

Coaching Conundrums

What is the best way to explain to parents to not coach from the stands or in the car on the way to or from the game?

While it is important to recognize that everyone has a right to his or her opinion and that you as a coach respect that opinion, it is also important for the parents to know that it is a team game, and that the team will operate under the guidance of the coaching staff.

Let the coach do the coaching.

As simple as it seems, it really is a very delicate issue, especially these days, as parents seem to be that much more involved in their kids' activities. Here are some tips on how to handle the situation without ruffling the feathers (or egos) of the parents of the players on your team.

Address it early.

As early as possible at the start of the season, take some time during a parent meeting to very clearly define your position on it and why you feel that way. If you wait until it becomes a problem, it will be that much harder to clear up, and it will be that much more uncomfortable for all involved. If you do have "bleacher coaches" it is pretty evident who they are, and they are more than likely to feel defensive about it if you address it after the fact. Lay it on the line early, so everyone knows the ground rules going into the games. If it still happens, it's not like you are singling them out, or coming at them out of the blue.

Explain why.

Everybody has a different opinion of the game and how it should be played. More importantly, every parent has a different opinion of how their child fits into the team, and how they should play, or be played. That opinion may or may not be consistent with the philosophy of the coaching staff. While it is important to recognize that everyone has a right to his or her opinion and that you as a coach respect that opinion, it is also important for the parents to know that it is a team game, and that the team will operate under the guidance of the coaching staff.

For example, you might be encouraging your players to work on their puckhandling skills and decision-making and you are telling them not to dump the puck off of the boards unless it is a last resort, or unless it is a pass to a teammate. This may result in a turnover or two while the players learn what to do and when to do it. The parents might think that the easiest

play might be to dump the puck out of your zone, and be yelling their support to do that, which makes it difficult for the player to read the play and make the right decision.

Undermining the coaching staff will not be a positive influence on their child, nor a positive for the team.

If every player played as an individual, under the guidance of his or her parents, it would make for a very chaotic environment. Humor is always a good way to help get your point across when needed. Let the parents know that "as they already know as parents, their kids don't listen to them about anything, and they won't about hockey as well".

Let them know what they can do and say.

Most parents want to do something, and usually for the right reason. They want to support their player, and the team. Keep the parents up to speed on what the team is trying to accomplish, what you are trying to do and achieve both as individuals and as a team. That way the parents can provide some positive feedback to their son or daughter, and the other players on the team, because they will be able to see that they are doing what they are being asked to do by the coaches. For example, you might be emphasizing "give and go's", good quick short passes, moving the puck quick and getting into position to get it back. If parents know this, they can point out times in the game when that occurred and provide their player with some positive reinforcement.

Remind them to be very positive.

Players (and parents) need to know that they are not playing the game to please their parents. Positive reinforcement goes a long way in developing the confidence and self-esteem that is vital in the skill development and maturity of any player. Any negative reinforcement and correcting of mistakes should come from the coaching staff, not from the parents.