

## The Parents Meeting: A Must for The Youth Baseball Coach By Marty Schupak

Each year I organize a parents meeting approximately two to four weeks before the start of the season. I prepare a handout of approximately three or four pages. Included is a list of the team with phone numbers and certain philosophies and organizational items.

People might say, "Well this is only youth baseball, it's not high school." This is true, but I have learned over the years that a parents meeting will make for a better-run season for the kids, the parents, and the coach. The meeting should not go more than ten or fifteen minutes. I leave a fair amount of time for a question and answer period.

I make this meeting a requirement for all parents. I try to lay out my goals and express to the parents about how I run my practices. Also, I tell them that players have to arrive at games 30 minutes before they start and if they cannot make a game, they must call me. It is very important that I let the parents understand I know their busy schedules and that as a coach you go through the same thing with ballet, karate, soccer, car pools, school work, etc.

Probably the most important point I go over is that because of my own busy schedule, I cannot run a taxi service for any players. Parents must be at practice five minutes before it ends. When I first began to coach, I never addressed this and after each practice I had a car full of players to drop off. As coaches, this cannot be part of our jobs for more reasons than one.

I also address any complaints parents may have during the season. I developed a standard policy of not taking any complaints for at least five games. This cuts down on a lot of phone calls and most of the times a complaint by a parent about playing time is taken care of by the sixth game.

Since I began doing this, I have had only a handful of complaints for a whole season in about the last eight years. When I first started coaching, I would go home after the game and there would be two or three messages on my answering machine.

As a coach, there are a lot of responsibilities and I try to cut down on the phone calls as much as possible. One system a lot of people use is the phone chain. This is effective only some of the time. Another system I use which is similar is the buddy system.

At the beginning of each year I ask for a couple of parent volunteers to help with the phone calls. Then I assign each player a buddy. So if there are twelve kids on the team, there are six pairs of buddies. The first thing I tell them is that if there is any question on practice time or location, call their buddy before they call me. And if their buddy isn't home, call someone else on the team list.

If it is raining, I call my two phone volunteers and divide the calls in half. Remember, each player has a buddy so they should never make more than three calls and maybe a call back to me. Any system you try isn't full proof and during the course of the season you can expect your share of calls.

There can be a whole lot of things to address at this meeting. Each coach might have his own pet peeve to discuss. The most important thing is to make sure you have each of the points you want to bring up in writing. This way, you are sure to touch on the points most important to you.

Remember, you are volunteering your time and you have a right to make the season run as smooth as possible for yourself, and that's the way you want it to be for your team as well.