Building Healthy Relationships With Parents

Most youth basketball coaches at some point in their careers face the wrath of a player's parents over issues ranging from playing time to intensity of practices. While there's no clear-cut cure to silencing the criticism, there are ways to quell their concerns, and most coaches agree it starts by maintaining a consistent line of communication with those invested in your program. Communication is a simple remedy, but how and when you open those lines with parents is just as important as the message you're delivering. Tom La Chance, coach of Ray Allen Select (Wis.), says his AAU program has succeeded in maintaining a healthy relationship with parents by laying the cards on the table before the season starts. He recommends other programs follow a similar model."The big thing I try to do is have full disclosure and call a parents meeting for organizational purposes," La Chance says. "We go over the parents' expectations and talk about what we will and will not discuss, like playing time. If there is a discussion about playing time I want the players to approach me. I don't want to hear it from (parents)."

The method works, La Chance says, and he doesn't have nearly as many problems with parents since he instituted the pre-season meeting. And when he does, he's able to reference the parent-coaches meeting as his defense."If you call a parent meeting you're laying the groundwork to handle any problems in the long run, so you can say, 'remember when we covered this extensively,'" La Chance says. He was able to do just that three years ago when a parent approached him in St. Louis following a tournament there. The parent was distraught over this son's playing time."Our program isn't for everyone, but I try to clearly lay out our expectations."Dan Krauser, program director for the World Class Basketball Association near Chicago, says his AAU program is more flexible in discussing playing time with parents, but it's similar to Ray Allen Select in how it thoroughly describes its philosophy. Krauser's organization distributes five-page manuals for parents that break down playing time, practices, roster selection and tournaments. Krauser shares La Chance's belief that by outlining your program's direction early in the season, it makes it difficult for parent's to claim they were misled or confused about how the team operates.

In addition to the pre-season gathering, La Chance and Krauser say they keep parents updated throughout the course of the season. It can be anything from a short email describing a player's progress or information on upcoming games and practices."Communicating is absolutely huge," Krauser says. "What we do is put out an email and schedule at the beginning of the year. On top of that, I'll send out an email every week with the schedule. Even though they have it already, this is confirmation of what's going on. We never have any complaints about communication."La Chance says communication is the key, however you do it. By keeping a line of contact between you and your team parents, the season is a smoother ride for everyone involved."If you cover one thing," La Chance says, "you have to cover the expectations."