

# How the Professionalization of High School Sports Has Changed the Psychology of Parents

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## I. Is It Important to Understand the Psychology of the Athlete's Parent

## II. Athletic Environment in College

- The growth of sports entertainment industry and the amount of money involved
- The increased competitiveness of college admissions
- The increased competence and ambitions of pre-college athletics

## III. Changes in Sport from Top to Bottom

- Athletes today are better than in the past
- College coaches recruit earlier and more systematically
- Students are thinking about their "athletic careers" and college applications differently
- College counseling has been changed
- The way high school coaches spend their time has been transformed
- The psychology of the parents of athletes has changed
- The relationship between parents and coaches has changed

## IV. Coach and Parent Relationships

- Syracuse.com survey: "Dealing with parents has never been worse"

## V. The Impact of Clubs on Parents

- Clubs "track" children from the beginning
- Club directors portray themselves as the brokers of talent and the gatekeepers for college
- Clubs set a glamorous standard
- Clubs become the focus of parents' social lives and their belief systems
- Clubs offer parents the illusion of control

## VI. "The Early Decision Racket"

- *"The system exists, and it rewards those who are willing to play the game."*

## VII. Two Games Being Played

- The sport that the student is playing
- The "Game of Clubs" which some parents are playing

## VIII. Game-Playing Parents

- Independent school parents are competitive, successful people driven to seize a prize
- Wanting "the best" for your child is a universal drive
- Watching children play sports (or perform) is intrinsically beautiful and irrationally exciting to parents
- No parent can ever be completely objective about their child's athletic ability---ever
- Choosing an athletic route to an elite college is a rational choice

## IX. The Difference Between Reasonable and Unreasonable Parents

- Reasonable parents, faced with the reality of a not very talented child, choose to stand down.
- Irrational parents start to use the word "WE." "We played...we switched clubs...we applied to...we were injured."

## X. Parents Get Sucked Into the Game!

- "I hate to lose"
- Investment: "sunk costs"
- Identity: child and parent share a fear of the loss of identity and connection
- Control: Paying for and switching

## **XI. What Can Schools do?**

- A good AD will protect you
- Have a clear policy
- Hopes and fears of parents
- No confidentiality
- Stats (D1 and D3 percentages)
- Forewarn parents of conflict
- Speak from your heart
- Be quirky

## **XII. The Biggest Losses**

- Team loyalty
- Respect for teachers and coaches
- Threat to academic values