

The Implementation of a Volleyball Program at IA East High School

With Emphasis on the Psychosocial Bases of Coaching

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Abstract

This paper explores the implementation of a volleyball program at International Academy (IA) East High School. IA is not permitted to be part of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA); however, there are still many athletes that attend IA East and my goal is to give them an opportunity to join a team, learn a new sport, and have fun. I discuss three main topics that will help me implement a volleyball program from the ground up. I address working with important stakeholders, specifically the athlete's parents and school administration and team cohesion and team building.

Keywords: volleyball, team cohesion, stakeholders, parents, administration

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Considering Varying Psychosocial Bases of Coaching

There is no better feeling in the world than being truly passionate about something and seeing your dreams and ideas come to life. Two of my passions in life are teaching and volleyball. I was a volleyball coach for 5 years before I started teaching. I coached wherever I could and during any season possible. I coached a middle school team, and high school team, and an AAU team; all ranging in age from 7th to 9th grade. I can't wait to get back into coaching, it is something that think about and miss almost every day. I took a break from coaching because I started teaching and wanted to be able to devote all of my attention to teaching. Now that I have been in the classroom for 5 years, I feel comfortable enough to get back onto the court.

I am creating and implementing a volleyball program at IA East. Because of the way that IA was established in 1996, we cannot have any MHSAA teams. "The International Academy (IA) is a nationally recognized all International Baccalaureate (IB) public high school serving 1,300 students from fourteen Oakland County school districts and students living in surrounding counties." (International Academy) Our students our permitted to play sports for their "home" high school. Some students find it difficult to drive to another high school in time for daily practices or have trouble being accepted on a school team at a school that they do not attend. I will bring my passion of playing and coaching volleyball to IA East by implementing a Girl's 18 & Under AAU Volleyball Team. In order to successfully implement a volleyball program several issues need to be addressed. This paper will focus on three of those issues. The first being

working with the stakeholders to make the team a reality, the second being focusing on team bonding and team cohesion.

Not only do I want to start a volleyball program because of my passion for the sport, but “research has shown that besides the tremendous health benefits that come with being physically active, children also can learn valuable lessons about the joy that comes from working hard, supporting friends and coaches in challenging situations, and improving skills over time” (Smoll & Smith, 1999; Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). These are the benefits that I will concentrate on when discussing my plan with administration and the parents.

Working with Parents and Administrators

The reason that I chose to discuss working with parents and administrators is because of the importance of building solid relationships. At IA, not only is it required for a club (or team) to get administration approval, but it is always best to work together towards a common goal, instead of working against a group, specifically administrators; my goal being to establish a volleyball program. IA is a school whose main focus is academics, specifically the IB program. If I have administration approval, but not full support, it will make convincing the parents of the importance of my program that much more difficult. Once I have convinced administration of the importance of the program, I will work with the parents to make sure that they are just as invested as their daughters and I are to give them an opportunity to play. Without parental support, athletes may be forced to skip practices or games because of other commitments their parents deem more important. I need to have as many people in my corner before the program starts to ensure its success.

There are numerous questions that I have to ask myself before I can consider approaching my future athletes' parents and my administrators. What is it that I can do to work with parents and/or administrators to make them a part of my program? What techniques can I use that will allow parents and/or administrators to help my program get off the ground and hopefully continue to grow in the near future? I will develop a plan that will answer these questions to the fullest extent.

Working with Administrators

Between the parents and the administrators I think that I will have a much easier time getting the administrators on board with my idea. We encourage our staff and students to be IB Learners; one aspect of the IB Learner Profile is Balance. When I decide to talk to my administrative team, I will start by addressing the need for our students to have more balance in their lives. Studies have shown that athletes “experience less anxiety, and report a better ability to handle their positive and negative emotions.” (2010).

One of the biggest advantages I will have is our AAU Boys Basketball Team's success. Starting a sports team with a teacher coach is not a completely new idea to IA East. This will hopefully be helpful, especially, when I point out the need for girls to have a fair and equal opportunity when it comes to having athletic opportunity. One problem that I foresee is gym availability. Even if I get approval from administration, without their full support it may be hard to get enough gym time for adequate practice. I would take a proactive approach and talk to the basketball coaches before I approached administration. If I come to them with a solution to a problem instead of just a problem I hope to get better results.

Once the program is implemented, I will make sure to invite administration in to watch practices and attend games to keep them in the loop. I will also encourage other staff members to support the team during their games. The more that I can bring the team into the culture of the school, the more likely we are to succeed.

Working with Parents

Fry (2010) proposes that in the beginning of the season (or start of a program) that the students and parents introduce themselves to each other. Just like in all aspects of life, if you meet someone only once there really isn't a bond or relationship formed. It is extremely important to "reinforce the value of building community" (2010). One way to do this is to provide all of the players and their parents with a mini directory. It can help the parents get to know each other and have a way of contacting each other, whether it be to set up a carpool, organize a team dinner, or get a reminder about the time of an upcoming game. "These strategies all help set the stage for coaches to help parents be part of their children's sport experience." (2010).

Once a team is formed, I will have a Meet the Coach Night for both the athletes and their parents to attend. This will give them a chance to learn about me, me a chance to learn about them, and them a chance to meet each other. One of the problems that I predict might happen is not enough parents showing up to the meeting. We have parents who are very involved when it comes to knowing their daughter's math grade, but not always there for supporting them during band concerts, dance performances, etc. To try and get the most amount of participation I would send individual emails to each girl's family letting them know that I am very excited to meet them and the importance of starting the season off on the right foot, while supporting their daughter. I would also

start talking to the girls every day in practice about how excited I am to meet their parents. I have a lot more parents show up at parent-teacher conferences when the students have stories to share at home about class. I would hope the same would be true for volleyball. I would also make sure to have a Parent's Night during one of our last games to thank the parents for their continued support throughout out the season, attending games, driving to practice, hosting team dinners, etc.

My hope is that after I get parents involved the first year that they are so impressed with the program that they become more involved in future years because they see the importance of their daughter belonging to a team. These will hopefully then carry on to future parents and become more of a tradition that everyone looks forward to.

Once I have approval to start the team, the gym reserved, the parents involved at Meet the Parent Night, and support from administration, the most important thing to focus on is team building and team cohesion.

Team Building and Team Cohesion

Being on a team is not just about playing a sport together; being a teammate means so much more. My hope is that while I am implementing this program, not only will I be teaching my athletes how to play volleyball, but I will be teaching them how to be a part of something bigger, how to be a team player. I chose to look at team building and team cohesion because of the importance of team work in everyday life. Students in class have to work together or in groups to learn and complete projects. Adults in their jobs have to work together to achieve the goals they set and the goals their bosses set for them. Working well as a team, means better productivity, increased ability to achieve the team goal, and individual goals, and more enjoyment!

According to Jones & George, “shared team values are, the foundation of a successful team and are critical to building trust among players and coaches” (1998). Kouzes & Posner list some of the more common team values as, “are achievement, accountability, challenge, communication, competition, cooperation, determination, fairness, family, fitness, fun, growth, hard work, honesty and integrity, individualism, learning, morality, high-level performance, pride, relationships, respect, responsibility, risk, security, timeliness, teamwork, uniqueness, and winning” (2007).

Getting athletes as excited about my program as I am can be easier that some may think. Fry suggests a brief introduction on the first day of practice that will make everyone feel more at ease and start to feel the excitement of the season. It can be as easy as starting practice by saying,

“Hello everyone. I’m and I am really excited to welcome you to the team. All of us (coaches) have been looking forward to today and meeting each of you. We think you’re really going to enjoy being part of this team. It is going to be fun because you’re going to learn a lot, have a chance to improve your current skills and develop new ones, and most important, I think you’re going to make a lot of new friends.”

The first step is making athletes feel welcome. Once they feel welcome I will start working on team building activities. Fry also suggested that on the first day, when athletes get to gym for the first time you should have them working on some type of activity. I will probably tell them to find two things that they have in common with each person in the room. Giving them something to do will keep them from awkwardly standing around and it will also get them more comfortable with their teammates. As

soon as the season really starts, maybe two weeks into practice, I would have a team meeting. I plan on having regular team meetings, sometimes they can just be to chat or other times they can be to discuss team issues or even game strategies. The more that my athletes become comfortable talking with each other in team meetings, the soon they will become comfortable effectively communicating together on the court, and eventually outside of the locker rooms and gym.

At the first formal team meeting I would work with my athletes on setting team values. The team values will be very similar to a set of rules, however, they will be intrinsically driven and determined by the team (with a little guidance from me). According to Shoenfelt, there is a 5 step process to help teams identify their team values. The steps include: (1) identify team goals; (2) individual team members identify potential team values; (3) team discussion of how values support team goals; (4) gain consensus on top five to seven team values; and (5) prioritize team values. (2011) I will make sure that the players know about the meeting and the goal of the meeting ahead of time in order to come mentally prepared. The values that the team comes up with will have to all be agreed upon and will set the tone for the season. We will discuss what those values look like in practice, during a game, and outside of team play.

Without having athletes currently to come up with the values it is hard to determine what values they will determine to be most important. Based on various articles and past experiences playing and coaching, I would guess that “Integrity, Respect, Responsibility/ Accountability, Hard Work, and Team First” (2011) are likely to show up. As the coach, I will talk about my experiences after each athlete has had a chance to contribute and let

the girls know what teams that I've played for and have played for me have valued characteristic wise.

One problem that I anticipate is selecting a captain. One of my weaknesses is not wanting to make one player feel less than another. I debate between my selecting a captain and having the team select a captain. Again without knowing the girls that I will be coaching, I can only hypothesize my selection process. Right now, I would say that I would select a captain for the first season and see how it goes. Once the captain(s) is/are selected, I will make sure to work with her/them closely to develop leadership skills. I was captain of two teams during my high school career. I was never given any formal instruction on how to lead and felt that my main role was to be a voice on the court for the referee and to call the coin-flip. Looking back I wish that I had more positive influence over my teammates. Because of my experiences, I want to make sure that the girl(s) I choose for captain feel a leadership role. I want the other players to be able to go to her for advice. I want my captain to be able to help a team up when they get down, to work through different drills at practice and keep pushing her teammate to bet better. Eventually I want her leadership skills to rub off on the other players. Again the focus is building a team. Every team needs a leader.

In an article by Gould, Voelker, and Griffes, "Coaches reported that the most effective captains lead by example (6/10), are trustworthy and respected (5/10), are vocal (4/10), and provide support (4/10). Others indicated that effective captains are not afraid and are willing to take risks to do the right thing (4/10)." (2013). These are the traits that I want to help my captain(s) achieve. I will do this by looking into leadership academies and captain clinics.

Conclusions

Implementing a volleyball program at IA East will take many, many hours of hard work and dedication. I will have to get collaboration from my administration and from the parents of the athletes that I will be coaching. Even with all of this work, I know that it will be worth it. My passion for the sport, for coaching, and for helping students grow from individual athletes to team players, will be my light at the end of the tunnel. Working on team building, team cohesion, and captain selection will be my first order of business. I know that it is almost guaranteed that there will be bumps along the way. As long as I don't jump to conclusions and think about the problems that arise I am confident that I implement a successful volleyball at IA East.

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