

***The WHY and HOW of Coach Education***  
***by Bruce Brown, CMAA***

Perhaps this is your first year coaching or maybe you are a veteran coach, but one fact of life is likely the same. Every time you answer the phone, open an e-mail, or read an administrative bulletin does it seem like there is just one or two or three *more* things you HAVE to do? And are you asking the question why coach education is one of those? It's a perfectly normal question to ask, and I think there are some very specific and relevant answers.

As interscholastic coaches, we are totally different in our vision, mission and purpose for coaching secondary school children. We are different than club, youth, private, college and, certainly professional level coaches, in that the great majority of our student-athletes (97% to be exact) do not go on to perform or play beyond the high school level. We approach the coaching of kids from an educational viewpoint rather than looking at it from another perspective.

In our current society, we often encounter the "semi-expert." Another way to view this is that a lot of people believe they know a little - or a lot - about what we do as coaches. This creates a unique challenge that we didn't really have to deal with 10-20 years ago. Much of the public's perception of coaches is that all coaches are interchangeable; in their view of the athletic world, "a coach is a coach is a coach!" I don't know about you, but I never believed I was of the same cut as a club coach or a private coach or any other type of non-scholastic coach.

One of the problems with allowing this public perception to continue is that without some level of standardized certification process, this same group of people (parents, fans, supporters, among others) will go on considering the interscholastic teacher/coach as just another person chasing kids around a field or court blowing a whistle. Consider this: in our state (Ohio) by current standards, you essentially need to be able to tape an ankle (sports medicine), start a heart (know CPR) and not be a convicted felon (BCI/FBI) to be deemed qualified to coach kids in our schools. Hairdressers and real estate agents are required to have more training and certification than we do as coaches, and we know that our clientele is *at least* equally as valuable and varied as theirs.

Many of us have read of "high profile" cases of inappropriate activities which occur throughout each state (and the nation) between youngsters and teachers/coaches. Even a course that addresses appropriate behavior, legal expectations, professional responsibilities and other related duties for the teacher/coach is no guarantee of sound behavior. However, more schools and districts are becoming increasingly aware of the liability issues that they encumber if they DON'T address with each employee (including coaches) what those expectations are. No school district can afford to assume that everyone knows his/her responsibilities and behavioral boundaries.

These are just some of the reasons why coach education is rightfully a requirement. Let me relate one quick story about a coach education participant. I am fortunate to have one of the best high school head football coaches in the state here at Lake High School. Jeff Durbin was hesitant about WHY he had to take a class like this, after 20+ years of high school coaching and five years of college coaching. Jeff took the course anyway. About two months after taking the

course, he stopped me one day and offered this, totally unsolicited, comment: “I didn't think I'd gain much from this course. But, I gotta tell you, after completing the course, I found myself re-energized by reminding myself as to WHY I got into this business to begin with. The class really got me to refocus upon WHY we do what we do, and HOW we should be teaching our kids.”

Both new and experienced coaches benefit from this education, but the ultimate winners are the students. The students in our schools deserve to have coaches who understand the WHY and HOW. Yes, it's another item to add to our “to do” lists, but it is hard to think of a more important one.

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