Windsor Why We Play: Gains Beyond Winning – by Tom Ludwig

This was my first year in athletic administration and I really did not know what to expect. I have been coaching various sports for nearly 15 years and heard the horror stories about what happens behind the scene when it comes to parents being upset about playing time and how those meetings and conversations go for an AD, but I was not totally prepared. One of the things I did not have was a platform to fall back on to when having these conversations. Both my high school and district are nationally recognized as a School and District of Character and have been for a number of years. When I was hired, I knew I wanted to align our activities’ philosophy with our district of philosophy of teaching and emphasizing character, but I was not sure how that would look or how to do it. Over the course of my first year, there were a few occurrences that showed how important it was to line up our activities philosophy with our district philosophy of character and then spread this message to our parents and coaches in the future.

The first instance came in the fall when I had a football parent call me because his son was not getting enough playing on the football team. I asked him if the student had spoken to the coach about this, he told me yes. However, but that is why he was upset because of the coach’s response. I asked him if he had spoken to the coach, he told me no. So I asked him what the coach told his son that was so upsetting. He explained to me that the coach brought up the fact that his son had missed practice multiple times over the past few weeks, and he was really upset because the coach told his son he needed to be at practice every day and work harder at practice if he wanted to play more. His exact words were, “Can you believe one of your coaches said that to my son?” He truly felt it was ridiculous for a coach to expect his kid to be at practice every day and work hard like everyone else if he want to play. I tried to explain to the dad that being committed and working hard are important life lessons we want his son to learn beyond football. The coach was trying to instill this in his son, but he did not want to hear it. The next day, his son quit the team. The problem was as a coaching staff we had no platform to tell our parents our values and why we do what we do.

Another instance happen in the spring. We had an issue on our freshman baseball team. An athlete had not played in the first two games of an opening season tournament. While at the tournament, I was approached by his dad during the third game and asked why his son was not playing. I explained that I didn’t know since playing time is determined by the coach and a lot of things go into determining playing time. It was only the third game of the season, he should have his son ask the coach what he needed to do to play more, then if he need more clarification, he should speak with the coach himself I explained. At this time, I also spoke to the dad about the fact that his son was earning himself a reputation at the high school of having a poor attitude and being disrespectful and pointed out that he had been written up six times since the semester began. Still dad’s main concern was playing time.

The parent took my advice and reached out to the coach. The coach told him why his son had not played in the first three games of the tournament, in which the team took first place. The coach explained to the father that his son’s attitude over the first few weeks of the season was poor; he had missed a few practices; and his work ethic was not on par with the rest of the team. But because it was early in the season, the coach felt he could help the young man and hopefully he would learn from it for the future. The next day the parent pulled his kid off the team citing in an email to the coach that “behavior and hustle were too subjective and should not be used to determine playing time.” I could not believe the parent did not want us to use work ethic and character as reasons when determining playing time. Right away I knew as coaches we had get a platform together and get that message out to our parents about why we play at Windsor.

I decided to form a Coaches Leadership Committee or CLC, and we set out to accomplish three goals before next fall. Goal 1 - define our mission and vision or goal to create a purpose that would set up and define our culture at Windsor. These would eventually shape our *Why We Play: Gains Beyond Winning* platform. Goal 2 - we wanted to update and improve our student and parent activities handbook making it more useful and in line with our *Why We Play: Gains Beyond Winning* platform and use it as a way to get that message to our community. Goal 3 - we wanted to define what good coaching looks like in our new culture and things people from the outside should see and hear when watching our practice or games. We wanted to align our methods with our philosophy, so our new mission and vision were more than just words that look good on paper. We wanted to bring them to life.

The CLC worked together and came up with a new motto, “Windsor: Commitment to Character” which falls in line with our district’s efforts to teach character. We wanted to make things simple so we kept it short and easy to remember. We came up with a simple saying, “We Are Windsor.” I know it’s not original, but we felt it fits into what we are trying to do. Instead of listing all the character values we would try to teach through participation, we designed a graphic to show how those core values are interwoven into what Windsor does.



The team rewrote our activities mission to resemble our district mission, “The mission of the Windsor C-1 School District is to inspire all students to develop a vision within themselves and become contributing members of society, by providing excellent educational opportunities founded on the fundamentals of a caring family, school, and community.” “To inspire our students by instilling pride and fostering success through character based life lessons” is our mission for activities which promote our goal, “To teach our students character and life lessons through participation in our programs and prepare them for life as an adult. Our activities are an extension of our classrooms where kids are taught our core values.”

Our goal is to tell our parents that we cannot always control talent, wins and losses, or scholarships, but we can control what we teach our kids through participation in Windsor activities and what we want kids to get out of activities at Windsor. All this was done to provide myself and our coaches a platform to help parents and student understand why we coach interscholastic activities. After all, “One athlete of character will improve a team. One team of character will improve a school. One school of character can impact an entire community” – Bruce Brown. In the future, I hope this will help me and my coaches in our efforts to show parents that playing time and scholarships are overflow and not the focus of participation in activities at Windsor. I know having this platform would have definitely helped me in situations and conversations my first year.

Why We Play: Gains Beyond Winning

Ask the question why do we play? What was the original reason we wanted our kids to play?

We Are Windsor

Our mission is to inspire our students by instilling pride and fostering success through character based life lessons. Our goal is to teach our students character and life lessons through participation in our programs and prepare them for life as an adult. Activities are an extension of the classroom where kids are taught our core values

Participating in our programs will provide opportunities that contribute to student growth and help equip them with tools to be a successful adult. Participating in our programs will provide opportunities to be part of once in a lifetime bonds and something special, scholarships, collegiate sports, etc… are a byproduct, less than 3% of seniors across the nation participate yearly in college programs. The reason for participating in extracurricular activities is not to produce hundreds of college athletes but to produce millions of quality citizens.

We Are Windsor

Success is… Gains Beyond Winning and maximizing our students potential as young adults.

Only one team wins the state title in their respective divisions, if we don’t win it then something must still be gained from the experience. What will that be? It must be a positive experience for our kids, where they learn character based life lessons that will help them later in life.