

# Coaching in the 21st Century: Flexible but Firm

**Todd Oye - Luverne High School Southwest Conference**

How would Vince Lombardi react if he was coaching a high school football team and his players were using their cell phones on the bus?

Before a game? After a game? They are talking to kids from the other team?

Many coaches never thought they would have to address issues such as these, but with new technology brings new issues for coaches to handle. These small issues need to be handled before they become BIG issues. This is just one example of how coaching now is so much different than it was 25-50 years ago.

Trying to be a traditionalist, but yet reasonable can be a tight rope to walk. After my first two years as a head coach, I realized it was important to be myself and have rules that make sense instead of having rules just to have rules. Rules are still very important and if a rule is broke, there must be a consequence, but common sense must be used.

Starting the season

Luverne runs two weeks of two-a-day practices. We condition in the morning and lift weights in the evening. We no longer run conditioning drills after two-a-days. The team is expected to play hard with intensity during our two-hour practices, and then we are done. My first few years, we ran conditioning for most of the season and weren't that good of a football team. We lost a lot of games in the 4th quarter so I assumed our extra conditioning was not the answer. The answer to winning more games is very simple. You have to have better players than the other team! We feel our players are much more effective after a good two hour practice, when they have practiced hard. Those two hours of practice need to be filled with quality football, and that is the responsibility of everyone, especially the coaches and the leaders of your team.

Football fundamentals

As a lifetime Minnesota Vikings fan, I have always loved Randall McDaniel. But how was he able to do anything with that stance? In my opinion, he was the best NFL lineman of his era and his coach was smart enough to let him use that awkward

stance. Obviously, high school football is somewhat different. Fundamentals are very important and our staff works hard instilling good form and technique but not to the point of creating robots. Players must be allowed to play.

Example, we all know ball carriers should carry the football in their outside arm. Our running back coach works drill after drill to make this a habit but we still have a player that keeps the ball in his dominant hand every time he carries the ball. When asked why he doesn't put the ball in the correct hand he says it feels like he is going to fumble, go figure! So what we have tried to do is allow him to keep the ball in his dominant hand and get him to secure the ball high and tight and cover it with his other hand at contact. My first few years I would have said fine, you won't switch hands then you won't play. We would have had our best player on the bench and I proved to everyone who was in charge. Is this type of player trying to be insubordinate? No. That is why I refer to the Randall McDaniel rule. Could Randall have had a better stance? Of course, but he still had a Hall of Fame career doing it his own way.

Offseason training

Each school has it's own unique situations. But, one thing most coaches would agree on is that being physically active out of season is important for the growth of an athlete. Along with being active, many coaches feel it is important to weight train. So how do we get kids to lift in the off-season? The first thing our football staff realized is there are other sports in our school that benefit from athletes lifting weights and we have those coaches supervise the weight room as well. Instead of expecting kids to lift the entire off-season, our coaching staff encourages players to complete at least one of our weight lifting programs between football seasons. These programs vary in duration of time, but we typically run a 6 to 10-week program. We open the weight room three times a week, before and after school. Three sport athletes lift in the morning and/or in the summer. Do all of our players complete



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a weight lifting program? NO! This used to drive me nuts... Don't they care about football? It makes them so much better why don't they lift? It took me a couple of years to realize the answer, (I am a slow learner) they are KIDS and football/sports is not their entire life. For some kids, football is the number one priority and they do lift the entire off-season. We have about a dozen kids that fit into this category and we have a good time in the weight room. But we need more than twelve kids to make a team so we do not "shove" the weight room down their throats.

Be yourself

If you have spent the time to read this short article I hope you are thinking about your football program. Whether or not you are the head coach, an assistant, or just a fan, reflect on what you are doing. There really is no ONE-WAY of coaching that is better than another. Make decisions based on what you feel is the right thing to do. Don't base your decisions on what other coaches have done.

Back to the cell phone issue, my first two years as a head football coach, our team was not allowed to have cell phones on road trips. I learned my lesson about being flexible. We now allow our players to have their phones on road trips but the phones are turned off when we arrive at the game site. Once the game is over and the players have left the locker rooms, the phones come out and they are texting as fast as their fingers can move. That way I can find out the scores of other games too!