

Every coach dreads these words....a cancer. It doesn't matter who it is, but it can kill a team. It doesn't even have to be a player. Sometimes, it's parents that are the team cancer. Sometimes, it's an assistant coach. Sometimes it's a player. And in the worst case scenario, it's all three.

The one common denominator behind all of these cancers has been unrealistic expectations. Whether it's players who think they are not being treated fairly, or parents who want their kids to be showcased, by playing a certain position, or hitting in a certain part of the order. Or the assistant coach who undermines the message that the head coach is delivering. I've seen it all, and it all has major effects on the overall team chemistry and performance.

What I have learned after dealing with all of these different issues, is to be as preemptive as possible, during the tryout process. Addressing expectations at the beginning of the season is a start. The next is explaining to the player that this is a one year deal. If you don't feel comfortable about me as a coach, or if you don't feel the right vibe with your future teammates, don't accept my offer. No one wants to be miserable for a year. The rest of the team doesn't want to deal with a miserable person either. Considering how much money is invested into a travel ball season, players and parents should ask questions during the tryout and recruitment process as well to avoid having buyer's remorse half way through the year. I have heard from parents on other teams saying that if they would have known Team X was doing this or that, they never would have let their daughter join that team. My response has always been that they could have asked those questions.

My team's philosophy has always been "We Before Me". Our teams were always a family. If you don't want to be part of that family, it is going to be a long season. You cannot be completely self centered on a team. One person does not win or lose any game. One person having a great game can significantly change the outcome of a game, but will never win a game on their own. A pitcher can throw a perfect game, but without a good catcher, a coach calling the right pitches, or a solid defense behind that pitcher, it may never happen.

Hindsight has taught me a few things. The first is to watch for certain red flags. Players that have played for multiple programs are the first issue. As a parent, if you are moving your child from program to program, maybe it's not the program that is the problem. Next are the parents that are your "friend" at the start of the season. They are always trying to be overly helpful. Meanwhile, they are trying to be sneaky at promoting their child and their accomplishments, while pointing out the weaknesses of other players. All this political maneuvering isn't beneficial to your child and will only cause more strife down the line.

If you want a truly successful season, try to be aware of these issues during the tryout season, and if you find yourself in a position with having a cancer, know that it doesn't have to be a terminal diagnosis. Treatments are available. Some are radical, but the goal should always be to treat it early and make it go away before it runs rampant.

