

Team Effort

The importance of working with your athletic/activities director

Brian Smith



If you ask coaches for a one-word response to the question ‘what do you want from your athletic director?’ the answer would most likely be ‘support.’ If you ask athletic directors what we want from our coaches it is to get no surprises. We want coaches to communicate with us and keep us informed with issues surrounding their programs.

The same can be said about athletic directors’ relationships with school boards and superintendents. We want to be supported and the boards and superintendents do not want to be surprised when it comes to the school’s athletic and co-curricular programs. So, what can school boards and superintendents do to help athletic/activity directors manage a quality co-curricular program?

- **Gain an appreciation and understanding** of the benefits to students who participate in athletic and co-curricular programs that your schools offer. There’s a large amount of research that concludes that participation in co-curricular programs increases graduation rates, improves academic performance, improves attendance, and leads to a better high school experience for kids.

- **Discuss and develop policies and procedures** for administering and funding a variety of co-curricular offerings. Obviously, school budgeting and funding of programs is a

challenge. An advantage of athletic and co-curricular programs is they can generate some revenue to help offset costs of the program. Boards and administration need to have conversations on participation fees, booster club fund raising, donations from the community, and sponsorships for events and facilities. Well-defined and communicated policies on these issues can be a financial benefit to the school. Invite and expect the athletic/activities directors in your districts to play an active role in these discussions.

- **Insist that disgruntled parents or community members** follow a proper communication chain of command. If a student or parent has an issue with a coach or advisor and they go directly to the board or superintendent, the question must be asked if the student and/or parent have contacted and met with the respective coach/advisor. Have they spoken to the athletic director or principal prior to raising the issue with the superintendent or board? If board members are contacted directly, I feel it’s important to contact school personnel to see if there really is an issue.

- **Support and encourage your school’s athletic/activities directors** to join our professional associations: the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association

(NIAAA) and the Wisconsin Athletic Director Association (WADA). These organizations are valuable resources for athletic/activities directors as they provide on-going professional growth opportunities through Leadership Training Institute courses, state and national conferences, publications, and valuable networking. This past year only 68 percent of Wisconsin athletic directors were members of WADA. We would love to be at 100 percent.

Early in my career as an athletic director, I told my superintendent that one of my goals was to keep things off his desk. I assumed if the superintendent and subsequently the school board were dealing with athletic issues, I must be doing a poor job. I have since re-evaluated this stance.

Just like we want our coaches to let us know if there is something brewing with a player or parent, we as athletic directors need to keep the superintendents and boards that we work for educated and informed about all that goes on in the athletic directors world and that the work we do on a daily basis is helping our student athletes to reach their potential and be successful throughout their lives. ■

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For more information about the Wisconsin Athletic Directors Association, visit www.wadawi.org.