

The last two weeks we've been taking a look at school athletic programs. In this country, athletic and extracurricular activities are seen as an integral part of the school program. Many of us in education have personally seen students benefit from these programs.

In high school administration, there are two tails that wag the dog: special education and athletics. Therefore, in my years as a principal, I would take responsibility for one of those areas and my partner the other. I always focused on special education so considered my role in athletics as, "philosopher." Since I didn't deal with the day to day problems in athletics, I could stand back, analyze the situation and proffer opinions on sometimes insignificant (but fascinating to me) issues in athletics. And so, this week I continue to relate my observations to prophesy the future of school athletics.

We looked at the shortage of game officials and last week talked about demands on coaches for which I focused on parental pressures. This week, I want to focus on the inordinate amount of time coaches put into athletic programs.

To do this, I recently sat down with head football coach, Jim Wells. I asked him to chronicle his week during the football season. It looks like this:

Sunday: Meet with staff (all coaches) to review film of the week's opponent; 2 - 3 hours

Monday: Practice from 3:00 - 5:00 - film work/play preparation at night as needed

Tuesday: Practice from 3:00 - 5:30 film work/play preparation at night as needed

Wednesday: Practice from 3:00 - 5:30 film work/play preparation at night as needed

Thursday: Practice from 3:00 - 4:30

Friday: Arrive for game at 5:00 p.m. After game, coaches review the film of that night's game to be able to address it in the morning. If it is a home game, they get home around midnight; if away, it can be as late as 1:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m.

Saturday: Meet team at 8:00 a.m. for breakfast and to review the film of the previous night's game; Coaches then attend the JV game at 10:30 if at home and then meet to review film of the next opponent. (takes about 5 hours for film review)

So in season, each week takes up 24 to 30+ hours of time dependent on game location and need for extra work with film and writing plays. Coaches also work full time jobs so you can see that the season is all consuming. A coach's spouse becomes a "widow" or "widower" for the season, so must be 100% in support. Children of coaches often grow up on the sideline at practice and games.

Now, because of the demands placed on coaches for a great program, there is year round work. Continuing with the football example, the 30 hour weeks begin in mid-August and go to mid-November. They take some time off until January when they start supervising the weight room about 3-4 days per week after school. This continues until school ends and then after a few weeks off, morning weight lifting begins in June followed by weeks of morning practices and football camps for younger students in July and August. August is pretty much full-on practicing with most of the days consumed with practice and preparation. In the course of a year, if you're a football coach, you get approximately only 8 weeks of the year away from football duties.

Since football is the flagship sport of fall, I have used that sport as an example. I know the other sports are similarly intense during the season and involve year round sessions with the players,

From my philosophical perch, I look at the situation and wonder how long it can last. How long will we have people willing to put in this great amount of time? How long will we have people willing to sacrifice time with their families to give so much time to other people's children? If you do the math on money and hours, coaches clearly aren't doing it for the money.

Making that kind of time sacrifice has to have some rewards. Any coach or activity advisor can enumerate those rewards; however, we all look at things on balance. I shared last week some extreme instances of criticizing coaches, probably by people who would never put the time in constructively, but rather, consider themselves experts even though lacking credentials. How many Facebook mobs will a coach endure before finding the rewards are not matched by the stress? How many parents, pressuring coaches about issues only related to their own child, can a coach endure until a coach feels unable to give to the whole team?

As I look back on my career and see so many lives positively touched by coaches and advisors, I want dearly for the future generations to have the same experiences. I worry that the selfishness permeating our culture on so many levels, may thwart the hope for future generations.