

Chapter 5: Managing a team

In general:

1. A coach will need to set some expectations for his team members related to weekly practices, the number of tournaments to attend, requirements for helping in fund-raising events, etc.
2. A coach will need to decide the structure of his team – will there be officers (or sometimes called team captains)? What titles will the officers hold? What responsibilities or duties will each officer hold? How are these officers elected?
3. A coach must decide if he needs to hold auditions for his team or if he'll let anyone join who wants to join. This is partially determined by issues of money available, transportation, size of the team, number of tournaments to attend during the season, etc.
4. A coach must decide if he wants students critiquing other students in practices.
5. There should be a meeting with the entire team early in the school year to establish team rules and explain practice and tournament procedures. Some coaches meet with the entire team once a week, with the rest of the week used for individual practice time.

Team captains/officers:

Many coaches find it advantageous to have officers on their teams, especially large teams. The coach needs to establish guidelines: the number officers needed for the team, the titles of the officers, the duties of the officers, how and when these officers are elected, and so forth. These officers can help in recruitment, running team meetings, running parent meetings, conducting practice sessions, doing paperwork, keeping a team scrapbook, writing newsletters for the team members, organizing fund-raising events, setting up rooms for practice tournaments, and a myriad of other areas.

Practice “rules”:

1. Some coaches require each team member to provide a full-size videotape; the students are then occasionally videotaped during practice.
2. Some coaches, especially if they teach a competition class, may require a daily log be kept of each student's work.
3. The coach needs to set the number of weekly practices for each student depending on the category. Most IE categories, for example, will practice once a week, while debate may practice twice (once for research and plan development, once for actual debating).
4. Some coaches require the varsity members of the team to assist with coaching during the practices.
5. Most coaches will not permit a student to attend a tournament unless he has practiced that week.

Evaluation journals: Some coaches require each team member to bring to each practice session a journal/notebook of some kind. Coaches will write critiques in this journal during practice; students may keep track of their research work, lists of resource material, or other items deemed important by coaches. This is especially important if more than

one coach works with a student. Some coaches also ask their students to write comments about judges they perceive to be “weak” or “strong,” based on judges’ verbal comments and behavior in the tournament rounds and judges’ comments on the student critiques.

Tournament dress and etiquette: The coach needs to specify what clothing is appropriate and will be accepted for tournament. General expectations for tournament behavior should also be discussed with students. More detailed information can be found under “It’s Tournament Time.”

Fun-Time (or Team Bonding Time): It’s a good idea to have special activities for team members occasionally. Many coaches feel that some socializing among the members of a forensic team makes for a close-knit group. Here are some ideas:

1. Sub-sandwich party and meeting – could be early in the year to review the different events, show video tapes from past seasons, answer questions, pass out tournament schedules, etc. Each person could contribute \$1, with coaches providing soft drinks.
2. Parents’ Night – again, early in the year to inform parents about this activity, recruit their help, perform some pieces, answer questions, etc.
3. Get the group together and go bowling. Just have fun.
4. If a member of the team plays hockey, get everyone together and go watch a hockey match (or wrestling or swimming, etc.)
5. Christmas Party – include a “Yankee Swap” or white elephant gift to exchange.
6. Ice Cream Sunday Party & Meeting – maybe in the spring to elect new officers, discuss recruitment of new members, etc.
7. Banquet – at the end of the season to recognize the students’ achievements. This could be a full dinner or just dessert or light refreshments.
8. Team breakfasts
9. Lock-In – stay overnight in the school’s gym



Chapter 6: Coaching Tips

General Advice and Expectations

1. When a teacher accepts a coaching position, he essentially tells the student, “I’m here to help you.” When this happens, a trust between the coach and the student develops and respect soon follows. The student must know as soon as possible that the coach is there to make him a winner or to make him the best he can be. Friendship then follows. Don’t start out to be a student’s friend. Start out as the coach and become the friend.
2. The coach needs to take command of the situation. Demand a quiet and productive work atmosphere. Take, as well as give, suggestions, but make sure all the students realize that the coach makes the final decision. The coach is the boss, but remember: it is difficult to gain control. A process of trial and error will help a coach find his level of control – somewhere between wishy-washy and Mussolini!
3. Patience is the key to coaching, especially at the end of a long day – and that’s when it’s needed the most! A coach explains, demonstrates, remonstrates, critiques, evaluates, challenges and encourages repeatedly before the student “gets it.”
4. A coach needs to be as visible as possible. The student needs assurance that the coach cares about him. It gives a definite morale boost.
5. If the student is really trying and taking the suggestions and starting to improve, the coach needs to work with him longer than with the student who is not working to improve or just doesn’t have the “it” to make him successful.
6. A coach needs to begin with the basics and then build for entirety. Don’t start out by trying to achieve total effect. Work on small parts such as introductions, or focal points, or voice inflection, or gestures; then proceed each time to include more.
7. The coach needs to set deadlines for the students’ work: When must Oratorical Interpretations be memorized? Rough drafts of Original Oratories written? First drafts of Humorous Interpretation cuttings done or memorized? Rough drafts of debate cases written?
8. What students do in practice and what they do in performance at tournaments may be two different things. Stress repeatedly to the students that you can’t coach them if you don’t see the program or debate case exactly as they present it in competition.
9. Remember that a coach does not need to coach all nine individual events and all four debate events his first year. He should select those areas he feels most comfortable with, tell the students they must compete in those categories or wait until next year

when he'll expand to another category, and then concentrate on learning everything he can about coaching those areas.

10. Remember, too, that a coach does not need to attend every tournament on the calendar. Select tournaments with an eye towards expenses, variety and strength of competition, support of the home schools in the Virginia Forensics League and Mid-Atlantic District, and other rationale.
11. Success begins with a work ethic. Most students who practice every day and have regular coaching sessions and take direction from the coach will get rewarded. "Bench" the student who complains about his results but admits that he didn't practice much that week or didn't come in for a coaching session or didn't make the changes in his performance as he was told to make them.
12. Encourage the students to strive to do their personal best. Everyone's level of excellence is different. Help them set realistic goals. Winning should be the result of hard work, but the reality is that some students will never win a tournament. If they've reached a personal goal, however, and improved their level of excellence, they are winners.
13. Make the students understand that ranks and win/loss records are not statements about their personal worth. They should be able to accept comments, sometimes negative ones, about their work without taking them so personally that they are devastated and cannot grow.
14. "It's so hard to keep this activity in perspective, but it really is about growing into good communicators. It really is about bonding and lifelong friendships. You, the new coach, are making a difference in their lives and it really is fun sometimes." Becky Harding, former coach at Beaver Creek HS.

Tricks of the Trade

In preparation for a workshop years ago, various coaches were asked to answer this question: "What is one thing you do as a coach to ensure your team has a good season?" These were the answers:

Marie Dzuris, Centerville HS:

"Talk with all the debaters (as a group and individually) about our goals for the year. I think it's important to make sure we all want the same things. Some goals are team-oriented, some are unique to individuals."

Elaine Daly, Centerville HS:

"I encourage each student that I work with to set one realistic, personal goal to shoot for throughout the year. This should be in regards to one particular skill as opposed to another competitor. I think it is important for my students to have and maintain a sense of self – shooting for personal bests, not shooting for a competitor from another school."

Fred Snook, Crestwood HS:

"We have a seven-hour Speak-a-Thon in early October where we raise money for the team and get to know each other better. We spend time emphasizing that 'winning' is secondary to improving as speakers and as people."

Martha Ebeling, Dayton Oakwood HS (now retired):

"*Kick-off dinner to begin building debate team bonds – explain format, goals, rules, schedule.

*Because I feel it's important that parents know what their kids are doing, and because most debaters' parents have no idea, I used to have a buffet for novice parents and have their kids do a model debate for them right before State Novice. It was always a big hit."

Linda Miller, Fairborn HS (now retired and current Director of the OHSSL):

"I keep a three-ring binder in my briefcase. In that notebook I put... 1) a tournament schedule; 2) all invitations to tournaments as I get them. On each invitation/registration, I write the mileage, judges' names, judging fees, competitors by categories, etc. After each tournament, I move the invitation to the back of the book; 3) a copy of the OHSSL membership directory; 4) a copy of each team member's school schedule (so I can find them during the day if I have to); 5) the team members' health cards; 6) OHSSL newsletters for the year; 7) the current NFL Rostrum; 8) correspondence from OHSSL and NFL that must be answered (in the front of the book where I'll see it daily until I answer it!); 9. the OHSSL Constitution; and 10) anything else I deem necessary for the moment. Basically, everything I might need at a tournament or in administering my team is all together in one place. It works for me!"

Dan Matheny, Findlay HS (former coach):

"Students coaching students – my team has to be vested in each other. They have to take stock in one another. I want them to share in the success and failure of each member of the team. Three out of four or four out of five days in a practice week, I have my more-experienced competitors coaching my less-experienced, not always my best (they do as well), but those with coaching those without."

Lyle Linerode, Gahanna HS:

"The one thing I do is make sure I have the election of officers in the spring of the year for the following year. We have a team meeting after States for nominations. Those nominated must complete a form with questions about personal and team goals, fund-raising, etc. They are then given to each team member and then we vote. The results are read by the current president at the banquet, and then we meet in the late spring and summer to start setting goals and planning for the next year. This works well, and once the school year starts, the team is ready."

James Butch, Kettering Fairmont HS (now retired):

"Define 'finesse' – it becomes our #1 priority in developing team spirit – the correct win-loss attitude. This is a Fairmont tradition dating back to Mrs. Akerman's years at Fairmont East and continues today as a leading tradition."

Stefanie Fatzinger, Jackson HS (formerly Canton South HS):

"Send out a summer newsletter. Prepare for the fall in the spring (choose events, etc.)."

Arlene Akerman, former coach at Kettering Fairmont East HS and Kettering Fairmont HS and retired Director of the OHSSL:

"*Make them aware of what I expected from them as an individual, as a team member, and as a representative of their high school.

*To build a foundation for each category before I ever subjected them to looking for material.

*To emphasize the need for cooperation, excellence and work ethics."