

YOUTH SPORTS ADMINISTRATION

101



COMPLAINTS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

TAKE YOUR LEAGUE TO THE NEXT LEVEL!

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If you run a well organized program and you are a great communicator, parent and coach complaints will be at a minimum. Although, sometimes things will happen that are out of your control causing someone to complain. No matter what you do and how great your program is, there is always those one or two that need to complain or cause issues on game days. Regardless of the type or validity of the complaint you should always listen. Most of the time, that is all the complainer is looking for.

Here are some examples, along with resolutions, of the top 5 complaints you will hear in any league. If you can eliminate these types of complaints it will resolve 95% of any issues you may have throughout a season.

- Playing Time: Have mandatory play rules and track playing time.
- Issues with Coach: Have a Code of Conduct. Educate, train, communicate, and monitor your coaches.
- Fairness/Balance of the Teams: Put the effort needed in evaluating players and forming your teams. If parents still complain about losing you have back up to show them at least the process was fair and on paper they have the same skill level as every other team.
- "I didn't know": Communicate, communicate, communicate! Don't give them a reason to blame you for missing the information you sent out or posted multiple times.
- Calls During the Game: Train, educate, monitor, and evaluate your referees. Open a line of communication and meet before every game day to improve consistency week to week. Educating parents and coaches helps here as well because they have a better understanding of the rules and won't misinterpreted a correct call as a bad call because they didn't know the rules.

When a complaint does come in, here are some tips to handle a complaint effectively, resolve it, and move forward.

1. Move Away from the Kids: The first thing you should ALWAYS do if something comes up at the game is get them away from the kids. Whether it is an unruly adult directed at you or two adults getting into it, you need to remove yourself from the playing area to deal with it. In these scenarios the kids are the mature ones and the adults causing the confrontation are the immature ones. The last thing you want is the kids to have to see this and emulate it.
2. Be Responsive and Listen: Regardless if you get the complaint in person on a game day or through email or phone call it is imperative that you are responsive to that person. Listen to what they have to say and if it involves some investigating get back to them within 48 hours with a resolution. Most of the time they just want someone to listen to what they have to say.
3. Taking the Complaint: Here are a few things you can do when the complaint comes in, whether it is in person, over the phone or even through email.
 - Actively Listen
 - Ask supporting questions if more information is needed for resolution
 - Apologize Sincerely
 - Find out what they want from the complaint and verify the resolution
 - Document the complaint using the proper forms and notify a supervisor, if needed
 - Resolve the Complaint
 - Thank them
4. Use the **CARP** Method if a participant becomes unruly
 - **C**ontrol the situation.
 - **A**cknowledge the dilemma
 - **R**efocus the conversation
 - **P**roblem-solve

5. Conflict Resolution: An unfortunate trend in youth sports is conflict among parents, coaches, or referees. It is almost always the adults that are causing issues and rarely your young athletes. Here are some more tips to display great customer service while resolving a conflict.

- Be Calm and try to calm down the person
- Be Friendly
- Be Respectful
- Listen
- Be Responsive
- Be Positive
- Clearly Communicate
- Listen to Both Sides
- Say Thank You
- Keep high standards
- Find Resolution

6. Discipline: As a last resort, sometimes you have to take disciplinary action. Whether it's several complaints coming in on a coach or two adults become unruly at a game, you should have a no tolerance policy on unsportsmanlike conduct. The result of these actions should be some sort of discipline. These should be in your policies so you have guidelines and procedures in place when you need to enforce it. It can be anything from a warning to ejection to suspension to expulsion. Be as strict as you need to be for the betterment of the league.

Regardless of the severity of the complaint or the actions of your participants you should take them all serious, listen, and be responsive so you and your participant can move forward and continue to enjoy your league!



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