

RAINY RIVER DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER COACHES

January 2013

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Table of Contents

Preamble	3
Rationale.....	3
You as a Coach	3
Pre-Season/Good High School Athlete.....	4
Team Tryouts	5
Team Rules.....	6
Meetings – Team, Individual, Parents	7
Practices.....	7
Injury.....	8
Home Games	8
Away Games – Day Trip	9
Away Games – Overnight	9
Final Thoughts.....	10
Appendices:	
NORWOSSA Code of Ethics for Coaches.....	Appendix A
NORWOSSA Game Incident Report	Appendix B
NORWOSSA Responsibilities.....	Appendix C
NORWOSSA Code of Conduct for Athletes.....	Appendix D
NORWOSSA Parent Consent Form	Appendix E
Fort Frances High School Team Policies	Appendix F
Fort Frances High School Field Trip Consent Form.....	Appendix G
Fort Frances High School Athlete Information Sheet.....	Appendix H

PREAMBLE

Anyone interested in coaching as a community volunteer for a high school team must go through the following procedures:

- a criminal records check
- providing at least two references
- following the Rainy River District School Board guidelines for the use of volunteer coaches

In addition, you should have knowledge and interest, not only in the specific sport but also in working with young people. You also require the energy and time to fulfill your commitment.

RATIONALE

There are many factors involved in coaching young people: skill development, conditioning, competition, enjoyment. The list is probably different for each individual. However, when coaching a high school team, the coach's priorities must change to promote the development of the complete player; physical, social and emotional (i.e. kids first, game second).

A high school player is a representative of his/her school and must act accordingly: in the classroom, on the field or court or ice and in the community. Because of this, it can be stated that playing is a privilege, not a right and many decisions about personnel, rules and coaching strategies revolve around this philosophy.

YOU AS A COACH

The characteristics of a good high school coach include a knowledge and love for the game in which he/she is involved. Enthusiasm for all aspects of the competition, including practice is essential. Good communication skills are very beneficial. Staying positive, regardless of the circumstances, is perhaps the most difficult aspect to achieve.

You should have rules: about behavior, attendance, work ethic and you should enforce them. Be firm but fair, and a good practice would be to anticipate problems and deal with outcomes before they take place. For example, what happens when a player skips practice or a class on game day? Does it matter if he/she is a starter or not? What's the school rule about the skipping of classes?

Familiarity with school and league rules and expectations is very important. Included in this package are several handouts outlining these rules. Please read them carefully and discuss any implications or concerns with the Athletic Director.

The Athletic Director should be your contact in the school with regards to any difficulties you have: eligibility forms; accessing equipment or uniforms; first aid procedures; transportation or simply as a back-up for a disciplinary decision you have made.

Finally, try to maintain a certain psychological distance from your team. Being a friend is fine, as long as players realize that friendship doesn't outweigh your rules or those of the school or league.

A coach should lead by example; appearance, language and attitude all should be positives. Your goals may include winning, but fun, learning, teamwork, setting priorities; time management (books and sport), performance and self-control in stressful situations should be just as important.

PRE-SEASON

Before you even start practice, you should contemplate the type of team and players you want. If all a coach had to do was select the best athletes, life would be very simple. However, team chemistry, which is important at all levels of sport, is probably most important in high school. It is not vital that everyone get along 100% of the time. It is VITAL that an atmosphere exists so that learning can take place at practices and games. To this end, here is a profile of what could be considered an excellent high school athlete:

1. Hustles in practices and games
2. Hard worker at school
3. Positive attitude
4. A leader by example
5. Accepts criticism
6. Potential to develop
7. Athletic/skilled
8. Gets along with teammates
9. Coachable
10. Self-controlled, poised
11. Conditioned, healthy
12. Dependable, punctual
13. Enjoys both games and practices
14. Cares for, focuses on team
15. Trustworthy

You won't find many young people with all these characteristics, but they come along every once in a while. Many players possess a high percentage of the above. You may wish to add or delete from the list but a good rule of thumb would be: don't fall in love with talent.

TEAM TRYOUTS

Selecting a team is the most difficult thing for a coach to do. Decide in your own mind how many you would like to carry. Keep in mind that only so many players (eleven) or players with equipment (football, hockey) will fit on a bus. Keeping a taxi squad or an excessively large group can work, but can present some difficulties. Playing time is tough to divide up. Frustration for top or bottom rung players mounts over a long season and this usually creates problems for the coach.

Here are several hints that could simplify some of your decisions:

1. As much as possible, insist that everyone be there for all tryouts. Illness and injury are obvious exceptions.
2. Make your first several tryouts very demanding physically. You might even include a 7:00 a.m. workout. Those who are really interested will be there, uncomplaining and working hard. A number of players may cut themselves.
3. If you have an excessively large group, you could divide them (by age/experience; by position/by size) in order to get a better look at individuals.
4. Make a chart with five or more criteria and rate players out of ten. When things get close, this could be of assistance.
5. Be fair but don't drag out the process. Three or four workouts should be sufficient for obvious cuts.
6. Near the end of the process, get input from others: teachers, other coaches, to assist you. However, the final choices are yours. Remember, the season is three to five months in length!
7. Problem Areas:
 - Who do you keep? An experienced grade 12 or a grade 11 student with potential – equal ability?
 - There is potential – to improve or to create problems – a great athlete who is a 'head case' may not be worth the trouble
 - Playing on a team can be rehabilitating for a student with problems (school, home, friends) – an experienced coach has a difficult time with a 'project' like this – a new coach might find it impossible – whatever you do, don't take on more than one!
 - In most instances, players that will and won't make your team are obvious – the gray area in the middle where you have ten players for four spots (as an example) make things really difficult – this is where extra factors listed earlier come into play – often it comes down to a feeling you have about the individual(s) or how you get along with them.

8. Once you've made your final decisions, there are two common methods of informing players: a face-to-face meeting or posting a list. The first is more difficult but, if you can give reasons or an explanation, how a player can improve for next year, at least then the player may understand why he/she wasn't successful. If you do this at a final practice, call everyone, even successful candidates over, so those cut aren't embarrassed. Post your list in a public spot (office window). Again, make sure you have reasons ready why certain players didn't make it. There will be questions – from players or parents and you have to be prepared.

TEAM RULES

Now that you have a team, it's important to establish some specific rules. Think about consequences; discuss them with others; explain them to your players (early). Again, anticipating problems that could occur and covering them before they happen, can cut off many difficulties that might arise

1. Indicate that you are making a commitment to them and expect the same in return.
2. The only excuse for missing practice should be illness or injury (or an unavoidable commitment). Players know the practice schedule and should plan around it. It's very frustrating to spend an hour getting a practice ready and not being able to run some (or all) of the drills because of absenteeism.

Points to consider: - work
- your sport versus a community team

Be tough early. Don't accept excuses! Don't take a message from another player. Insist that the person who won't be there tell you him/herself, if possible.

3. School comes first. Players shouldn't use practice or a trip as an excuse for not doing homework. Set up some kind of system for checking attendance (Athletic Director?)
4. Establish a dress code for home and away games,
 - clean and neat
 - dress up
 - no jeans
 - game jersey – are possibilities
5. Outline your expectations for behaviour/effort.
 - 100% all the time (you play like you practice)

- Stay positive – don't yell at teammates (or referees, opponents or opposing fans)
 - Stay focused and under control
6. Establish a team philosophy about winning. Most players, if asked, will select winning over 'fun'. However, winning shouldn't take precedence if it means leaving one third of the team on the sidelines. Playing time is the toughest call to make. Create a system which allows for as much participation as possible. Get players in the game early. Remember, winning loses its luster if you are not taking part. A player can't learn while he/she is sitting on the bench. The starting players will probably be established after the first few games. Indicate that it is not etched in stone – effort and improvement will be rewarded.

MEETINGS

1. Team: an occasional team meeting to talk about practices, upcoming trips, problems, a new offense/defense or just clearing the air is often beneficial.
2. Early in the season, either casually or on a schedule, try to talk to individuals about your expectations and theirs. It assists in opening communication lines, and again, clearing up misconceptions before they occur. One topic, especially with substitutes, is how much playing time they can expect and how to, perhaps, increase it.
3. Parents: sometimes your rules and schedules can be covered in a letter. Unfortunately, sometimes these letters get lost. A face-to-face meeting in the pre-season might prevent an irate phone call or confrontation later. Besides team rules, you could go over practice, league and exhibition schedules; the field trip permission form; costs for the season; school insurance forms (Athletic Director) and to clarify any questions they might have. Handled properly, parents will see that you have their son's or daughter's best interests at heart. Be sure to emphasize the players' needs to put school first. Invite parents to home games. If they show up, make sure their son/daughter plays.

PRACTICES

There should be several factors to consider when planning your practices. Early in the season, basic skills and conditioning should be stressed. Seldom does a coach have enough time to get ready for the first game, but players should be ready to play safely. "Partial game" situations have to be incorporated gradually (e.g. power play, punt return). These simulations never completely take over your practices but become a major part. Remember – scrimmages usually end up with people repeating previous mistakes. If you wish to scrimmage, control it to the extent that you interrupt to correct mistakes, adjust personnel or positioning, or stop it altogether.

Practices should be: fun; varied; to develop individual or team skills; to improve certain aspects or areas that are weak; to prepare for the next opponent; to allow for goal setting; to increase conditioning (to play as well in the fourth quarter as in the first); to assist players in learning to give 100% all the time; to learn to perform under stress.

Plan your practices in writing. Players will realize that you are not just “winging it”. Get changed into athletic clothes; it’s tough to demonstrate in a dress or suit.

As much as possible, make sure your practices are safe. This can be accomplished through:

- proper stretching and warm up
- Use of ability/age appropriate drills
- Precise explanation or instructions of the drill
- water breaks – at least three or four in a ninety minute practice

Finally, realize that late in the year, it’s tough for players to maintain interest and intensity (especially if you’re losing). A fun or competition practice; a day off (occasionally) changes the pace and gives everyone a break. There will also be days when everyone is “off” – perhaps a good time to shut things down early, before someone does get hurt.

INJURY

If an injury does occur, check with the Athletic Director to be sure of proper procedure. Make certain the first aid kit has all the necessities, either at home or on the road. Know where the ice is in your own facility. If you’re not sure about the injury, get help – someone with St. John’s Ambulance, the Athletic Director or an ambulance. Don’t try to take on something you are not sure of – especially involving a neck or back injury. If you are uncertain, do not move the athlete until help arrives. Be sure to fill out an accident report form with the Athletic Director.

HOME GAMES

The only complication that can affect a home game is whether it is during school or not. Players must attend all classes, unless they are dismissed early. If so, an excused list (names, date, release time) should be presented to the office. Players should make it a habit to contact teachers a day or so ahead of time to get homework. Be sure to time any early release so players get as much time as possible in class, without having to race to get ready. Forty-five minutes is standard for court sports; ninety minutes for football.

Some teams have started to dress up on game days or wear their uniform jersey. P.S. Remind them to always have their entire uniform available.

AWAY GAMES – SINGLE DAY

NORWOSSA road games are reasonably simple as well. Remind your team about the departure time (tell them 15 minutes earlier); approximate return time; dress code and how much they will need for food. It's also wise to tell them to bring books and use them, either on the bus or when they are not playing. This also provides an opportunity for a team member who is struggling (e.g. math) to get help or tutoring from someone on the team (or on the bus). Players should be on their best behaviour: on the bus; at the host school; or at a restaurant.

OVERNIGHT TRIPS

Taking a group away for an overnight trip is not a simple task. Before making any commitment, meet with your team to discuss dates, costs, expected behaviour, etc. Nothing is more frustrating than finding out two days prior to your departure that several players have changed their minds. Expenses for the remaining players (hotel, van, entry fee) could become prohibitive.

Things like transportation and hotel rooms can be arranged by the Athletic Director. Entry fees for tournaments range from \$100 - \$150 for court sports to almost \$400 for hockey. Hotel rooms can be as little as \$60/night (four to a room) to \$100. It is important that players know their share of the costs well ahead of time.

Players should be reminded that they are responsible for any charges to their room (phone calls, movies, etc.).

Make sure the team knows when they play and ensure that they eat properly (lightly) ahead of time. Taco chips and a soft drink is not a pre-game meal. Pancakes before a morning game are far too heavy. Players should also get proper rest. This ties in directly with curfew and behaviour.

When initially discussing the trip, the team should realize that they are not leaving for a party – they are going to Winnipeg or Dryden or Thunder Bay to compete. This is a chance to demonstrate their maturity. A lack of maturity will cancel any future trips, not to mention branding guilty players as not being trustworthy for the rest of their high school careers.

If you have a 9:00 a.m. game, a reasonable curfew would be in the room at 11:00 p.m. – lights out at 11:30 p.m. (They have to be up at 7:00 a.m.). They should not be out of the room after that. A simple method of stating this would be: "If you cannot be trusted for one night, tell me before we go." You cannot babysit them all night (you need your rest).

Above all, the team should be well behaved and well looked after. Make sure you repeat all instructions regarding rules for the trip – ask if everyone understands. If there are problems, responsible players will verify what you said to the group.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Coaching is a tremendous undertaking. Hopefully, the above will assist in getting you over some of the hurdles you will face. In most instances, however, experience will always be the best teacher. Some of the following comments are new – others bear repeating:

1. Anytime someone is out of class, the office should have a list (date, times, names and players should arrange to get work from their teachers.
2. A good coach leads by example. Find one or two players who can do the same and make them your captains.
3. Use everyone who can help you: administrators, athletic director, teachers, guidance, secretaries, maintenance staff. Try to maintain good relationships with all of them.
4. Winning is important, but not more than the education of the total student athlete.
5. Anticipate as many problems as possible and deal with them before they can occur. I think the term is proactive.
6. Team chemistry is absolutely essential – avoid layers who could hurt it.
7. Work ethic and attitude sometimes can equal or surpass athleticism.
8. Playing time will be your biggest cross to bear. Share it (not necessarily equally) among all your players.
9. In today's moral and political climate, your relationship with the team and individuals on it will come under close scrutiny. To avoid problems:
 - a) Be careful how you touch your players. High fives are fine; touching anywhere else could be unacceptable.
 - b) Avoid situations where you are alone with a player, i.e. locker/shower room, in a hotel room. It is best not to be behind closed doors. Remember that someone else's perception may be quite different than reality.
10. On a lighter note, be careful what you say to the press. Statements can often be misinterpreted. Once in print, it is hard to change things. **Never** say anything that the opposition can use against you!

GOOD LUCK!!!