

Coaching Action Plan for Communicating With Players & Parents By Jim Koltes

This was designed with the idea of how we (Coaches) can better communicate TEAM selection, players roles in the program, playing time philosophies & special event philosophies (Senior Day, Youth Day, Teacher Appreciation Games, Section & State Games etc..)

Communicating Team Selection and Releases

I have tried this many ways:

I have:

- Talking to each player who has tried out individually (MG boys hockey coaches do this) philosophy is kids have worked hard in the off season & are owed a face to face sometimes the conversations surprises you
- Talking to each of the Seniors & Juniors if they have been in the program Individually and than posted Teams for the rest of the players (When discussing roles I do this and this is where the follow up comes with what was specifically discussed with the athlete if they are staying in the Program)
- Talked to each of the Seniors if they have been in the program Individually and than posted Teams for the rest of the players
- I have had each level coach talk to the players (This was not the way to go in my opinion)

***** I have always had these conversations with at least two coaches present and three coaches I feel is a better number to have. Being that I have coached female sports mostly, having a female coach present with team selection, role defining and releases can be helpful as well if possible.**

The way that I have found to be the most player, parent and coach friendly is to post the teams on your website by tryout number with the example letter below. **NOTE:** I do talk to Seniors and Juniors about roles before I post as they may not expect the role and choose not to play opening room for a player you may have released/ back to 15's [Example Team Posting Letter](#) (some of this was used from the MG Volleyball Tryout Post)

[Example: of what a competitive High School Program looks like](#) (Some was taken from a SSP Girls Hockey HB)

Reasons why:

- 1. Players are at home or away from their peers when they get the information of what team they are on or if they are released from the program. This gives them an opportunity to go through all of their feelings and emotions privately.**
- 2. Parents have an opportunity to go through all of their emotions and they have a period to process it all to help them look at it more clearly**

Post teams and releases late in the week (usually Thursday for me) and in your letter posting the Teams give a specific time frame after practice on the following Monday for either just the Player or the Player and Parent (Together) to come in and ask any questions about the decisions that were made on their athlete ONLY and how they can improve their skills. Usually this cooling off period helps eliminate some of the conversations after everyone gets a chance to go through what they need to go through. Give your AD a heads up on your policy and what you're rational is. The AD then can direct the parents to that part of your policy and have them start with meeting you first. This helps everyone stay on the same page and gives a clear directive for everyone. **NOTE:** NEVER have just a parent meeting on anything without another coach from your staff and the **athlete present**, the activity is about the athlete **NOT** the parent.

Defining Players Roles

Defining and **Documenting** each player's role and responsibilities for the upcoming season is a crucial step in Team and Player success. It also helps you to clarify a player's role & expectations to the player as well as the parents of the player. What this is meant to do is to avoid confusion of what the player's role is so that they can excel in their role as well as not lose the translation of their role to the parents through communication from their athlete. It is like the telephone game, what you say to the athlete very rarely is communicated correctly to the parents, protect yourself from this miscommunication.

Here are some things as a coach I want to move towards: as a coach I really want to grow in this area of defining roles

- Our Seniors and Juniors who you see having a specific role on the team or in the program Document what role you see them in or where you see them being placed whether it is V, JV , B sq or 9A
- Ask the athlete if this is a role they can play and if this is the best the role ever gets for the season
- Send an email to the parents & the athlete outlining the conversation you had with the player about their role on the team for the season. Ask the player to confirm that this is what was said and agreed to, make it clear to the parents that this is not up for discussion, it is only having the player clarify this was the conversation that was had & agreed to. If a player needs clarification still they can see you at practice and resend once you have the second discussion. **NOTE:** Bcc the AD on this first email
- Once the email has been received that they acknowledge that was the conversation, forward on to your AD and athletic office for their records.

NOTE: if your sport allows it numbers wise start to look at where you see Juniors fitting in the next season. You may be able to make decisions on players before they become seniors, the entitlement seems to be stronger as they become seniors. Just something to think about. The senior year they feel they can say anything as they are down after the season. The junior may still be deciding if they want to play the following season and if they self release then they don't have the argument that you did not do a fair tryout because they never tried out their senior year. They may still say you are a terrible coach but that is their way of not having to admit to themselves they were not going to make it. They know but it helps save face some in front of peers and parents and that is ok

Make sure your TEAM and LETTERING policies are on file with the AD. These are not up for discussion; you run the program; these are the policies you put in place, they may not agree with them but you make the policies and they are on file. No discussion is needed, only reference parents and players to them. This is where I state what special games will look like: Youth Day, Specifically Senior Day, Eligibility for Team awards etc.. **NOTE: Be direct with Parents, all of this information is given at the beginning of the season.**

[EXAMPLE of Team Policies](#)

[EXAMPLE of Lettering Policies](#)

Communicating with Player I work on this all of the time as ways to communicate change all the time

- **NO Promises** (I work on this all of the time as a coach, I have worked hard to improve but I still need to pause and think of how I want to word things for me it is a work in progress)
- Don't make **decisions before you have to**. Hold it close to your vest. You may want to get a player more playing time in the next game thinking there will be an opportunity and the game does not go the way you thought and you can't give them the time, no you broke a Promise. Make them when you need to, not before

- Texting with players or boosters- if done make sure it is very very clear what is meant or in a group chain with Captains or Players that is about Team things. Keep to Y or N or time changes (I work hard on this as well)
- Use Group Me, HUDL or another format and keep to Team things only NOT individuals
- Social Media keep the post about things that the players and programs are doing well or all inclusive of a special day. Give shoutouts to the lower levels as well, you are a Program they will appreciate it
- Praising & Celebrating all Roles on the Team will help with creating a TEAM Culture of we need everyone and makes players feel their contributions are appreciated
- **Phone Calls** I feel are still the best way to communicate maybe not the easiest way but are needed

Final Thoughts but don't skip this Section

This plan is to help give more consistency to what we all do with our teams. By being direct, upfront with (Players and Parents) and having documentation on file with the athletic office that we can refer to and say you were aware of this from the start, I believe will help alleviate some issues that seem to arise during a season every year especially in a release sport. They may not like the answer but it has all been communicated to everyone and you have that documented.

We will never eliminate every conversation and we will still have the 5-10% that are never happy with us no matter what we do. However no one can say I did not know that or I never heard that before if it is documented. They don't have to like your policies but they are your policies that you have put in place. I would encourage you to review your policies yearly & make changes as needed.

Starting out your parent meeting setting the Tone on the first day and everyday build culture

I have been looking at a way to start out my parent meetings. I always want to be direct and leave no room for a different interpretation. That you are doing what is best for everyone, not just the individual.

I found this:

"I know that your son or daughter is absolutely the most important thing to you. To the Coaches everyone is equally important. We need to look out for what is always Best for the Team to be successful and how we see each individual fitting into the team concept or program. (My old High School Coach Tom Peart)

"Players and Parents want their athletes to make the BEST Teams, We want them to make the RIGHT Team for continued development" every player on the MG Boys Varsity team last season who finished in the State tournament every player on that team was on a B, B2 or C team at some point during youth hockey or had been released as a sophomore to play Jr. Gold and ended up on varsity as a senior. Development is the RIGHT Team

"Teams are designed to compete and develop with the larger picture in Mind, not just the individual" this means there will be players who just miss the varsity level and those who just made the JV level. It will always happen but remember we are looking at the whole group and not just individuals.

[The Parent Problem in Youth Sports](#)

[Being a Head Coach is Hard](#) (Article)

[Entitlement in a program will ruin a culture](#) a checklist all coaches can go through to help them avoid entitled athletes in the Program by doing things better themselves, **me included always be aware**

Great coaches understand that coaching is a relationship business. They know that the sport-specific knowledge matters but is not sufficient. It is 10-20 percent of what you do, and the other 80-90 percent is all about the person in front of you. Every one of those people has unique needs, and you need to work to understand them, the more you can inspire them to perform well the better you will be.

In the end we are trying to give a positive experience to **ALL** of the athletes in the program and the more you can clearly communicate to them & their parents about what their role is, it will help everyone.

Parents care for their kids unconditionally, help them make it a positive experience for their kids

Here are some ideas to help the parents have conversations before and after games

- I love watching you play and compete
- I enjoyed watching you play today, the team and you did great (win or lose)
- The team looked great tonight, everyone played their role, I am proud of you
- Enjoy the game tonight, have fun & play your best so there are no regrets W or L
- I thought you did this well tonight, fantastic job

Parents' words and actions have an impact on your player and their mindset.

If you are anxious or stressed before tryouts, a game, their first high school game or a section game

Your player may feel that extra pressure on top of their own anxiety. If your player senses positive energy, it may help them go into all those situations listed above with confidence and excitement.

A few things parents can do as their child's biggest fan:

- Make sure they are well-rested
- Help make sure equipment is in order (skates sharpened, gloves in the bag, equipment fits correctly, etc)
- Remain positive about the whole process
- Remind your player that mistakes will happen. Coaches look for what you do right after a mistake. Recover, don't get upset, continue to compete
- Don't compare your player to other players – focus on what your player does well and how they add value to the program.
- Reinforce that success is doing their best and having fun. Keep competing

NOTE: Always keep your AD involved in what has been communicated it helps them not be blind sided

[Politics of Coaching-Coaches survival guide](#) fantastic read an resources for all coaches

[Inside Out of Coach Transforming Lives](#) awesome book and I have taken a few things from there in the above information

[A Vagabond Life: Stories from a MN Hockey Coach](#) Tom Peart lots of stories to draw from (Coached me in High School)

[Every Moment Matters \(Book\)](#) fantastic read an resources for all coaches (recommended by Jaime Grosmann)