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This eBook is an excerpt from NAYS League Director Training program.
The individuals that you welcome into your youth sports program and allow to coach children are a direct reflection on you and your organization. How they interact with participants, officials, parents and other coaches, and how they go about teaching skills, sportsmanship and many other important values to their players speaks volumes about your skills not only as a youth sports administrator but as a judge of good character.

If that doesn’t have your full attention – and it should – then consider this: Any wrong decision that you make regarding your volunteers can potentially lead to debilitating lawsuits, embarrassing publicity and even ridicule throughout the community for failing to provide a safe experience for children. Far worse, insufficient attention to detail could put children at risk of suffering irreparable emotional and physical abuse at the hands of a coach that never should have been granted access to children. Even more catastrophic, bad decisions can open the door for child predators to infiltrate your programs, inflict their sick desires on innocent children and cause a lifetime of heartache, grief and despair. You do not want that on your conscience – and even more importantly, you certainly don’t want any child to suffer tragically either because of poor decision-making on your part.

Coaching children is a privilege and you simply can’t grant access to just anyone who expresses a willingness to coach. Again, your decisions regarding volunteer coaches directly impacts young lives. When it comes to volunteer coaches you have a responsibility to:

- Recruit quality volunteers
- Screen and conduct thorough background checks on every individual
- Have volunteers complete training on how to coach children and understand their roles and responsibilities as youth sports coaches
- Evaluate them throughout the season to give them feedback as well as ensuring that they are abiding by your program’s philosophy
- Hold them accountable for their behavior during practices and games and make sure they are providing quality experiences for every youngster on their team
- Sure, it’s a huge task, but one that can never be taken lightly simply because there is too much at stake. Let’s take a closer look at these key coaching areas that you must have firm control over so that your program is in the best position possible to provide a fun – and safe – experience for all.
Recruiting Quality Volunteers

Season after season, youth sports administrators face the challenge of recruiting volunteers to coach. After all, seldom is there a season where every coaching spot is automatically filled, particularly because as children get older and advance in the program the parents who coach those teams typically move along with them as well, creating a revolving door of new openings – and new opportunities – for others to step forward and fill. So the burden falls squarely on your shoulders to find individuals to come on board – not just anyone – but those who will genuinely have all the kids’ best interests at heart. If you are able to regularly replenish your volunteer coaching pool with quality individuals that share your passion for children and providing the best possible sports experiences for them you will establish a strong foundation that will enable your program to grow and flourish in the community.

The following are some ways you can persuade the right types of individuals to step forward, oversee a team and become an important piece of your program’s structure:

**PROVIDE TRAINING:** One of the biggest reasons many moms and dads, as well as other community members, don’t volunteer to coach is the fear of being unqualified to handle the responsibilities. It’s truly unfortunate that there are so many individuals who would make wonderful coaches because of their caring nature and ability to connect with children, but the program is deprived of their involvement. Why? There are many reasons why individuals choose to remain in the background and allow others to assume these coaching roles. Some are reluctant to step forward because they may not be entirely familiar with all aspects of the sport; they may have little or no experience playing the sport and incorrectly believe that makes them unqualified to oversee a youth team; or they simply have never tried coaching before and believe that lack of experience makes them ill-suited to ever work with children in a sports environment. This is what makes this aspect of your job so immensely challenging, because no one wants to fail or embarrass him- or herself, especially in front of both kids and fellow adults in the community in which they live. Concerns about how best to teach fundamentals, organize a practice and manage a team on game day can be daunting, for sure. Providing a training program at your facility – or making one accessible to your coaches via online – can go a long way toward easing those fears and getting some truly great people involved who otherwise would simply remain in the shadows of the sidelines. Research coach training programs that are available and choose what is best for you. For more information on the National Youth Sports Coaches Association, a program of the National Alliance for Youth Sports that has been used in more than 3,000 communities and has assisted more than 3 million volunteer coaches.
Recruiting Quality Volunteers

RECRUIT FEMALE COACHES: The majority of youth sports programs are dominated by male coaches, so there exists a vast pool of untapped coaching potential right in front of you with all the moms and other women that could fill some of your coaching positions. If you don’t make every effort to include women in your program you are doing a huge disservice to your program and depriving young athletes of opportunities to play for a variety of different types of coaches. Some research suggests that women tend to self select themselves out of certain activities when they don’t see women in those particular roles, according to Dr. Warren Whisenant, Associate Chair of the Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences at the University of Miami (Fla.). If your program features predominantly male coaches it’s probably going to be more challenging recruiting women to take over teams. One approach to gradually work more women into your programs is to encourage them to serve as assistant coaches. This provides great experience and can help make the transition to a head coaching position often a much smoother one as it allows them to get a good sense of what it is all about. Of course, this applies to men too, who may be reluctant to assume head coaching positions based on lack of knowledge or experience, but who can gain valuable insight and experience in assistant coaching roles before progressing to assume control of a team.

CAPITALIZE ON LOCAL MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES: A news release announcing that your organization is seeking volunteer coaches for the upcoming season can be placed in community newspapers, often free of charge. Also, public service announcements through radio stations are a wonderful source to get the word out regarding your openings. Many communities also have local parenting magazines or similar publications that can be helpful in letting the community know about your organization’s needs.

TAP INTO LOCAL UNIVERSITIES AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES: Reach out to local institutions of higher learning, particularly those that offer recreation, sports management and youth development curriculums. Students in those programs are always looking for job-related experience and opportunities to network. Even though in many cases they may not have children of their own, college students often are among the best candidates to work with young people and they can infuse your program with energy and enthusiasm that can be contagious with young athletes.
Recruiting Quality Volunteers

MAKE SURE YOUR MESSAGE PACKS SOME PUNCH: When soliciting volunteers to coach teams your recruiting pitch, as well as your program, must have appeal. If it is unattractive, is poorly organized and run or has a less than stellar reputation in the community, why would anyone want to contribute their time and energy and be a part of it? Put some thought into what makes your program special and then ask yourself if you heard this pitch would you volunteer your time? Youth sports, when conducted the right way, are powerful tools in shaping young lives. So be sure you stress that you are developing young people and helping them build valuable life skills – and that you rely on the efforts of volunteers to make it all happen and you want them to be a big part of this special effort. Adults who love sports, children and physical activity can be difference makers in the lives of children. It’s up to you to help them fully realize that and ignite their passion to assist and be a special part of the program.

UTILIZE YOUR CURRENT COACHES: Check with your current volunteer coaches for leads on others they may know that could make possible coaching candidates. Also, assistant coaches from teams in your program from previous seasons are natural sources to fill vacancies as some, based on their experience and previously demonstrated interest, will likely have a pretty good handle on what the role is all about.
Screening/Background Checks

Yes, the majority of volunteer coaches are truly wonderful and caring individuals who are committed to their young athletes and care only about meeting their needs and helping guide them to a fun and safe experience. But certainly not all coaches enter organizations with that mindset or, unfortunately, that intention. Some volunteers harbor some of the most sick and unimaginably horrific thoughts and their only purpose of getting involved is aimed at taking advantage of unsuspecting children. In recent months the following took place:

- A youth soccer coach in Los Angeles was charged with 15 felony counts of child molestation and detectives working the case believe there may even be more victims.
- In Tucson, Ariz., a youth soccer coach was arrested for a molestation charge on a 14-year-old.
- A former youth football coach in Florida was facing charges of three counts each of child molestation, felony sexually battery, cruelty to children and false imprisonment.
- A youth soccer coach in Illinois was charged with molesting a 12-year-old boy and also possessing child pornography.
- A girls basketball coach in Louisiana was arrested and charged with molestation of a juvenile for allegedly fondling one of his 13-year-old players.

Are these isolated cases involving a handful of demented individuals preying on innocent young athletes? Hardly. Sadly, these are representative of a much larger problem permeating youth sports. Child abuse in youth sports, as it is in all facets of society, is very real and occurs with alarming frequency. If you aren't conducting background checks on your volunteers you are failing in your responsibilities to protect all of your young athletes. Furthermore, you are basically throwing down the welcome mat for child predators to join your program and gain immediate access to large numbers of children.
Screening/Background Checks

Need further proof? Check out these disturbing numbers:

• A child molester molests an average of 120 times before they are caught, according to the FBI.
• Self-report studies from the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire point out that 20 percent of adult females and 5 to 10 percent of adult males recall a childhood sexual assault or sexual abuse incident.
• There are approximately 400,000 registered sex offenders in the United States, and countless others who are unaccounted for.
• A study done by the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission found that 3.4 percent of the youngsters polled said they had been pressured into sex or sexual touching.
• 1 out of 5 girls and 1 out of 8 boys are sexually abused before they turn 12.
• Predators target children they know: 90 percent of child abuse victims know the perpetrator.
• According to Department of Justice statistics, a child in America is sexually assaulted every two minutes. Furthermore, estimates are that for every serious incident reported, 10 go unreported.

Yet statistics do not even begin to address the crippling consequences of abuse. For example, victims of abuse are at a higher risk of abusing their own children, thus continuing the vicious cycle. Plus, children who suffer abuse are nearly 60 percent more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 28 percent more likely to be arrested as an adult and 30 percent more likely to commit a violent crime, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Screening - It’s Not Just A Background Check!

Will a background check provide 100 percent protection? Of course not. While they are a valuable tool in weeding out some undesirables who have records – the mere fact that your program makes it known that it uses them likely deters some individuals from even attempting to join your program for fear of what will be uncovered – they are simply one piece to the larger screening puzzle. We know that background checks can’t identify those individuals who have never strayed across the line of inappropriate behavior before; and they certainly can’t predict which individuals will lose control of their emotions on game day or cause physical or emotional harm to their players through their inappropriate words and actions during practices.

When children’s safety and well-being are at stake, guidelines must be in place that help program administrators ensure the protection of their participants. Culling reports from experts with experience in youth sports, background screening and law enforcement, plus a group of recreation administrators, the National Alliance for Youth Sports developed an easy-to-follow process to help youth sports organizations meet the challenge of implementing volunteer screening, which features the following five steps:

1) Obtain completed application forms for all positions
   Required information should include name, address, references and employers. Insist that every potential volunteer complete a form, regardless of how long they have been associated with the program or how desperate the organization may be for “warm bodies.” Applications should be signed and dated by the individual and a copy of their photo identification should be attached to their completed form.

2) Review information and check references
   When reviewing the application form, look for any inconsistencies, gaps in time or frequent moves. Don’t assume that just because all the information on the form looks legitimate that it is – verify everything. If you don’t take the time to check references and confirm employment history you are creating opportunities for individuals to become a part of your program that can potentially cause enormous harm to children. Remember, you must take every step possible to ensure that every child is fully protected, and that means being diligent and checking each prospective volunteer’s information, no matter how time consuming and tedious it may be. Be sure to document everything you find out in a confidential manner.
Screening - It’s Not Just A Background Check!

3) Interview the potential volunteer
Gut level and first impressions are important. Depending on the number of volunteers that are connected to the program, as well as how many staff are available to conduct interviews, these may be telephone interviews or a more formal face-to-face approach. Since the majority of the volunteers will have a child in the program, many organizations conduct a short interview during the registration process. As a parent registers their child and then agrees to potentially volunteer, this can be an opportune time for you (or your staff) to ask some questions and make some notes on their application form.

Develop a standard routine to save time and allow for consistency. When you have a carefully constructed list of questions that everyone uses it allows your organization to be more effective when selecting candidates. Also, if you run a large organization and several different staff members will be conducting interviews, by having a predetermined list of questions it is easier for groups to compare notes on individuals. When compiling your list of questions don’t be afraid to ask some tough ones. Remember, the purpose of the interview is to get as accurate a gauge as possible on each individual. The following is a sampling of some of the types of questions you may want to consider asking:

- Tell me about yourself and your current job/last volunteer position.
- When we contact the previous organization you volunteered for what are they likely to share with us regarding your skills, characteristics and ability to be a positive influence with children?
- Share an occasion when you followed a policy that you did not agree with.
- Share a time when you demonstrated your trustworthiness while in a volunteer position.
- Share a time when you successfully communicated or worked with another person who you didn't like, or who didn't like you, in order to get a job done and help others.
- Tell about the most challenging situation you ever dealt with in a volunteer role and how you handled it.

Solicit input from staff members when formulating your list of questions so that you have a comprehensive list to choose from, or even reach out to another organization that you respect for their thorough interview process to get their input on what questions would be the most beneficial to
4) Conduct a criminal history background check
Today a thorough criminal history background check should include the following components:

- Social Security Number (SSN) and name verification. Obtain a copy of the potential volunteer’s social security card. In verifying the social security number, you are ensuring accuracy in searching for the proper individual.
- Sex Offender Registry Search (SOR). Sex offenders who have completed their criminal sentences are required to “register” to track where they live and their activities. The information in the SOR is made available to the general public via a variety of websites. While most sex offenders comply with the reporting requirements and residency restrictions many don’t so we must understand that while checking the SOR is a significant component, it is only one part of a thorough check.
- National Criminal Database search. Many databases exist that contain millions of records and summary information about criminal convictions throughout the United States.
- A County or Statewide Criminal search (only when necessary). In many places, conducting the National Criminal Database search includes state and county information. An organization must determine what information is available in their jurisdiction to determine if the additional state and/or county checks are necessary. Please note that these searches should ONLY be conducted if your area is NOT included in the National Criminal Database search.

5) Compare results against disqualifiers
Once the above four components have been completed, the organization must decide if the candidate is a suitable volunteer. Every reasonable effort should be made to protect youth sports participants from adults in the program who have a history of unacceptable criminal activity. It is estimated that 9.6 percent of all volunteers screened have a criminal record and 2.9 percent of would be coaches have had convictions involving sex offenses, violence or other felonies. The following disqualify a potential volunteer prior to even reviewing the information obtained from the Criminal History Background Check:

- An applicant provides inaccurate information in their application
- References provide distasteful or disturbing information about the potential volunteer
- Information gathered in the interview raises questions about the potential volunteer’s motives
- The individual fails or refuses to complete the screening process
Screening - It’s Not Just A Background Check!

If the individual has not been disqualified then the next step is to analyze the information gathered from the Criminal History Background Check. If an applicant is found to have been convicted of any of the following offenses, he or she should not be allowed to work with children. Additionally, pending convictions of or arrests for the following should be considered disqualifiers until an organization decides otherwise:

- Sex offenses and misconduct
- Violent felonies
- Felonies (other than sex or violence related) within the past 10 years
- Any child abuse or domestic violence convictions
- All misdemeanors within the past seven years

Some additional points to consider are the following:

- Whatever decision the organization makes about a potential volunteer be sure to document it in writing.
- Some organizations may want to establish a special committee specifically to manage the background check process. This may include deciding on a background check procedure and disqualifiers, and putting them in writing; and determining who within the organization will be responsible for reviewing the report, notifying the potential volunteer and managing information.
- Organizations should conduct follow-up background checks every two years on volunteers that continue to serve.

There is no way to be 100 percent certain about any individual working in youth sports but the more preventative measures that are taken the more likely children and your organization will be protected. It simply can’t be stated enough: The more steps an organization takes, the thicker its protective shield. There are several standards a volunteer must meet to be considered suitable to work with children. Relying on just one before granting an individual access to your program and its participants is foolish and irresponsible – and can have devastating consequences for the youth athletes under your care.
Recruiting, Managing and Retaining Quality Volunteer Coaches

Training Volunteer Coaches

The sooner you can make your volunteer coaches more comfortable and confident in their abilities to work with children the quicker they will feel like – and be – a valuable part of your program. Training programs do exactly that: They provide coaches with key knowledge on all those areas that can be problematic and overwhelming, giving them the self-assurance that they can handle the challenging role of a volunteer coach. Training programs don’t scare potential volunteers away; in fact, the reverse is true as they are actually embraced in most communities that utilize them.

Imagine volunteering for a particular role with a community organization and being informed that in order to participate you had to complete a couple hours of training to help prepare you for the position. Would that deter you from getting involved? Unlikely; instead you would probably be inclined to welcome the opportunity to be well-versed in your role, because that would give you not only the knowledge to excel at the position but the confidence to do so.

Coaching youth sports requires a wide range of skills, many of which may not have crossed the minds of individuals when they stepped forward to volunteer. Beyond the basics of how to teach proper sports skills and knowing how to correct improper techniques the following is a sampling of some of the areas that your coaches should be aware of and understand:

- Recognizing signs of concussions
- Understanding the psychology of coaching youth sports
- Recognizing heat-related problems and knowing how to respond
- Communicating effectively with athletes and their parents
- How to teach good sportsmanship and be a model of it at all times
- Working with children with special challenges

And you may even want to consider having coaches (and officials) trained in CPR in the event of an emergency. Clearly, many responsibilities accompany being a youth sports coach. Because of this extensive list most volunteers are receptive to training sessions provided by the program or offered at their convenience online so that they can learn how they can best fulfill their role. Remember, no one wants to look unprepared or embarrassed in front of other parents in the community and come across not knowing how to do something or being unable to teach a particular skill. Training provides volunteers with not only that all-important knowledge, but also that equally crucial confidence that they can be effective in this constantly challenging role and be one of those special coaches that young athletes rave about and want to play for again in the future.

From the outset it is important that your volunteers understand your program’s philosophy, which should be centered on fun, safety and maximum involvement for all. If potential volunteers understand this from the moment they express an interest in coaching and their philosophy doesn’t mesh with that of your program, then they can look elsewhere for a different program to get involved with. You want your coaches to operate with a task orientation mindset that places the emphasis on the children rather than an ego oriented mindset that shifts more of the emphasis to the volunteer.
A typical volunteer youth coach can spend several hours a week running practices with their team, as well as working with them during games. If you calculate those hours over the course of a season that can range anywhere from about 25 hours total for a beginning level sport like T-ball to easily more than 75 hours for a typical 12-and-under recreation program team. When you stop and think about it that is a lot of time spent molding young boys and girls.

Yet, for all this time coaches spend with their players, both teaching and interacting with them, a surprisingly low number ever have a really good indication of just how well (or not so well, as the case may be) they are handling this important role. Just imagine how challenging it would be performing a job if you never received either positive feedback or even constructive criticism. Guess what happens? Your effectiveness comes to a standstill. When coaches are never told what they are doing right and wrong their only recourse is to continue using the same approach day after day and season after season. So coaches who are really good in some areas, but have lots of room to improve in others, will never have the chance to work on enhancing those weaker areas because no one ever told them. So who suffers? That's right, the young athletes. Even those coaches who are on top of all areas would benefit hearing that they are going about things the right way as that fuels their confidence and reinforces that they are indeed having a positive impact on their players.

Sure, some programs conduct end-of-season evaluations on their coaches. On the surface that would appear to be a positive program attribute. But stop and think for a moment and you'll realize just how woefully ineffective they are. For example, if a coach is doing a terrible job of motivating players and is too wrapped up in the final score rather than if the kids are having fun, informing him of this through an evaluation conducted after the season does little good. He's already ruined the season for many of the players; some of the kids may never return to the program because of the dreadful experience; and the coach may not have any plans to ever coach again anyway. So what was really accomplished? Unfortunately, nothing more than alerting the league that this individual would need additional training and guidance before being allowed to coach again if he expressed an interest in the future.

As an administrator you must be proactive and closely monitor your coaches all season long – not just at season's end. An evaluation done two or three times throughout the season allows you to get immediate feedback on how the coach is performing his or her duties. If the feedback is positive that's great; share that with the coaches and let them know they are on the right track and to continue doing what they are doing. If the feedback indicates there are some areas where the coach may be having some difficulty you can meet with them, discuss the areas that need to be worked on and then give the coach time to correct them before another evaluation. Everyone, regardless of their profession, enjoys and appreciates feedback on how
Evaluating Volunteers

well they are performing their responsibilities. If you don't inform your coaches how would you ever expect them to know? Coaches deserve to hear your feedback, whether it's good or bad. Sure, delivering good news is more enjoyable for you, and more enjoyable for coaches to hear too, of course. Yet, you must also be willing to share the not-so-good feedback during those times when a coach isn't living up to his or her responsibilities or is failing to adhere to your program's philosophy. When your feedback is framed around some positive comments as well, such as, “These are a few areas that you need to work on, but based on how well you are doing in all the other areas you'll clearly have no problem improving these skills,” the coach is much more likely to embrace your input and seek to excel in those areas rather than if your tone is strictly negative and he feels unfairly attacked.

Your coaches are typically moms and dads who are volunteering their time and doing the best they can. Never use feedback to embarrass, ridicule or diminish an individual's efforts. Instead, use it as a tool to help guide those coaches to be the best they can be for the benefit of their entire team. When initiating a coach evaluation system be sure to share with coaches that this is a positive move done to help enhance the overall playing experience for every child, which is what your program is hopefully all about; it's not being used to scare volunteers or attack them for any mistakes that happen to be made. Keep in mind that volunteers may at first be a bit apprehensive regarding the evaluation. Just remember to ease those fears by reinforcing that the evaluation is a tool to help them improve and that they are strictly confidential. Never share evaluations with other coaches in the league or with any parents. Any conversations with coaches regarding their evaluations should always be done in private at a time that is convenient for both parties.

Evaluations can lead to some interesting discoveries, so be prepared to handle these situations accordingly. There certainly will be coaches who are pleasantly surprised to find that they received high marks in areas that perhaps they thought they weren't particularly strong in; and conversely, there will be occasions where coaches receive lower scores on skills they felt they had a really good handle on. As a youth sports administrator, it's how the information is used after reviewing the evaluations and how it is presented to the coach, that will ultimately define the volunteer's approach and shape their players' season. Evaluations give both you and your coaches access to a gold mine of information – so be sure to use them in your programs to help your volunteers be the best they can be.
Screening your coaches and training them are important steps to take, for sure, but it doesn't end there. You simply can't turn coaches loose after that and just cross your fingers and hope everything turns out okay and that they conduct themselves exactly as you instructed them all season long. Please remember that once coaches step on the field for practice and there are a dozen sets of eyes looking up at them, and even more parents watching them, that behaviors can change and doing what is best for the children can get overlooked among all the other responsibilities they are suddenly faced with; and that on game days once the scoreboards are turned on and the crowds are cheering that philosophies such as equal playing time for all and good sportsmanship can get pushed to the side amid all the excitement and the pursuit of wins.

You can provide all the training and resources you want for your coaches; you can talk to them about the importance of being role models for their players in everything that they do; and you can go over the repercussions that will accompany any unacceptable acts; but none of this means absolutely anything unless you back it up and hold everyone accountable to a standard of behavior. Accountability is gaining increasing traction in youth sports programs nationwide for the simple reason that for much too long volunteer coaches have had free reign to behave however they desired. When programs are conducted in which adults aren't held accountable for their actions – both in practices with few people present, as well as during games in front of many spectators – you can bet that problems will surface that otherwise likely would never have materialized if coaches had been informed that they will be held accountable at all times for their words, actions and body language.

Being held accountable has absolutely nothing to do with the team’s won-loss record, but it does have everything to do with what coaches are teaching, how they are teaching it and how they interact with their players, parents, opposing coaches and officials. Of course, all team members won’t have the same level of ability but based on your program’s philosophy every child must be treated equally and given equal opportunity to improve – and your coaches must be held accountable for making that happen. Young athletes must learn how to accept winning and losing with equal grace and dignity, so coaches must be held accountable for being models of good sportsmanship since players will learn more by the actions of their coaches rather than by their words.

In order to hold coaches accountable it is important that they fully understand what you expect from them. Besides providing training and detailing your program’s philosophies, having a Code of Ethics outlining specific behaviors that you expect of every volunteer in your program – and having each sign it agreeing to abide by this code – lays the groundwork and, more importantly, leaves no room for misunderstandings on the standard of behavior you fully expect to see exhibited at all times.
The Coaches Code of Ethics developed by the National Alliance for Youth Sports:

• I will place the emotional and physical well-being of my players ahead of a personal desire to win.

• I will treat each player as an individual, remembering the large range of emotional and physical development for the same age group.

• I will do my best to provide a safe playing situation for my players.

• I will promise to review and practice the basic first aid principles needed to treat injuries of my players.

• I will do my best to organize practices that are fun and challenging for all my players.

• I will lead by example in demonstrating fair play and sportsmanship to all my players.

• I will provide a sports environment for my team that is free of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol, and I will refrain from their use at all youth sports events.

• I will be knowledgeable in the rules of each sport that I coach, and I will teach these rules to my players.

• I will use those coaching techniques appropriate for each of the skills that I teach.

• I will remember that I am a youth sports coach, and that the game is for children and not adults.
One of the strongest factors regarding retaining volunteers is showing them how seriously the organization takes this responsibility. Initially, some organizations may view some of the areas covered earlier in this section as potential road blocks to recruiting and keeping volunteers, but in reality the exact opposite is true. The fact that an organization takes the time to do all these things to create quality volunteers means that these individuals are going to be a lot more serious about their job, as well as be better at it. Plus, coaches that feel good about what they are doing and have more confidence in their abilities and the positive impact they are having on young athletes are going to be more likely to coach again. Chances are they also will feel that they have made a personal investment and will have a stronger interest in continuing to use that knowledge to benefit more youngsters in the future.

When you find individuals that “get it” when it comes to coaching kids and you see the impact they have on their team during the season in all different areas, those are the people you want to retain. After all, the more quality individuals you can bring into your program to work with children, and keep them around for many seasons, the stronger your program will be and the more benefits children will gain from playing for them and learning from them.

A simple thank you can go a long way toward establishing bonds with your coaches, make them feel truly appreciated for all the hard work they put into the season and increase the likelihood that they will be back on the sidelines next season because they feel appreciated and a real part of what the program stands for and is striving to accomplish. So many individuals give willingly of their time to coach a team and then when the final game of the season concludes everyone goes home and they never hear a word from the administrator again until coaches are needed next season. That is not how you want to treat your volunteers. They deserve respect and some form of acknowledgement for all of the hours they gave of their time to coach in your program. When individuals feel genuinely appreciated for their efforts they will be more likely to return than if they don't receive any type of feedback from you. If your program is able to conduct an end-of-season Coach Appreciation Night, that is a great way to put an exclamation point on the year. During this type of event you could acknowledge their contributions and hand out gas or restaurant gift cards, or some other token of appreciation (which can often be donated by a sponsor). If you are unable to stage this type of event, at the very least you want to make sure that every volunteer coach in your program is thanked for their efforts. This can be done any number of ways. You (or staff members if the program is large) could personally visit the practice fields during the final week of the season to shake the coach's hand and tell them how much you appreciate their efforts being involved this season. This can also be done after the final games of the season. Another option is to write thank you cards to each of the coaches. It's a classy move and coaches will appreciate your effort to acknowledge their contributions.
Conclusion

The quality of your youth sports program is determined, to a great extent, by the individuals who you grant the privilege of coaching teams and how effective they are at handling their responsibilities.

A youth sports team can never simply be turned over to any individual just because they expressed an interest in coaching and you have spots to fill. As an administrator it is crucial that you take all the necessary steps to help ensure that only the right types of people are involved. That means conducting background checks and comprehensive screening on everyone, even close friends and acquaintances that may have offered to help out coaching. It means providing training programs, regardless of the experience level of the coaches, so that they fully understand their roles and are able to meet the needs of their young athletes. It also means continually evaluating their effectiveness and holding them accountable for their behavior at all times.

A child's experience with your program will be tied directly to their coach and how well that individual abides by the philosophies of your program. Volunteer coaches play vital roles in your program and the children under their care will look back on their experiences with them for the rest of their life. It's up to you to make sure those memories are positive ones.

For more NAYS resources and programs, visit nays.org.

Better sports for kids, better kids for life.