

Every Sunday morning from 8-9 AM, Rick Wolff hosts a radio talk show called "The Sports Edge" on WFAN out of New York. The show focuses on timely and topical issues in the world of sports parenting. Listed below are links to the transcripts from selected shows. These shows were selected based on their content and how they relate to sports parenting issues that are being covered by the CSP. If you have a question for Rick, or any of our experts, please submit it via e-mail to [csp@internationalsport.com](mailto:csp@internationalsport.com)

Top Ten Issues in Coaching Kids Today  
Top Ten Issues for Sports Parents

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The Sports Edge ...718-937-6666

Hi everybody, and welcome to the Sports Edge, the show that focuses on timely and topical issues in the world of sports parenting....we're brought to you in part each Sunday by Con Edison, People Helping People Everyday.

On today's show, I want to take some time to review what I call the Top Ten Issues involving coaching kids....long before I became a radio host or even a sports parent, I served as a head coach myself, both at the collegiate and professional level....and over the years, it's become clear to me that some of the basic issues and concerns that I had to confront as a coach myself, or even confronted when I was player, have evolved over the years - -some for the good, and quite honestly, some for the bad.

Now, please - -don't get me wrong - there is no question that being a coach today is much more difficult and challenging than it was when I was a head college coach. It's much tougher today than it was 10 or 15 years ago. And today's coaches know that - that helps explain why it's becoming increasingly difficult to find good people who want to work with our kids - especially at the high school level.

Most varsity and JV coaches make about \$3-4,000 for their effort. And in most cases, whereas the sport itself is only in season for 10 weeks, most of these coaches try to work with their kids throughout the year. So we're talking about some very dedicated people.

But all that being said, there are some chronic issues that keep popping up - issues that people often call me about, or write to me about, and I want to use today's show as a forum to both give you my top ten list of current coaching issues

No. 10 - Dealing with Frustration - or maybe this is better known as How to Communicate with your players effectively.

if you're a yeller or screamer at your players - and that's the key phrase at your kids - then you're becoming obsolete.....Why? because the vast majority of kids today DO NOT respond well to being belittled by their coaches....most kids will NOT, repeat, will NOT rise to the challenge....they just end up hating you and will shrink from the task at end.

So, if you want to scream and yell, modify your approach so that you yell at the TEAM in general - not at an individual player. That's the key difference. It's much easier for the entire team to hear they're not making an effort than for an individual kid to be picked up and humiliated in front of his teammates.

Top Issue No. 9 - Make every possible effort to get everybody into the game.

Now, this is a tough challenge for some coaches, but for others, it's easy...yes, especially at the varsity level, you want to win....but the best coaches seem to understand that in order for the team to win, it helps dramatically if every kid - - even the second stringers - get a chance to break a sweat and get dirty, even if only for a few plays.

Why? Because it's hard to talk about how We're a TEAM if only a few kids play in the game....kids on the bench begin to lose interest, their self-confidence withers -after all, how good can they be if You, the coach, don't trust them to play them in the game...and eventually, your entire program suffers because you get the reputation as favoring only a few kids...

Coaches, trust me on this....find a way to get All your kids into the games....and not just when the score is lopsided.

Issue No. 8 - Learn how to Communicate with your players.

That means You, as the coach, have to build a rapport with every kid on your team....talk to them one on one....let them feel free to give you ideas, feedback, etc....don't be afraid to let the kids make suggestions to you on how to use a certain player here or there....sometimes, the players know better than you do who should play where on the team....

I remember a player telling me that one of my outfielders - a kid who didn't play much - had a terrific knuckleball....I went to this outfielder, asked to see him pitch, and lo and behold, he was great....but he never came to me to volunteer that info, and I would have never have heard about it unless I had listened to his teammate.

ALSO ...be careful and precise with your words. Those youngsters live and die with what you say, so be very, very careful. Above all, never make a promise to a kid if you don't plan to carry it out...that will absolutely ruin any trust or rapport the kid has for you....example: telling a kid he's going to play a lot in the next game, and then the kid gets in only briefly...there's no reason to do that.

Issue No. 7 - Here's a tough one...Parents should be treated with respect and with friendship-they are NOT to be avoided like the plague.

Now, I know this can be very difficult for coaches....but the only thing that parents want from you are two things: 1) a few kind words about how their kid is doing, and 2) they may want to offer a coaching strategy or two.

My advice? Give the parent 5 minutes of your time, let them give you their advice, and give them a sincere smile. Sometimes, they may even have a good idea....but to be distant or aloof from these folks is a big, big mistake.

Also, always remember that parents rarely tend to be objective about their kids' abilities as athletes. But that being said, it's not your job to deflate the parent's dreams....don't worry - -when the time comes, the kid will either rise to the top, or they won't....you won't have to tell the parents the bad news.

And one last thing about parents. If they call you, make every effort to call them back within 24 hours.

Issue No. 6 - Make sportsmanship a key priority.

Don't just say and shrug, "Oh yeah, I guess we gotta shake hands after the game with the other team." Rather, teach your kids about the Golden Rule in Sports - treat your opponents the way you would like to be treated.

As a coach, praise the opponents and their efforts. Let your kids know that the other team is working hard, too. Teach your kids what's acceptable after they score, and what isn't. Let them know that running up a score is just not right....I still get angry when I hear about coaches letting kids run the score in a game in order to set a personal record....that stuff stinks!

Teach your kids how to win - and lose -- with class.

Issue No. 5 - Be careful with your words!

You can never go wrong with praise, but you can really run into problems if you lash out at your kids and use words that cut right to the bone.

Sarcasm is really the worst enemy you can have. If you're a coach, don't try to be a comedian. Don't try and poke fun at your kids by using sarcastic remarks....kids, for the most part, won't respond to that. And by the way, remind your asst. coaches of the same philosophy.

Issue No. 4 - Don't try to be the player's best friend. He or she already has lots of friends. Your job is still to be an educator. You can talk to them, listen to them, and motivate them, but don't think for a second that you're on the same level with the kids. You're still a grown-up here, and you're being paid to act like an educator. So educate them - don't be part of their social world.

Issue No. 3 - "We're building for the future - -that's why I'm playing the younger kids over the seniors." Hmm....is that fair? At what point do you pull the plug on the seniors who have waited for their turn to play on the varsity? Is building for the future really part of the high school mentality, or is that better left to the pros and colleges?

From my vantage point, too many high school coaches think this is appropriate. This is wrong. It's not fair to the upperclassmen who have waited to get their playing time.

## Issue No. 2 - Conditioning and safety.

Coach, what do you do if you find out that one of your kids is taking some legal but controversial nutritional supplements to his or her diet? Are you going to say anything to the kid? To their parents? Is that part of your job?

We have already learned about kids working out in the heat and have paid the price, sometimes with death. Now, at least, there are water breaks for the kids. But what about those situations where a kid is taking creatine, or ephedrine, or any other supplement that might seriously damage their health? Coach, what kind of responsibility do you have to that kid? Let me put it this way - suppose it was your kid?

## Issue No. 1 -- - Discipline

Every coach on every team has to have some sort of team discipline. That's the easy part. The hard part is to trying to determine what kind of punishment should be handed out if a kid disobeys one of the rules.

Example: the coach says that if you're late to the pre-game meeting, then you sit out the first half of the game. No excuses accepted. Well, what happens if the kids are playing the biggest game of the year, and the star player is late for the pre-game meeting because he witnessed a car accident and he stopped to render some assistance to the injured people? Coach --- according to your rules, he sits out. Is that fair? Is that the kind of message you want to send to a kid who's a good Samaritan?