





# Measure UP!

for Better Youth Sports

By Linda Alberts

A growing number of recreation programs are upgrading their efforts to hold their volunteer coaches more accountable during both practices and games. Many are utilizing the Coach Rating System to get the job done, in the process strengthening their programs, enhancing the quality of coaching taking place on their fields and courts and, most important of all, helping ensure more young athletes have memorable experiences for all the right reasons. How do your coaches measure up?

**V**olunteer youth sport coaches donate countless hours of their time to enriching the lives of the youngsters in their community through sports. From practices to pregame speeches, their actions contribute to the childhood memories of the youngsters playing on their teams.

While the benefits of physical activity, social skills and teamwork are undeniable, what makes the difference between children walking away with positive or negative youth sports experiences? The answer lies in the attitudes and behaviors of the volunteer coaches who serve as role models to the young athletes.

Volunteers are welcomed to give their time and coach at the Town of Clover (S.C.) recreation department, just as they are in countless youth sports programs across the country.

However, that does not mean that the youth sports staff will put up with poor behaviors and attitudes from their volunteers.

“I’m always researching ways to make sure our volunteers are accountable for their job to us,” said Willis Whitley, youth sports coordinator of the Town of Clover recreation department. “I want to find ways to make sure our volunteers are properly trained and aware of how good or bad they are doing.”



This means making sure their coaches have an understanding of the sport they are coaching, but also that they uphold the program’s philosophy.

#### **PROGRAM HELPER**

The Town of Clover is among a rapidly growing number of recreation departments nationwide that are utilizing the Coach Rating System, developed by the National Alliance for Youth Sports, to strengthen their programs and enhance the quality of their coaching.

Whitley credits the rating system with reducing the number of coaching-related issues occurring on the field which, in turn, is providing more positive experiences for the young athletes.

“Parents are able to quietly list their concerns about a coach and the coach can make immediate changes,” Whitley explained.

The Coach Rating System, which any NAYS chapter has access to, is an online tool that anonymously collects feedback from the parents of players regarding the coach. It addresses key coaching areas, including the coach’s knowledge of the sport’s rules, how effectively they hold practices, how well they teach sportsmanship, their proficiency at identifying and correcting improper technique and how effective they are in motivating players, among others.

“The Coach Rating System gives great value to my program because it helps me have eyes and ears by way

of the parents,” said Renee Nunez, assistant athletic director at the City of Pembroke Pines (Fla.). “The parents see the coaches in action with their children during games and practices first hand.”

While many youth sports programs conduct coach assessments by its staff, many recreation departments are discovering the benefits of parent-orientated evaluations done with the click of a mouse.

Parents that provide feedback through the Coach Rating System can reveal problems that may have otherwise gone undetected – often at the expense of the youngsters in the program.

want to be identified until the end of the season and have that child subject to the problem all season,” Mellinger said.

The Coach Rating System utilizes online technology to make the rating process simple for both the parent and youth sports staff. The staff sends the parents of each child on their roster an email containing a digital link that NAYS provides to the evaluation form. Shortly after the parent submits their evaluation, it is available online for the staff to review.

“I feel that the convenience and anonymity of online surveying makes coach evaluations easier to

However, that quickly changed based on how well it was received.

“Due to overwhelming responses from our coaches, we have decided to implement this tool for every coach in our youth sports program throughout the year,” he said. “The response from our coaches regarding the feedback has been extremely positive. They can immediately dissect their coaching success and failures.”

According to Gandee, both positive and negative criticism help coaches evolve.

“Constructive feedback gives coaches the opportunity to make modifications in their style for the benefit of the team,” he said.

**“I don’t want to hear about a problem from a parent who does not want to be identified until the end of the season and have that child subject to the problem all season.”**

– Steve Mellinger, program manager, Glynn County (Ga.) Recreation and Parks

For example, if a parent finds that their child’s coach is not exposing the players to a variety of positions or dedicating enough time to stretching, they can indicate these concerns through the evaluation.

Parents also bring a fresh set of eyes to the program and value sharing their input.

“Our parents are appreciative that they are getting to rate the coach along with the staff,” said Steve Mellinger, program manager at Glynn County (Ga.) Recreation and Parks.

At Glynn County the coaches are rated twice throughout the season – once in the beginning, and then again at the end.

“I don’t want to hear about a problem from a parent who does not

administer,” said Jason Gandee, recreation supervisor at the City of Reynoldsburg in Ohio.

### **FEEDBACK FUELING IMPROVEMENT**

Youth sports staff can use the feedback provided through the Coach Rating System to improve their coaches’ skills, and the youth sports experience of the children, so it is a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Coaches at the City of Litchfield Park (Ariz.) have received the rating system well. Franz Fuhrmann, the youth and sports coordinator there, originally offered the Coach Rating System as a trial during the fall 2010 season and the coaches’ participation was optional.

By seeing their average score in each area of coaching, the coaches quickly learn what their strengths and weaknesses are. For example, if a coach learns that he received high marks in every category but one, he can focus on improving that particular skill.

For coaches at the City of Pembroke Pines, if they are not willing to improve their weaknesses then they cannot continue coaching.

To Nunez, the youth sports experience is “about the children, not the coaches.” She keeps each coach’s evaluation in their personal file and uses them to hand select coaches for her leagues each year.

Feedback from the Coach Rating System also clarifies what the youth

sports staff and parents expect from the coach. When everybody involved in the youth sports program is on the same page, they can create a positive and memorable experience for the children.

Gandee adds, “Having this extra layer pursues our department goal in having all coaches adopt and support our mission statement and philosophy on youth sports.”

“The Coach Rating System only increases our standing as a valuable, respected program in our community,” said Whitley. “It’s yet another way that we can show to our families and prospective participants that we’re dedicated to providing the highest quality recreation programs in the area.”



halfway through the season. This may allow you to identify any negative situations before they get out of control, saving youngsters from an unpleasant season.

► **End of season evaluations:** Have your parents complete evaluations at the end of the season to evaluate how they performed. Use this feedback to make a plan to improve the coach’s weak areas, if any.

► **Supplement your staff’s coach assessments:** Use the determinations of your staff’s assessments of the coach, along with the added insight of the parent evaluations, to develop a complete plan the coach can use to improve his coaching skills.

## **By properly training volunteer coaches in the expectations and responsibilities of coaching youth sports and holding them accountable to a code of ethics, coaches, parents and youth sports staff can work together toward the department’s youth sports philosophy and mission.**

### **MEASURE UP! FOR BETTER YOUTH SPORTS**

Every day stories of unbelievable issues occurring among adults at youth sporting events – fights, 9-1-1 calls and arrest warrants among them – are covered in the news.

But beyond those horrific events, even coaches with the best intentions can cause emotional harm to children during a mid-week practice by how they interact and instruct them; or physical harm if they are teaching an unsafe technique.

By properly training volunteer coaches in the expectations and responsibilities of coaching youth sports and holding them accountable to a code of ethics, coaches, parents and youth sports staff can work together toward the

department’s youth sports philosophy and mission.

*Measure Up! for Better Youth Sports* encourages volunteer coach evaluation and accountability practices in all youth sports programs. A key tool youth sports programs can use to open communication and identify potential problems, as well as opportunities for praise, is to have their coaches evaluated through the Coach Rating System.

Take part in the *Measure Up! for Better Youth Sports* movement by implementing the Coach Rating System in your youth sports program in one, or more, of the following ways:

► **Mid-season evaluations:** Request that your parents conduct evaluations on their child’s coach about

► **Validate coach complaints:** Foremost, when you receive a coach complaint have it submitted in writing. To determine the authenticity of a complaint, ask 10 parents to give a current evaluation of the coach. Use their feedback to help you decide how to respond and what level of discipline is appropriate.

► **Let coaches see their ratings:** Give your coaches the information they need to review their ratings on their own from the Member Area. Since parent evaluations are anonymous, there is no chance of backlash or repercussions from their feedback. The coaches will only see their average score in each area, providing them with a learning resource to become the best coaches they can be. ✨