

ADVICE:

athletic directors sharing thoughts and actions



Make your
**Preseason
Parents Meetings**
more
Effective

By Dr. David Hoch, CMAA

Considering that the parents of a freshman athlete may attend several preseason meetings during the athlete's high school career, it is essential to continually develop new approaches. Certainly, some of the basic messages need to remain constant and be delivered, but your meetings may become boring and stagnant without new and varied approaches. This problem could be exacerbated if parents have other youngsters in your program.

If you are in a setting in which you can require parental attendance at these meetings as a prerequisite for participation, you may have a full house regardless of your approach. However, without this mandatory attendance, you will probably face a declining audience from the fall to the spring and year to year if you don't vary your presentation. A common parental refrain that may be expressed is, "But, we've heard all of that before." And they'd be right.

Since the first challenge is to get parents to your preseason meetings, the following are some techniques to help you boost your attendance. You may want to try these ideas as you move season to season or as you prepare for a new school year.

1. Send a notice of the meeting home with the athletes. Print your brief basic invitation on the top and bottom of an 8½x11 sheet of paper. After duplicating copies, cut them in half, which creates two flyers from this one sheet of paper (*Example on next page – Preseason Notice to Parents*).

When your coaches have their candidates meetings, have them ask their athletes to take one home to their parents.

Obviously, not all of these notices will make it home. Some will be left in lockers, others will be buried in book bags, but some will make it home. This is a simple, extremely inexpensive technique to remind parents.

2. Post the time and date of the meeting on the signboard in front of your school. Considering how many individuals drive past this board daily, the signboard is a free and another extremely effective method of communication.

3. Send a brief release to the local weekly newspapers. Often, these newspapers are looking for copy to fill their pages and this may effectively reach another segment of your parents. This technique takes very little effort and there is no associated cost.

4. Put a little of the onus on your coaching staff. Since coaches are required to be in attendance and this evening is a proactive attempt to head off potential problems, ask them to call a few parents. An invitation from the coach may just be the enticement that is needed for some parents. The coaches can also send generic letters to their parents or include an invitation to attend in their team's newsletters.

5. Post a notice of your meeting on your school's Web site. More and more, schools utilize a Web site and this presents another effective vehicle with which to communicate with your parents.

6. Ask the parent-student-teacher association in your school to list the dates of your preseason meetings in its newsletters. Since every parent in the school gets a copy, this is an important means for notifying your parents and it is also free.

With these ideas designed to boost attendance, you now will want to explore some approaches to help improve and make your preseason meetings more effective. By using the same approach repeatedly, these meetings certainly lose their impact. You may want to consider the following ideas.

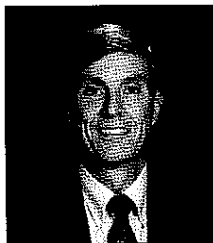
- Use PowerPoint to make your presentations. The visual aspect aids the message and makes it more entertaining. Also, once you have a basic PowerPoint presentation, you can always edit it by adding topical items and deleting those which may have been repeated in previous meetings. Without much work, you can revamp your presentation using the same basic PowerPoint presentation and keep it fresh.
- Utilize different individuals to help deliver the basic components of your message. Regardless of how tal-

ented and prepared you are, parents, just like their children, need varying stimuli during these meetings. The basic tenets of your meeting – sportsmanship expectations, the communication process, etc. – remain the same, but a guest speaker, college coach or member of the community may provide the needed change of pace.

- Develop a fun activity to be used as part of your meeting. Several years ago, facing the prospect of another ho-hum meeting, I created a sportsmanship self-test for our parents. Instead of me getting up, lecturing and covering our expectations, the message was still delivered effectively in an entertaining and humorous fashion. It was a huge success.
- Create and distribute a checklist for your coaches to use at their meetings. While you want varying approaches, there are basic components which have to be covered. This checklist ensures that all of your coaches cover the necessary and pertinent information. Never leave anything to chance when trying to be proactive with parents.
- Vary the setting. If you consistently meet in the gym, for example, consider something different. For your fall meeting, try a picnic in your stadium or a presentation with video clips in the auditorium. Even a meeting that features refreshments may provide that little bit of uniqueness to keep it fresh. Of course, you will want to advertise these changes and amenities ahead of time in order to stimulate attendance.

Dealing with parents presents an ongoing challenge and just when you think that you've figured it out, something new pops up. One lesson that is important to learn is that your group of parents is continually changing. When their sons or daughters graduate, parents leave your group and new parents enter the picture with each incoming group of freshmen. Therefore, you can't assume that they already know anything about your athletic program. They need these preseason meetings in order to understand your program and your expectations. **IAA**

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Preseason Notice to Parents

Loch Raven High School's Spring Preseason Parents Meeting will take place Monday, March 7, 2005. The evening will begin at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium.

Attending this "Meet the Coach Night" is undoubtedly the single-most important thing that you as parents can do to support your son or daughter. It is during this meeting that you will hear firsthand about the team's rules, the method of selecting the squad, the criteria for earning a letter, sportsmanship expectations and much more.

Remember that each coach, team and season is different. You really need to attend even if you attended the evening in the fall, winter or the one last year. Don't miss this very important evening. Mark your calendar now and plan to attend!

See you there!

Coach's Guidelines For Preseason Parents Meetings

1. All coaches are required to distribute copies and address the following:
 - A. Team rules
 - B. Criteria for selecting the squad
 - C. Criteria for earning a letter
 - D. Sportsmanship expectations for athletes and fans
2. Have your parents sign and return the Athletic Policy Form, which indicates that they have received a copy and have read the various policies. These forms should be put in alphabetical order and sent to the athletic director to be kept on file.
3. Other topics which you may want to address:
 - A. Academic requirements for eligibility
 - B. Your coaching philosophy
 - C. Your team's style of play
 - D. How practice sessions are conducted, including:
 - Their length
 - When they normally start and end
 - Why spectators are not permitted at most venues
 - E. An athlete's expectation for attending practice sessions; including Saturday sessions and over holiday periods
 - F. The responsibility for issued uniforms and equipment
 - G. Determinants for an athlete to start and playing time
 - H. Academic requirements for eligibility
 - I. Procedures for reporting and attending to injuries
 - J. How and when to contact you (the coach) with a concern or question
 - K. Commonly misunderstood or new rules of your sport
 - L. The risks (injury or death) involved in playing your sport
 - M. Answer any questions
4. Helpful hints:
 - A. Try to make your presentation as positive as possible.
 - B. Don't let one parent take over the program with a "hidden agenda" or "personal vendetta." Invite them to make an appointment to speak with you individually.
 - C. Find the athletic director, if an issue arises that you cannot answer or is problematic. He or she will handle it.
 - D. Be prepared. Plan what you want to say and how you want to approach the various topics.