

Coaching Code of Conduct

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Most coaches I know love Friday nights. The smell of fresh cut grass. The vibrant colors of changing leaves. The crisp, clean air. The sound of our teams warming up, the cheers, the thudding of the pads. The band playing in the stands with the cheerleaders leading the student section in cheers. The student section dressed up in wild outfits. All of this is part of the reason that many of us coach.

At Proctor add the sound of a train whistle blasting. Our field is located right next to a major rail line, formally the Duluth/Mesabi and Iron Range (now the Canadian National). Many of the engineers who are working while they pass our field as we warm up, or even during play, are former players and they make sure to blast the whistle a bit longer in a show of support.

The history and tradition that permeates the Proctor community has become part of the DNA of the football team. Our nickname, the "Rails" comes from the place the railroad has and does play in our community. Our school colors are even derived from the railroad. In the 1920's the DM & IR had extra paint from painting their ore cars. So they donated the extra paint to the school to paint one of the small schools in the district. The paint was green and white. These are still our school colors.

However, many schools have unique aspects of their community that adds a sense of tradition and history to the football team. Proctor is probably not unique in this. What we have done at Proctor though is take the sense of tradition and history that was passed down from player to player and coach to coach and marry this with a Code of Conduct that is based on the book *InSide Out Coaching: How Sports Can Transform Lives* by Joe Ehrmann.

In this short article I will show how the coaching staff at Proctor has taken the history and tradition of our community and football program and implemented a Code of Conduct for the coaching staff that has worked for us and which has helped us to have the recent success that our program has had and helped continued the

tradition of a strong and competitive football program at Proctor.

The process that finally resulted in our Coaches Code of Conduct started when our Head Coach Derek Parendo attended a workshop where Joe Ehrmann was the speaker and he pre-sented on his book. Coach Parendo was intrigued by the concepts that were presented by Erh-mann. It was the perfect time to start looking at the Proctor program and really evaluate how the program was run in the past and how it would be run in the future. We had just come off a down year for our program, we were right around .500 and had lost in the first round of the playoffs. The next year was a bit better we won in the first round of the playoffs but lost in the section semi finals. These are not horrible seasons, but at Proctor, where the last two coaches before our current head coach, are in the MFCA Hall of Fame, with the last coach, Dave Hylla coaching the Rails to seven state appearances and 198 wins in 27 years, so these were not seasons that were considered successful. We needed something.

Coach Parendo bought a copy of *Inside Out Coaching* for the entire staff and then he wrote the Coaches Code of Conduct. The three questions that were posed by Erhmann that really hit home to the coaching staff were: "Why do I coach?, Why do I coach the way I do?, What does it feel like to be coached by me?, How do I define and measure success?"

These are powerful questions and I encourage you to really think about these questions. As we thought about these questions our Coaches Code of Conduct started to take shape. The Code eventually evolved into a nine point Code that we all follow. As coaches we are not perfect and we all slip up, but we try and hold each other accountable to the Code and it has been working and we have seen definite results with our players on and off the field and a by product is that we have been 18-5 in the last two years since the Code was put in place with a state semi final appearance.

So what is in the Code?

First - Treat all players with respect and empathy.

This is a powerful statement. I was a player and have coached for a while now. I have seen, and I am sure many of the readers, have seen coaches treat their players with a total lack of respect. I know as a player I had coaches that discarded me after a serious knee injury showing a complete lack of empathy.

This point can be hard to follow as coaches though! We are expected to win and are of-ten judged on our wins and losses. But when this point is followed what an impact we can have. For example, this year we had two players who were not taking care of things in the classroom. As a staff we had to deal with this. But, we were able to treat the player with respect even as we had to have tough discussions about playing time, and taking care of the classroom. Empathy played a part as well in this case, one of the players had lost a parent suddenly and had a ton go-ing on in his life. Football was a refuge. As coaches we were able to give the players the respect that they deserved, show empathy and give support through a tough time, but at the same time hold to our expectations of our players in the classroom. By the way, we are still monitoring those players classroom as we enter the spring. This point is not for just the starters. In this case one of the players was a starter the other wasn't. By showing respect and empathy we were able, hopefully, to have a lasting impact on these players. We are seeing this and it is joy to watch our players become successful and make better choices with our support.

Second - We are role models.

This was a point that had been part of our program for a while. In the late 1970's and early 1980's Proctor was lucky to have a coach who laid the foundation for our program, Terry Egerdahl.

Egerdahl was a Proctor grad who and All American at UM - Duluth in football and baseball, was drafted by the Minnesota Vikings and was in camp with the Chicago Bears, before returning to Proctor. He died suddenly of a heart attack, but in the two short years of coaching he firmly put in this idea of role models, or how he looked at it: mentors. One of his former as-sistant coaches Minnesota Representative John Ward said in the Proctor school newspaper, The Mallet, "He was more than just a coach; he was a mentor."

The current staff has taken this idea of role model and mentor to heart and it is something that we think about. This extends beyond the field as well. How we act in our jobs and out in the community and how we treat not only our families but those around us, all have an impact on our players. Whether we all like to admit it or not, our players watch us. ■

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