

MANY PEOPLE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO FIND A NICHE within their work place or to feel like they fit in. Fitting in can be difficult for some sport coaches too, especially when they are new to the school building. Some teachers have a perception that sport coaches are there to play sports and win games only, and that they are not overly concerned about the academic performance of their athletes. When push comes to shove, it is difficult for some coaches to fit in with noncoaching faculty. Sport coaches may need a plan for fitting in with the rest of the faculty and staff at a school. This plan must be purposeful and specific; coaches must do as much as possible to endear themselves to other faculty and staff. The goal is to win over everyone, from the custodian to the cafeteria worker, the secretary to the librarian, and the administrator to the hardened teacher. This article provides 10 ideas coaches can use to fit in with the rest of the school staff. It is hoped that each idea will serve as a springboard to even more ideas. Readers are encouraged to consider these ideas with their specific teaching/coaching situations in mind and adapt them in a way that works for them.



WAYS SPORT COACHES CAN FIT IN WITH THE FACULTY

By Dennis M. Docheff

COACHES MUST ACTIVELY SHARE THE benefits of being a coach with other programs outside of sport (drama, debate, music, etc.). Sport coaches who acknowledge and actively support other extracurricular activities are indirectly inviting those other programs to support their sport.

1. Celebrate Academics

First, coaches must find a way to celebrate academics. There are numerous ways for coaches to promote academic performance. One way is to create a Coach's Honor Roll. When creating an honor roll, it is important to make it meaningful for all athletes, not just the high academic achievers. For instance, a coach may tabulate a list of students with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.1 and above, but it is also important to have a coach's honor list for the students with GPAs ranging from 2.5 to 3.09 and 2.0 to 2.49. Some students may never make any other kind of honor roll. The sport coach can make the honor roll important for these lower academic achievers by encouraging them to work hard to reach that 2.0 or 2.5 GPA. Typically, classroom teachers appreciate the fact that the coach wants all athletes to perform well academically — "All Athletes Are Academics" may be a nice slogan for a coach's "4A Club."

To demonstrate support for academics, coaches need to demonstrate strong academic performance as well. Coaches must go out of their way to communicate with other teachers at an academically high level. All emails, notes, letters, etc., should be examined for grammar and spelling errors and be as perfect as possible. It may be effective to ask an English teacher to review or edit a few documents the coach plans to provide to the public. Does the coach want to publish his or her philosophy statement, send a letter to the parents or booster club, or write an article for the local newspaper? In these cases, the coach can ask another teacher to proofread — grammar matters!

2. Acknowledge Sport as Extracurricular

Sports are only one area where students can participate in activities outside of the academic program. Maintaining a viewpoint that sports are, in fact, extracurricular leads to a healthy perspective on how sport programs fit in with the rest of the school experience. Sport coaches must support other

programs — all programs. Should coaches attend every musical presentation at school? Do coaches encourage athletes to participate in theatrical events, even if it requires missing a practice or two? Should coaches purposefully seek out faculty who lead other activities and demonstrate support for those programs? Absolutely! Coaches do not have to be so obsessed with their own programs that they neglect to acknowledge other activities.

Although some coaches may feel that sports offer the best opportunities to provide students with immeasurable life experiences, other extracurricular programs must be acknowledged. Sport coaches are often in the limelight, sought out by the press for a comment, recognized as school leaders, or known as student favorites. Coaches must actively share the benefits of being a coach with other programs outside of sport (drama, debate, music, etc.). Sport coaches who acknowledge and actively support other extracurricular activities are indirectly inviting those other programs to support their sport.

3. Attend All Faculty Meetings

It may sound easy, but it is difficult for athletic coaches to attend faculty meetings. Faculty meetings are often held immediately after the regular school day, which is prime time for coaches to be in the locker room, supervising and interacting with athletes, and making last-minute adjustments for practice. How can coaches be expected to sit through faculty meetings when their athletes are waiting for practice to begin?

Coaches must go out of their way to attend all faculty meetings. Each time a coach misses a meeting, teachers make unfair judgments about the professional teaching status of the coaching staff. Head coaches, especially, run the risk of alienating themselves from the teaching staff; being there is half the battle. Maybe practice begins a little later than usual on the day of the faculty meeting (usually only once a month). Maybe the head coach talks the principal into having early-morning meetings once in a while so that all the coaches can attend. Or maybe

one coach can be excused from the faculty meeting to monitor athletes, while the rest of the coaching staff participates in the meeting. Coaches must become active participants in faculty meetings (not sit in the back row diagramming plays). These meetings are an opportunity for coaches to make a positive statement about being committed teachers by making their presence known. Coaches are supposed to be problem solvers — and they can solve this problem by being there!

4. Be a Great Teacher!

One of the typical complaints people have about coaches is that they let their teaching slide and put all their efforts into coaching. The most significant thing coaches can do to fit in with the teaching staff is to exhibit exemplary teaching skills. A need exists for coaches to demonstrate quality teaching, regardless of the subject taught. Teaching is the priority during the regular school day, and coaches should make that known to students and to fellow teachers.

Simply having a well-planned lesson and sticking to the plan (also by starting and ending on time) is one way to ensure quality teaching. Other teaching-effectiveness concepts coaches can implement include teaching to objectives, having a strong knowledge of content, using meaningful assessments, giving performance-related feedback in the classroom, and demonstrating a command of the disciplinary process. Just as coaches expect athletes to work to improve their playing ability, coaches should always be looking to enhance their own teaching skills.

5. Seek Help: Study Table

Often, coaches have players who struggle with some of their academic studies. Coaches can help their athletes and fit in with the teaching faculty by asking other teachers for help. Teachers feel appreciated when there is a genuine request for their expertise. Coaches have opportunities to create a “study table,” where athletes are required to put in certain amounts of study time before they can practice. Coaches who ask teachers for help staffing a study group open the door for other teachers to support the academic success of athletes. They also demonstrate their genuine concern for students and academics.

Scheduling times for the study table may be difficult; it may require some flexibility on the part of the coach. Can players come to practice a little late if they are at the study table? Can the study table be in the mornings or evenings? Can the study table be for all athletes at once — a mass study experience? Can other faculty members help in figuring out how to meet the academic needs of the athletes? The answer to each of these questions is a resounding *yes!* All it takes is one volunteer teacher to help and advocacy for that program begins. Coaches who emphasize classroom performance create avenues for noncoaching teachers to get to know them and support athletes’ academic growth.

6. Faculty Guests at Practices and Games

One of the best ways to win over faculty is to get them involved with the team. It is a simple task to invite teachers and/



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or administrators to come to practices and speak to the team. A noncoaching teacher may have expertise in nutrition and can give a 10-minute talk to athletes. Maybe another teacher is a former all-state athlete who can share stories of athletic successes with the team. The coach should find ways to help teachers connect with the players. This invitation may lead players to see teachers and administrators in a different light and respect them in a different way. Once coaches entice teachers to come to a practice, new supporters are born.

In addition to inviting faculty and/or administrators to practices, coaches need to make a concerted effort to invite faculty and staff to their contests. It is possible to make teachers honorary coaches at sporting events to thank them for being quality teachers. This invitation can include participation during the pregame, half-time, and postgame activities of the team. If coaches want to go the extra mile, the invitation could include travel on the team bus to an away contest. It is amazing how much support can be gained through a simple invitation (or the coach could throw in a T-shirt for good measure and the support would be strengthened even more). When noncoaching faculty become part of the entire sport experience, they may develop a stronger appreciation for the sport coach.

7. Praise the Faculty

Most coaches make an effort to praise their players — and that is a good thing. But coaches are positioned to take it a step further. During the next interview with the media, the coach can mention how the entire faculty prepares student-athletes to be solid citizens. If able, the coach could mention a specific teacher (or two) by name and ask the reporter to include the name in the report, while also emphasizing the academic performance goals of the school. When coaches share the media limelight with the rest of the faculty, people notice the gesture to include all teachers.

In addition to using the media, coaches can praise faculty and administration at pep assemblies and make a connection between academic prowess and athletic performance. Recognition of supportive teachers can occur at the end-of-the-season banquet, especially if they assist with the study table. Coaches need to show pride in their athletes and the teachers who work together to meet the challenges of the total student-athlete experience.

8. Read and Share Materials

Schools should be a place where lifelong learning is encouraged! Coaches must become readers and share some of the books they read with other faculty and staff. Coaches are encouraged to read a variety of books — pleasure reading is good, but it is important to tackle “learning books,” too. Learning books are those that demand a highlighter and may focus on the enhancement of teaching technique, life practice, or other quality-of-life issues. Simple conversations with noncoaching faculty members about a great book may leave a lasting impression on the teachers with whom the coach interacts.

Imagine the effect of a coach sharing a list of top 10 reads with a few faculty members. Or consider how young student-athletes might be positively influenced if the coach shares five life-changing books with athletes, along with the challenge of reading one or two of these books over the summer. Coaches need to share their desire to learn, and the best way to learn is to read books!

9. Promote Community Service

Teaching athletes the importance of service has become part of the job of coaching. Service can be addressed at the beginning of each season when introducing team goals. Coaches can seek out service-learning opportunities for their teams and then invite faculty (noncoaches) to participate. For example, the author once had the opportunity to take a girls' basketball team (in game warm-ups) to a senior citizen facility. The team walked through the building singing Christmas carols and handing out candy canes. It was amazing how much positive feedback came from that one visit. Also, the girls felt good about spending a little time with some aging adults, even if they did not know them.

Community service projects create avenues for coaches to fit in, especially if the projects are open to the entire faculty to participate. The author also coached seventh-grade football. There usually was no cost to attend games, but one year, the coaching staff decided to establish an admission price of one canned food item. At the end of the year, a picture of two players (in their game jerseys) loading a truck with more than 900 pounds of food for the local food bank appeared in the local paper. The results? A positive service opportunity for kids, a healthy donation to the local food bank, kids feeling good about doing something nice for others, parents recognizing a positive outcome of the program, and school administration seeing the school mentioned in the brief newspaper article. Everyone won!

10. Create an Advisory Board

Issues related to the sport scene crop up each year. Many issues may raise concerns: hazing incidents, bullying in sport, use of steroids, misuse of funds, and more. One way to prepare for issues before they arise is to form an advisory board. This group, meeting two to three times per year, may look at issues that could infiltrate the athletic program. The establishment of an advisory board demonstrates forward thinking by the coach. In addition, it shows that the coach values the input of those interested in the program.

The intent is to bring a variety of people together to discuss ways to enhance the school sport program. This advisory board helps to establish credibility with nonsupporters of the program. Different groups can serve on the advisory board: parent representatives, student representatives, administration, a coach, former players, booster club members and, of course, teachers. Including a noncoaching faculty member (or two) on the advisory board provides yet another way to develop support for the sport program, which helps coaches fit in.

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Conclusion

Occasionally, coaches can be self-absorbed, loud, selfish people who seem to care only about their sports teams. Is this an unfair statement? Yes, but it is also true. Coaches must go out of their way to be the antithesis of this stereotype. It may be the most important way a coach can fit in with the rest of the faculty. The purpose of this article was to provide ideas on how new coaches might be more readily accepted in a school building — ways to fit in. The intent is that the 10 ideas provided in this article will serve as a springboard for

thought and provide coaches with fodder for self-reflection and self-assessment. Coaches are encouraged to make a positive impact beyond the world of sport. Fitting into the school environment provides opportunities for coaches to expand their circle of influence. **S**

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