

How do your coaching skills rate?

NYSCA volunteer coaches worldwide are taking advantage of the first-of-its-kind Coach Rating System to find out how their coaching skills stack up on everything from teaching skills and modeling good sportsmanship to communicating with parents and motivating players. Are you taking advantage of this unique tool to be the best coach you can be?

By Greg Bach

As a youth sports coach in Highlands Ranch, Colo., Jason Ivey devotes countless hours running practices, helping children develop skills and making sure their game days are fun-filled ones.

But, like so many other volunteer coaches toting clipboards and juggling chaotic schedules these days, he has never been able to accurately gauge how well he is performing his duties – until now.

Ivey represents a fast-growing number of NYSCA coaches who are stepping forward to use the Coach Rating System to propel their coaching skills to a higher level, in the process opening the door for them to have an even greater impact on their players.

The one-of-a-kind rating system evaluates coaches' skills in 14 key areas and provides both beginning and experienced coaches with incredibly useful information that most have never been able to get their hands on before. It was unveiled to NYSCA members and chapters recently and is part of the National Alliance for Youth Sports' (NAYS) ongoing efforts to provide its members with all the tools they need to be a hit with their players and a positive influence throughout their program.

"Overall, the rating system is a useful tool that any coach who is genuinely interested in what their parents think and want to continue to progress as a successful youth sports coach should use," said Ivey, who is certified in football, basketball and baseball. "The feedback will help give me and my other coaches more insight as to what is on the minds of our parents and will definitely help us try to address the areas of concern better."

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SIZING UP THE SYSTEM

Ever since the advent of youth sports volunteer coaches have been stepping forward and doing their best to provide youngsters with a rewarding experience.

Yet, as they wind their way through the season – orchestrating practices and supplying game day pep talks among their endless list of responsibilities – rarely do the overwhelming majority of coaches have a true sense of just how well they are performing those duties and if the needs of all the children on the team are being met.

In virtually every other corner of society evaluations are routinely used to inform individuals of how well they are doing in their roles, as well as identify those areas that may require additional attention and improvement.

Through the Coach Rating System, available only to NYSICA members and chapters, youth sports are finally catching up. Now, coaches are enthusiastically reviewing

at handling their wide assortment of responsibilities, the greater the chances that the season will be a smooth running and problem-free one. So, the better understanding they have of their strengths and weaknesses, the better they'll be able to fulfill the demands of the position.

The user-friendly system features 14 questions covering such areas as a coach's knowledge of the rules of the sport; how effective their practices are; how well they teach sportsmanship; how proficient they are at identifying improper technique and correcting it; and how effective they are in motivating players; among others.

The system is set up so that all a coach has to do is visit www.nays.org, log in with their member ID number and password and click on My Coach Rating on the menu bar. Then, they simply cut and paste the pre-written text that is on that page and email it to their players' parents. This directs the parents on how to complete the



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their evaluations and using the information to improve upon those areas – if any – where they may not be as efficient as they had hoped.

“The questions provide a broad spectrum of the parents' views of my coaching philosophy as well as their perception of the job that I did during the season,” said Michael Carbonaro, who coaches baseball in Allentown, Pa. “I will use the ratings to help me adjust my coaching and practice approach in the hopes of improving in those areas that I had a lower score than I thought I should have.”

It's easy to see why coaches are embracing the tool.

After all, coaches enter the season with the mindset of wanting to help their players learn and improve – and they have those same goals for themselves, too. The more well-rounded coaches are, and the more skilled they are

evaluation. The parents rate the coach with a score between one and 10 for each of the categories. The parents' responses are anonymous and the coaches are able to see their average score in each category.

“I love the idea of giving the parents a way to offer their feedback without the fear of repercussions,” said Matt Shoffer, who coaches youth football in Georgia. “The ratings confirm certain areas of weakness that I was aware of and I feel that it will give the parents some confidence that I am working to improve as a coach.”

What makes the system so useful for anyone who steps on a field, court or rink to coach children is that it serves a dual purpose: First, high scores in specific categories reinforce to coaches that they are on target with their coaching and they can use that positive reinforcement to propel them through the remainder of the season; and



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secondly, any areas that result in a lower score than they had expected they now know where to focus a little more of their attention.

"I like the feedback and it allows me to see firsthand how well I have done or where I need to improve," said Michael Sidare, who coaches youth football in Texas. "It gives me an idea on where I may have to change or communicate better."

STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS

Coaches aren't the only ones using the system to improve their skills; recreation directors are finding that the system provides a gold mine of information on how well each of the coaches in their program are fulfilling

Gaithersburg (Md.). "It also keeps information linked directly to that coach for his or her eyes only."

Many program directors who already have an evaluation system in place for their coaches have found that this new system dramatically reduces the amount of time they have traditionally spent on conducting them.

"I like the online rating system," said Scott Krason, youth sports and fitness director for Kadena Air Base in Japan. "Toward the end of each season we e-mail each parent the link to the coaches' rating system along with their coach's member number. This greatly reduces the amount of paperwork we handle since we used to complete our coach evaluations with paper forms."

Plus, the ease of the system for all involved has generated more responses from parents. This, in turn, has led to more complete evaluations for the coaches since the more parents that share their thoughts on each individual coach the more accurate the evaluation becomes.

"It has really streamlined some of our administrative work and we have found that parents are more willing to complete an on-line evaluation that is e-mailed directly to them," Krason said.

Adds Jeanene Graves, the youth sports and fitness director for Beale Air Force Base in Northern California: "I love it and it has made life much easier. I get far more responses because I feel it's more convenient for the parents to do on their own time. Coaches are usually surprised by their rating so it's definitely a great tool for morale and to motivate those beginning coaches."

When programs send out the evaluations at the season's halfway point, they are able to see which coaches are sticking to the program's philosophy and meeting the needs of the young athletes, and which coaches may need a little refresher to get back on track.

"It is very innovative and a great addition to our program," said Sheron Jones, director of the Miramar Youth Sports program at the Marine Corps Air Station in Miramar, Calif. "It is simple to keep track of the results that you receive since they are stored electronically. The layout is very easy to navigate and the results of the survey are instant. Overall, it is something that makes this facet of our program more efficient."

"I think it's great and the coaches seem to like it," said Kristen Maiden, program supervisor for the Village of Evendale in Ohio.

Using the system to identify and address any areas of concern before they have a chance to gain momentum

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— Dottie Phillips, recreation superintendent for the City of Wentzville (Mo.)



their responsibilities. After all, those who oversee leagues are well aware that the higher quality of coaching the kids receive, the more satisfying and beneficial their experiences will be.

"I love the coach rating system," said Dottie Phillips, recreation superintendent for the City of Wentzville (Mo.). "I think it is very user friendly to both the coach and the parent completing the evaluation. I like that it is made very clear that individual comments will not be known by the coach."

The system allows league administrators who are affiliated with NAYS to provide a digital link for parents to evaluate coaches anonymously. The link can either be placed within an email or posted directly on a league or organization's Web site.

"I believe this is an excellent system for rating coaches since it is designed to be anonymous," said Dave Ludington, the recreation program specialist for the City of

See how your coaching skills stack up

and derail a season is a proactive approach that many who oversee youth sports programming are relying on more and more these days.

“Parents like to be heard and seem to appreciate the fact that we genuinely want to improve our program,” Graves said.

EYEING EVALUATIONS

In the end, it's all about the kids. When coaches approach the evaluation as a tool to help them pinpoint those areas – if any – that they can upgrade, everyone wins.

“As a volunteer coach myself I know, and understandably so, that coaches may experience a little anxiety at first wondering how their scores stack up,” said John Engh, chief operating officer of NAYS. “But I’m confident that once volunteers see how the system is set up that they will embrace it as an effective instrument for improving their coaching skills. One of the roles of a volunteer coach is to encourage our players to strive to be the best they can be, and that’s exactly what this system is all about – helping coaches become the best they can be for the benefit of their players.”

The NYSCA Coach Rating System is quick and easy to use. Here is how it works:


- ▶ Visit www.NAYS.org and log in using your Member ID# and your password.
- ▶ Click on My Coach Ratings.
- ▶ Copy the pre-written paragraph on the page, paste it in an email and send it to your players’ parents so they can complete the evaluation.
- ▶ Check back by logging in to your member page to view your rating in 14 coaching categories.

Certainly, there are sure to be coaches who are both pleasantly surprised to find that they received high marks in an area that they may have thought they weren’t real strong in; as well as those who receive a lower score in an area that they were confident was one of their strongest.

It’s how the information is used after reviewing the evaluations that defines the coach and shapes the kids’ experiences.

“In a couple of areas I was surprised, but upon reflection I can appreciate the parents’ perspective,” said Carbonaro, the youth baseball coach, after reviewing his evaluation. “One area highlighted

my lack of focus for the players and I will definitely adjust my practice and game approach to incorporate the needed aspects of that one area that I received a lower rating on.”

That’s exactly what the system is all about – giving coaches access to information that they have never had available before that they can use to become the best they can be. 

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