

Setting Team Rules & Expectations

Most coaches set team rules or expectations. These can help to provide a clear sense of your program's values and acceptable/unacceptable conduct. Sometimes, they can be an insurance policy for a coach – a tangible document that you can point to when something happens that then can either underscore what you are teaching or justify a consequence. Here are some tips to consider when formulating your team guidelines.

1. **Keep it simple.**

You don't want to recreate the tax code. Team rules should be easy to read, easy to understand and clear. Ideally, the core rules should all fit on one page, maybe two. Team values could be set the tone on a separate page before the rules. Team rules should include conduct that is expected and conduct that is prohibited.

2. **Don't Sweat the Small Stuff.**

Do you really want to regulate the color notebook they use to take notes or how they organize their locker? Yes, your team rules should include some level of detail, but these are also a reflection of the values of your program. What is important to you? What is *really* important to you? It can't be everything. Work to identify and hone your priorities. A rule is only as good as it is enforced – which means if the rule is in your handbook, you need to enforce it. Think about this as you are adding rules and then when you take a step back and look at your compilation of rules.

3. **State the range of consequences.**

In the law, this is called "notice." Your players should know the rules *and* the consequences for breaking them. However, give you and your staff some flexibility in your response. You don't want to box yourself in with automatic punishments. Accountability is not a formula. You want to be able to consider context and other factors, yet the players need to know that extra team chores, losing the privilege to practice or dress for a game, suspension and dismissal from the program are possible consequences for their actions, depending on the severity of the offense, that individual's history, the effect on the team and the circumstances.

4. **Involve the players.**

More and more coaches share their process of setting team rules and consequences that involves their players directly. The upside to bringing the players into the discussion of what is expected conduct, as well as consequences for violations, fosters a sense of ownership. If they are part of defining the standards, they will be more likely to uphold them. Instead of reenacting the scene of Moses handing down the Ten Commandments tablet from the mountaintop, this interactive or collaborative approach signals to

the players that we are collectively responsible for our actions and each other.

5. Obtain administration approval.

Whatever the ultimate size or shape of your team handbook, you should bring a copy to your Athletic Director and sport supervisor (if different), explain what it is, what it contains, how it was composed, why it is important and then ask for approval. Offer to answer any questions or make any changes they suggest. If the fundamental framework remains the same the next year, then highlight any changes. You need more than a cursory nod or yes from the administration; you need them to take a good look at this document and give you feedback and approval. Follow up with a confirmation email: *"Thanks so much for meeting with me. I'm glad we had a chance to review my team handbook and rules. Just following up to confirm that these are good to go for this year."*

I am happy to discuss your team rules, your approach, and/or review your handbook. These rules set both the foundation and tone for your program. In a crisis situation, they can be your life jacket. This is not just another piece of paper. Spend some time before school starts to think about how you want to approach this important part of your program.