



Implementing A 3-4-5 Game Plan for Parents

By Joe Thomson, CMAA on April 14, 2015 HS Today

<https://www.nfhs.org/articles/implementing-a-3-4-5-game-plan-for-parents/#>

While most parents are supportive of the overall school athletic program, they are totally and singularly focused on their son or daughter. Occasionally, issues surrounding the selection of the squad, determining starters and playing time may become problems.

To limit potential issues and to ensure the best possible experience for young people, proactive communication with parents and setting expectations for them within a school's program are essential. The key to dealing successfully with today's parents isn't to alienate them, but to embrace, educate and convince them to work with the coaches to create the best environment for their son or daughter.

In order to accomplish this goal, the athletic department at Wilmington Christian School developed a 3-4-5 Game Plan for Parents. At the beginning of each season, all of the coaches review the program with their parents and utilize it in their interactions.

The 3-4-5 Game Plan should not be considered as a "silver bullet" to handle all parent issues. If the program has been introduced and explanations given on how the various situations will be handled, about 95 percent of potential problems can be proactively addressed.

The 3-4-5 Game Plan is broken into three easy-to-remember segments:

3 Non-Negotiables

Every coach and athletic director should use these when meeting with parents. These provisions need to be laid out at the beginning of any interaction – it could be a phone call or meeting – that a parent has requested with a coach.

1. Comments about other players will not be entertained.
2. Playing time, especially in comparison to other players, will not be discussed.
3. The coaching philosophy that is employed. The administration reviews, defines and ultimately approves all philosophical approaches so that they are in harmony with the education-based concept.
The key point is to remain on the topic of how everyone can best help their son or daughter develop physically and mentally and to gain lifelong values and qualities.

4 “Pillars” to Winning Parents O.V.E.R.

It is important to make your parents feel a part of the team. Rod Olson, the founder of Coaches of Excellence, created this concept with the following acronym:

O – Parents need to know that school administrators are Organized and ready to go. This needs to be consistent before, during and after the season. There have been a number of great articles in High School Today that recommend various means of technology to accomplish this task.

V – Parents should be provided a Vision of where the athletic staff wants the season to go. It is important to share the coach’s philosophy and make sure that the parents understand it. This is also a good time to define the roles of the coach, athlete and parents in the lines of communication. Review what is needed from all individuals involved in order for the program to be successful.

E – Train and Equip parents. Give them articles, tools, handouts and examples to help them focus on the task at hand. Things like Parents Pledges, Pocket Guides and weekly articles are all helpful.

R – Reinforce parents’ actions when they meet expectations and do things the right way. As was stated by Kenneth Blanchard in The One Minute Manager, “The best way to get quick results that will rapidly build throughout the organization is to catch people doing something right.” This can be done with parents privately and publicly whenever the chance presents itself. The more times the better.

Win them **O.V.E.R.** is a simple plan that is guaranteed to work with patience, determination and perseverance.

5 “TIPS” (To teach this concept, a picture of an open hand with these ideas on the fingers is used).

The following are checklist items that should be done each season.

1. Send an email to parents explaining how important they are to the success of the athletic program and include the basic rules of the program.
2. Organize a Preseason Meeting, which could last 30-60 minutes, for the parents to meet with the athletic administrator and coach. At Wilmington Christian School, it has been very productive to invite the parents to a Saturday morning practice session. After the meeting, the parents are invited to stay and watch what a typical practice looks like. Holding this meeting once a month can be a great tool.
3. Create some type of “Parents Pledge” that the staff and parents sign. Use this as a guide to reinforce some of the ideas that have been presented.
4. Explain the 24-hour rule. Wilmington Christian School has adopted the 24-hour rule, which states that there is to be no conversation between parents and coaches until 24 hours after the incident or situation that may have caused concerns has passed. This rule is good not only for parents, but also for coaches as well. It has helped many a situation “calm down” and a more constructive conversation resulted the next day.
5. Explain the Communication Chain of Command and make sure it is in the school’s Athletic Department Handbook and posted on the school’s website. This process must be backed and supported by all levels on the chain of command for it to work effectively. Just like any chain, it is only as strong as the weakest link and parents will look to express their opinions in the quickest, easiest way possible. Use this technique to slow the process down and de-escalate things.

During the summer, the athletic administrator should consider revising the 3-4-5 Game Plan to fit the school’s setting. Once a school implements this program, there may only be minor revisions that are necessary. However, new coaches would not constitute making changes to the overall concept.

Having the 3-4-5 Game Plan ready to go before the start of next season will provide a great proactive approach to incorporate parents into the school’s athletic program.