

ARIZONA

PARKS AND RECREATION



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From the Eyes of Parents

The Insight from Parents of Youth Sports Program Participants Proves Valuable When Assessing Volunteer Coaches

by Linda Alberts, National Alliance for Youth Sports

A child's experience in youth sports programs is something he or she will take with him or her as the child matures into adulthood. Their volunteer coach not only teaches sport skills, like how to head a soccer ball, but also serves as a role model who has a direct impact on the life skills learned on the field. Securing the commitment of volunteer coaches is a challenge each parks and recreation professional faces, but what measures are in place to effectively manage volunteer coaches and ensure that they provide the children participating with a safe, quality sports experience?

While many parks and recreation departments conduct coach evaluations by its staff, the added value of parent-oriented assessments should be considered. The Coach Rating System developed by the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS), for example, provides parents of children in the program with an opportunity to offer insight of the volunteer coach from the family's perspective.

"It's a fantastic way for our coaches to receive honest, anonymous feedback directly from the parents of the children they taught," said Franz Fuhrmann, youth sports coordinator for the city of Litchfield Park (Arizona). The Coach Rating System is an online tool that anonymously collects feedback from parents on key coaching areas, including the coach's knowledge of the sport's rules, how effective their practices are, how well they teach sportsmanship, their proficiency at identifying and correcting improper technique and how effective they are in motivating players, among others. "They can dissect their coaching successes and failures and make adjustments to improve their coaching," he added.

Originally presented as an optional feature to coaches who were interested, the city of Litchfield Park adopted the Coach Rating System in fall 2010. Since then, the rating system has become an integral part of their program. "There was an overwhelming positive response from our coaches to participate in the rating system," Fuhrmann said. "We have decided to implement this tool for every coach in our youth sports program throughout the year."



In the midst of a digitally dominated world, an online tool like the Coach Rating System is an efficient way to collect information. According to Fuhrmann, offering an online evaluation is more streamlined and much easier than other forms of assessment. The staff sends the parents of each child on their roster an e-mail containing a digital link to the evaluation form. After a parent submits his or her evaluation, it is immediately available for review from the staff, as well as the coach.



"We are extremely pleased with the responses we have received from the parents," he said.

"The Coach Rating System offers our youth sports programs the opportunity to listen to our parents regarding the coaches in our leagues," Fuhrmann said. Parents can bring a fresh set of eyes into a youth sports program, often seeing things that the staff doesn't. The input from parents to solve a problem or improve the program is beneficial to the parks and recreation department and the children participating in the youth sports program.

"Many times, we are only offered feedback when issues arise, but now we can identify those coaches that are doing an outstanding job, as well as those that may need additional instruction," Fuhrmann explained. For example, receiving high marks in each coaching area provides positive reinforcement that the coach is handling his or her responsibilities successfully. Meanwhile, if a coach learns that he received high marks in every category but one, he or she can focus on improving that particular skill.

The Coach Rating System is just one component of the four steps NAYS emphasizes in managing volunteer coaches. When parks and recreation professionals utilize NAYS resources for background screening, coach training, evaluation and accountability, they can create a youth sports program built around providing a positive environment where youth athletes can learn both sports and life lessons.

Founded in 1981, the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) is America's leading advocate for positive, safe sports and activities for children. The nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization is headquartered in West Palm Beach, Florida, and works with more than 3,000 community-based youth sport programs across the country to provide programs and services for everyone involved in youth sports experiences, including professional administrators, volunteer administrators, volunteer coaches, officials, parents and young athletes.