own personal gain. These coaches can expect athletes to have lowered self esteem, disrespect for the coach, little confidence in their skill level, little enjoyment for their sport, and high drop out rates.

NFCA Coaches Code of Ethics

The function of the coach is to properly educate students through participation in interscholastic competition. The interscholastic program is designed to enhance academic achievement and should never interfere with opportunities for academic success. Each child should be treated as though they were the coaches' own and their welfare shall be uppermost at all times. In recognition of this, the following guidelines for coaches have been adopted by the National Federation Interscholastic Coaches Association Board of Directors.

The coach must be aware that he or she has a tremendous influence, either good or bad, in the education of the student athlete and, thus, shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest desirable ideal of character.

The coach must constantly uphold the honor and dignity of the profession. In all personal contact with the student athlete, officials, athletic directors, school administrators, the state high school athletic association, the media, and the public, the coach shall strive to set an example of the highest ethical and moral conduct.

The coach shall take an active role in the prevention of drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse and under no circumstances should authorize their use.

The coach shall promote the entire interscholastic program of the school and direct his or her program in harmony with the total school program.

The coach shall be thoroughly acquainted with the contest rules and is responsible for their interpretation to team members. The spirit and letter of rules should be regarded as mutual agreements. The coach shall not try to seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules.

Coaches shall actively use their influence to enhance sportsmanship by their spectators, working closely with cheerleaders, pep club sponsors, booster clubs, and administrators.

Contest officials shall have the respect and support of the coach. The coach shall not indulge in conduct which will incite players or spectators against the officials. Public criticism of officials or players is unethical.

Before and after contests, rival coaches should meet and exchange friendly greetings to set the correct tone for the event.

A coach shall not exert pressure on faculty members' to give student athletes special consideration.

It is unethical for coaches to scout opponents by any means other than those adopted by the league and/or state high school athletic association.

Coaching is Caring

One must never forget the real reason most people become involved in coaching interscholastic athletics - because they care about kids! There is an old adage that says, **“People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care!”** That concept may be more true for student-athletes and their coaches than for anyone else. Caring may be difficult to measure objectively, but student-athletes certainly know how much coaches care about them. One former player put it very simply, **“We knew coach cared because the players were more important than the game!”**

Sources: A Winning Combination, Iowa High School Athletic Association, 1996; Athletic Management, “Who’s On Deck?,” August 1997; Athletic Participation: Students Give Their View, Iowa High School Athletic Association, 1990; Carnegie Meeting Papers, “The Role Of Sports in Youth Development,” Alex Poinsett, March 18, 1996; Catch the Spirit: Sportsmanship/ Citizenship, Saggau, Bernie & Harty, David, The Iowa High School Athletic Association, PO Box 10, Boone, IA, 1989; Citizenship Through Sports and Fine Arts: Curriculum for High School Activities, National Federation of State High School Associations, 1997; Coaches Planner, “Ethics in Sports,” National Institute for Child Centered Learning, 3160 Pinebrook Road, Park City, Utah, 1996; Coaching for Character, Clifford, Craig & Feezell, Randolph, Human Kinetics Press, PO Box 5076, Champaign, IL; “Good Sportsmanship & Codes of Conduct,” American Youth Soccer Organization, 1997; Coaches Quarterly, “Athletics: Classroom for Values,” Fall 1996; Coaches Quarterly, “Coaches Code of Ethics,” Winter 1997; Ethics Training for Coaches, Jeff Miner, 1997; Interscholastic Athletic Administration, “It’s Time to Write Course of Study for Interscholastic Athletics/Activities,” Kanaby, Robert, Executive Director, National Federation of State High School Associations, Volume 22, Number 3, Spring 1996; National Federation News, “Coaches: Treat Players With respect,” Rikki Stein, May 1992; National Federation News, “Ethics Involves Character, Action - A Matter of Being Good, Doing Right,” March 1997; Gatorade Sports Science Institute, “Traits of Successful Coaching,” Olson, Bill, Baseball Coach, Omaha Northwest High School; “How Do We Deal With Sportsmanship,” Fudukian, John, M., Athletic Director, Novi Community School District; “Ethics Training for Coaches,” Miner, Jeff; Program for Athletic Coaches, Michigan High School Athletic Association, 1989; The American School Board Journal, It’s How You Play the Game, August 1997; The Case For Sportsmanship, Ethics, and Integrity in High School Activities, National Federation of State High School Associations, PO Box 20626, Kansas City, MO; Youth Sports Participation: A Parent’s Guide, Iowa High School Athletic Association, 1997.