



Watertown/Belmont Pop Warner
Football And Cheerleading
Guide to Effective Coaching and Communication

2007

Guide to Effective Coaching and Communication

INTRODUCTION

Pop Warner football and cheering is one of the fastest growing and most successful athletic programs in the country. Thousands of children participate in Pop Warner activities around the world, and for the most part, their experiences are positive and life-fulfilling. The combination of fun, discipline, hard work and team sportsmanship have positively affected the lives of the kids who play and cheer.

Yet, when looking at organized athletics across the country, a staggering 75% of all children who begin playing an organized sport in early elementary school years, quit before high school. Obviously, there are many reasons for this loss of talent and numbers, but most kids cite negative experiences with coaches as the primary cause for quitting. Bottom line is, coaches can make or break the athletic experience for kids on their teams. It is then, up to the coaches to make sure that they do everything in their power to provide a positive, informative, low-pressure, and ultimately, fun experience for their kids.

Football and cheering are demanding sports which require huge commitments by players and coaches. They are competitive sports, and pressure is a part of the game. Coaches need to recognize this and ensure that kids get the most out of their teams while ensuring success and fun. Not an easy task. This book is designed to provide some helpful tips and information to make sure you are in the best position to teach kids how to cheer and play football, and also understand the current philosophy of Watertown Belmont Pop Warner.

WATERTOWN BELMONT POP WARNER PHILOSOPHY

Pop Warner Football is an international program operated for the benefit of its youthful participants. Since 1929, the national program's philosophy has been: Academics and athletics go hand-in-hand. At every level, Pop Warner Football seeks to develop well-rounded young men and women who learn not only the fundamentals of football or cheerleading, but also the importance of education, in an atmosphere conducive to developing sound mind, body and character – and having a good time along the way!

As a result, please understand that academics is very important, and coaches should reinforce this point to all kids on the team. If football or cheering gets in the way of homework and school, then the coach should discuss with the child and his/her parents to

ensure that the child is achieving good grades. Winning in football and cheering is a short term goal, doing homework and doing well in school helps kids to win in the game of life, which is far more important than Sunday mornings.

Discipline and structure are important elements of the WB Pop Warner philosophy, and teamwork and respect are equally as critical. Without these four factors, a team cannot be successful. Coaches should enforce the rules of football and cheering, discourage cheating or bad sportsmanship, and strive for a balanced contribution by every child on the team or squad. Winning is great, but it isn't everything – especially when your behavior compromises the game and impacts kids' respect for you.

Flexibility will be important this year, that is, flexibility of schedule and expectations. With the influx of new children this year, we as coaches and Board members need to be more flexible about schedules. Sometimes, children have conflicts with practice. We will accept that and not penalize the child for an occasional missed practice. As long as a legitimate reason is provided, coaches should not pressure kids or try to change their plans.

Finally, this is an exciting year for Pop Warner with new kids and new teams/squads. Coaches, the pressure is on you to retain these kids over the years and ensure they have a positive experience so they feel proud to be associated with the WB Pop Warner experience.

COACHES CODE OF CONDUCT

All coaches, football and cheerleading, will abide by this code of conduct. Coaches shall:

- Not smoke and/or use smokeless tobacco on the field
- Not criticize players/cheerleaders in front of spectators, but reserve constructive criticism for later, in private, or in the presence of team/squad members if others might benefit.
- Accept decisions of the game officials and judges on the field and in competitions as being fair and called to the best of said officials' abilities.
- Emphasize that good athletes strive to be good students and are both physically and mentally alert.
- Strive to make every football/cheerleading activity a training ground for life, and a basis for good mental health.
- Emphasize that winning is the best result of good “teamwork,” and is not based on one single player's/cheerleader's efforts.

- Not engage in excessive sideline coaching during games and not leave the bench area to shout instructions from the sidelines.
- Together with team officials, be jointly responsible for conduct and control of team fans and spectators. Any fan who becomes a nuisance and/or out of control will be asked to leave.
- Not use abusive or profane language at any time.
- Not “pile it on” – not encourage their team to get a commanding lead and raise the score as high as possible. In these instances, every effort shall be made to let all players play.
- Not be receiving payment, in cash or kind, for services as a coach. This includes any coach, consultant, or choreographer, regardless of his/her roster status. Coaches and squad leaders are volunteer positions only.
- Not permit or encourage “sweating down” tactics in order for a player to make the team weight.
- Not recommend or distribute any medication, controlled or over the counter.
- Not permit an ineligible player to participate in a game.
- Not deliberately incite unsportsmanlike conduct.
- Abstain from the possession and drinking of alcoholic beverages and possession or use of any illegal substance on both the game and practice fields.
- Remove from the game or practice any participant when even slightly in doubt of his/her health, whether or not as a result of an injury, until competent medical advice is available.
- Control their fans. Remember, as a coach, you’re responsible for your team, and fan reaction will usually be in step with your reaction. Conduct yourself well and remember that you are representing yourself and WB Pop Warner.

CREATING GOOD HABITS

- Only three things really count when it comes to football and cheering – the team; the team; and the team. There are only 2 forces that work on an athletic team: forces that bring players together and those that pull them apart. In football and cheering, it is all about teamwork and how to set the tone for your kids to work together, for you to work with your other coaches; and yes, how you and your players work with your parents.
- Start the season with clear expectations for your players and for your parents. We suggest a team meeting with parents where you state your expectations for everyone and what they can expect from you. Parents need to know your rules and the consequences of noncompliance. Start bringing everyone together at that first meeting. Be fair and firm and consistent.
- When introducing yourself for the first time, provide a written introduction letter to the parents and kids, describing your coaching qualifications, expectations for the year, philosophy on coaching, and contact information. This establishes a high level of trust with parents at the outset. (See sample introduction letter on next page)
- Your coaching habits must be consistent. There can be no double standards and that includes you and your coaches. Create team pride by promoting the best in practice habits. Good habits are coached, constantly reinforced, and repeatedly acknowledged in positive terms. Raise your voice only when something positive happens and keep your voice low when correcting something negative. It is much more effective.
- SAFETY – Coaches need to reinforce all the rules of the game and competition, watch for illegal play and encourage safety. Keep Your Head Up! All football coaches should impress upon their players that their helmets are for protection and not to tackle with. Keep Your Head Up and make contact with shoulder pads and hands.
- Good habits extend beyond the playing fields and competitions and we want good behavior in the classroom, in public, and at all activities whether or not sponsored through Pop Warner. These are kids and they will make mistakes so we need to impress upon them the importance of controlling their reactions and attitudes. There are many things that we can not control but what we can control is our behavior and attitude.
- Be a mentor besides a coach. Football and cheering can teach many life lessons to kids like teamwork, communication, perseverance, and respect. Respect is earned not given and you and your players need mutual respect and that takes time and effort. Mentor those kids that need your support by being a positive role model. Remember, for some kids, the 2 hours with you may be the highlight of their day; for others, it may be their worst since they were forced to be there. Read each kid and mentor him or her.

- Good coaches are natural teachers. Be a teacher on and off the field and teach your kids how to play. Never stop teaching and instructing and your team will benefit from the effort.
- Watch for signs of destructive behavior, drugs and/or alcohol. You are not experts but you will come to know your players and inconsistent effort, poor attitudes, or interest withdrawal is signs to be alert to. Contact Board of Director members or league officials if you suspect problems or other warning signs of destructive behavior.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION LETTER

My name is _____ and I am the head coach for the 2007 Pop Warner Bulldogs. I am a lifelong resident of Watertown and this is my sixth year as a Watertown Belmont football coach. I also coach Watertown Youth Baseball and Boys Club Biddy Basketball. I have a child on this year's football team, so I obviously have a vested interest in the success of the program.

My assistant coaches have been involved in youth sports for a combined 20 years, and they are an important part of our team. We understand the importance of making sure that kids have a fun, enjoyable experience when playing football, while learning the rules, becoming better teammates, working on skills, and more important, learning the lessons of good sportsmanship. We look to you – the parents – to be good role models and help us make sure the kids have a great season. Thanks for your interest in WB Pop Warner.

Coaches contact information goes here – including phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

If you have questions, please feel free to call or send us an e-mail.

- The WB Pop Warner Web site can be found at www.wbpopwarner.com
- The season schedule is not final yet, but we should have our practice and game schedule within a couple of weeks.
- Mandatory weigh in is September 9 and first game is September 10.
- We strongly recommend that players wear rubber cleats for better traction.
- Team uniforms and helmets must be worn at every game – no exceptions. Practice shirts for practice.
- We encourage players to bring water bottles.

Thanks again for your interest in WB Pop Warner and we hope your child has a fun and productive season.

COACHING DOS AND DON'TS

- Unite as coaches prior to the season and discuss who will coach what. The head coach needs to prepare all information ahead of time and make assignments. Coaches must respect each other and always appear on the same page. ***Never show anything but a unified front.*** You may not always agree but the kids do not have to know that. When you make a mistake in front of your kids, admit it, apologize, and move on. This sets a good example for the kids and let's them know it is OK to make mistakes.
- Communicate directly with parents regarding their questions and concerns. Most times what you are reporting to them is something they already know about their child since they know their kids better than you ever will. Only talk about their child and never bring up another child during your conversation. If they ask "why is my son playing behind so and so?" keep the conversation about their child and do not include so and so in the conversation.
- You will not make everyone happy and will be second guessed but honesty, fairness, and integrity in your approach will alleviate sleepless nights.
- Remember that while you may love what you do, Pop Warner is not about you – it is about the kids. Plan, think, and behave accordingly.
- Plan Ahead. Map out your strategy for every second of every practice and be organized. The kids want discipline and you must deliver it. You should have a plan for the whole preseason. Typically, there are six weeks in preseason before the first game and 4 practices of 2 hours each in each week. Given poor weather conditions and scrimmage games, that leaves about 20 practices or 40 hours of prep time before the first game. You need to have every hour planned about what you want to accomplish.
- For football players, add new plays but reinforce the Old. During preseason, plan to add new material each day and try to teach it a linear progression so that it builds upon prior material. At the same time, review and repeat the old information. Always include a great deal of repetition into your practices. Remember that the attention span of children is limited so we feel it is best to speak less and create more hands-on demonstration. A good rule of thumb is 30 to 5 to 2; that is 30 seconds of verbal instruction in a clear and concise manner then 5 quick repetitions on the field of the new material; and then 2 repetitions of older material.
- Stress the importance of every position on a football team. Though quarterback and running backs touch the ball a lot, make sure the linemen know that they are the backbone of the team, and without their successful play, the entire team breaks down.
- After each practice, evaluate where you are according to your plan, and then set the next night's practice. Did you accomplish your plan? Did you prioritize and get taught what you needed?

STRUCTURING AND RUNNING A PRACTICE

- Practice time is sacred. The importance of this can not be stressed enough. The process of preparation is one of the most important values that can be instilled in the team. “Failure to prepare is preparing to fail”. Kids must come to practice and coaches must keep to a consistent schedule. Keep your practice time within a window that will maximize teaching retention. The entire team must be on the same page. Repetition, positive reinforcement; Repetition, positive reinforcement; Repetition, positive reinforcement. We recommend that you keep your practice schedule organized and to the minute. Below is a sample football practice sheet.
- Overplan for Practices. It is better to over plan and cut back if necessary. For football teams, your play schemes whether offensively or defensively must be related and build upon the prior play. This could mean teaching plays in sequence and adding a little more each time. Take the time to explain to your kids not only the “how’s” of a play or technique, but also the “why’s” of a play or a technique so that your players understand why it is important that you execute a particular assignment. Full perspective is important even at a youth level.
- There are volumes of material on position drills. Individual coaches by position should read up and research position drills so that during group sessions individual coaches can run these drills. Positional drills must be consistent with the offensive and defensive schemes. For example, it does you no good to teach the offensive line shoulder blocking technique if you plan to run a spread offense that passes, sweeps, and runs draws most of the time. Keep your drills and techniques consistent to your schemes.
- Conditioning is important but excess conditioning is a waste of time at the youth level. Integrate fun games into your conditioning sessions so that speed and stamina can be built up. Your practice sessions and drills should all be run at a high speed and designed to incorporate conditioning.
- “Do what I say, not what I do” is a **bad philosophy** for coaching. Too often coaches penalize kids with excessive conditioning after they have a bad game. Bad games should be shared equally among the coaches and players so if you are making the kids run, get in line with them since you probably had more to do with their poor performance than they did.
- Below is an example of an organized football practice schedule including group and team sessions.

PRESEASON PRACTICE SCHEDULE SAMPLE

08/12/06

- 5:45 – 5:55 Calisthenics/Warm Up
- 5:55 – 6:05 Three line drive blocking (all players hitting dummies)
- 6:05 – 6:10 Water Break
- 6:10 – 6:40 Offensive **Individual Group Work** –
Linemen
10 min. of Drive blocking – highlight leverage and blocking to the whistle
10 min. down blocking – highlight angles / head and hand placement
10 min of aggressive blocks for pass plays – highlight recoil technique
Backs and Ends
10 minutes -Catch Passes (highlight proper hand placement – rip and run),
10 minutes - Timing on Motion, alignments, blocking / route assignments
10 minutes - Run through 90 series, Quick series
- 6:40 – 6:45 Water Break
- 6:45 – 7:15 Offensive **Team Work**
- Together as offensive unit – High speed run through of plays that highlight all techniques for line and backs
 - Have individual coaches watch assigned groups for proper technique and alignment
 - Several reps for each play with several different player combinations
- 7:15– 7:20 Water Break
- 7:20 – 7:50 Defensive **Group Work** (Base 4-4 responsibilities)
- D-backs** – explain coverage schemes (zone and man), technique, contain
Linebackers – stance (outside leverage), alignment, technique, assignments, drills, review gap responsibility (A-D)
D-Line and Ends – Stance, alignment, assignments, review gap responsibility (A-D), contain
- 7:50 – 8:00 Conditioning

FOOTBALL GAME DAY TIPS

- Real games go by at a frenetic pace. They are much shorter than you ever imagine and you must be prepared for all circumstances – injuries, weather conditions, etc. You should use your scrimmage games as a means to prepare for game day, that is, your last scrimmage could be coached from the sideline and your substitution patterns planned. All players must play, so we recommend you have a plan for game day and have practiced your game day plan prior to opening day.
- Organize your coaches on the bench and give each an assignment whether it is substitution, tracking plays, watching the opposing teams' reaction to certain plays, etc.
- Keep your pre-game routine consistent – Players should show up at the same time, complete warm-ups like practice, quick group work on offense and defense, and walk through kicking game.
- Have a game plan on both sides of the ball and try to stick with it. Don't be afraid to change or adjust your plan depending on the game situation.
- NEVER, NEVER put in something during a game that you haven't practiced successfully at least 5 times. New things may seem clear to you but these are kids and they will not understand.
- Game coaching and practice coaching are two different things. Try to establish positive relationships with your sideline referee and don't be afraid to ask his help. Keep track of the clock (Not all fields have clocks and you need to communicate with the referee), your timeouts, and your opponents time outs.
- Review minimum play requirements at halftime and make adjustments as necessary. It is a good time to settle your players, if necessary, and take stock in their performance. No matter what, use positive reinforcement at halftime and show faith in your players.

SIX BASIC PLAYS FOR YOUTH FOOTBALL

- 1) **Double Tight End, I Formation, Toss Sweep** – Onside guard pulls to sweep side and kicks out first man that presents; onside- tackle and tight end blocks down, QB reverse pivots and toss to I back; full back leads around end; I back cuts off of guards and full backs block.
- 2) **Double Tight End, I Formation, ISO** – Assume the play is being run to the 1 hole against a five man front – left guard double team with center on nose guard; tackle blocks out on tackle; full back ahead full to play side linebacker; QB direct

hand off to I back who follow the full back through the hole and cuts off of his block.

- 3) **Tight End Left, Slot Right- I Formation, Fake ISO, Tight End Seam** – This is a continuation play from the I formation, ISP series. Same play as above except the QB fakes to the I-back. This play action should draw in the inside linebackers who have to respect the run first to the I-back fake. This should create a small seam or cushion behind the linebackers and in front of the safeties. Play side tight end should block for a count of one and then release behind the linebackers. Backside wide receiver runs a full speed, convincing deep fade and slot back must run a full speed, convincing, 7 yard out to draw away back side defenders. The QB must throw a quick accurate pass to the tight end who gets what he can after the completion. Please note that this play can be adjusted if you notice that the safety is aggressive and is coming up fast on the isolation plays and not create any cushion between him and the linebackers. If so, adjust the play and have your tight end release without a one count straight down the field past the safety and this may be a home run play. Coaches you should be watching safety aggressiveness on all ISO plays.
- 4) **Double Tight End, Pro Formation, Crossbuck** – Offensive line drive blocks and/or double teams depending on the defensive front and where the play is being run. Assume the play is going to the 3 hole. QB opens opposite to play side and makes a fake to the left back who sprints directly to the 4 hole. This must be a good fake executed by both the back and the QB. Right side back takes a stutter-step to delay a fraction to the right, then sprints toward the three hole cutting behind the left back. This is a misdirection play and the timing/mesh between the QB and backs are critical.
- 5) **Double Tight End, Power I (Full backfield or Wishbone), Power Run** – This play can be run either way and is designed for short yardage and hopefully will gain 3 to 4 yards consistently. Depending on the numbering scheme for backs, this play can be called many different things but the idea is to get 2 lead blockers at the point of attack and to run the play off tackle. Assume the play is going to the 6 hole. Both the fullback and the I-back sprint to the six hole and make power blocks to first defenders to present depending on the defense. QB opens to right side and turns toward the offset back who is eyeing his blocks at the point of attack. This is not an outside or edge play per se but an off tackle run where the offset back wants to plow through the 6 hole and then cut outside if contain is lost. QB hands the ball to the offset back and rolls into the flat, faking a run himself and eyeing the right defensive end.
- 6) **Double Tight End, Power I (Full backfield or Wishbone), Fake Power, Flat Pass** – This is a continuation play in the Power I (Full backfield or wishbone) series. Everything stays the same as the previous play, except the quarterback fakes to the offset back, hides the ball on his hip, and rolls into the flat staying behind the line of scrimmage. The back side tight end (in this case left tight end,

blocks down for a count of 2 or 3, releases his block and sprints into the flat to a depth of 3 -5 yards beyond the LOS. The QB has the option to run or pass but the pass should be wide open. If thrown, the tight end must catch and get up field as soon as possible using the sideline as his ally. PLEASE NOTE – that this is a continuation play and will not work unless you have established the power run game (number 5) repeatedly, your quarterback executes his run fake every time, and the off side defensive end is aggressive and not respecting the QB fakes to his side. As a coach, you must be watching the back side defensive end to see if they are containing and coming up field or chasing the play away from them.

GLOSSARY

FOOTBALL TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

Blocking – Offensive team players do this. Refers to the correct way of pushing, moving, shielding defensive players away from where the offensive team wants to run the ball. Offensive players can not grab or hold onto defensive players with their hands but can use their hands and shoulders to correctly push defensive players away from the ball.

Offensive Line – Also known as offensive linemen, refers to the following offensive players: X = center; LG = Left Guard; LT = Left Tackle; RG = Right Guard; RT = Right Tackle.

Pulling – Refers to the way offensive line players block. It means that they will block someone but not the person in front of them.

Offensive Back – Also known as backfield positions since these players line up behind the offensive line. Refers to the following players: QB = 1B = Quarterback; 2B = Running back; 3B = Fullback; W = Wingback.

Receivers, slot backs, split ends – refers to players positioned away from the offensive line and in position to catch passes and block the perimeter

Tight End – Positioned next to the interior linemen and can block and/or catch passes.

Defensive Line – interior players primarily responsible for stopping running plays. Usually lines up opposite and within the offensive linemen.

Defensive Ends – Usually a pass rusher and containment player positioned at the end of the defensive line.

Linebackers – line up behind the defensive line and responsible for run stopping and pass defense. They can play inside and outside the offensive linemen's formation.

Safeties and Cornerbacks – Also known as defensive backs and line up behind the linebackers and on the perimeter. Primarily responsible for pass defense and for containing running plays to the perimeter.

Downs – Refers to the attempts or tries or plays by the offensive team. According to the rules, the offensive team has 4 “downs” or tries to move the ball a minimum of 10 yards in order to earn 4 new tries or “downs”. Whenever 4 new downs is achieved it is said to be a “first down” since the offensive team gets to start over.

Turning the ball over on downs – This happens when the offensive team fails to gain the minimum 10 yards in 4 downs. If they don’t, then the possession of the ball is given to the other team, that is, it is “turned over on downs”. Typically, if a team is at its 4th down or its last try and has many yards to go in order to achieve the minimum of 10 yards, that team will “Punt” the ball.

Punt or Punting – refers to kicking the ball to the other team in order to move the ball as far away as possible away from your team’s end of the field.

Tackling – Defensive team players do this. Refers to the correct way of bringing the offensive team’s ball carrier to the ground. When the offensive player who has the ball is taken to the ground, the play is over. Defensive players may use their hands and can grab and hold offensive players who are trying to “block” them. Defensive players may **never** grab the head, helmet, or facemask of another player.

Snapped – refers to the act by the center on the offensive (blocking) team when he/she moves the ball to start the play. The center “snaps” the ball back to the quarterback.

Interception- this happens when the offensive team has the ball and is passing it. The defensive team catches it rather than the offensive team, thereby taking away possession.

Fumble – When the offensive ball carrier has the ball and drops it on the ground before the play is stopped. Whoever gets the ball now has possession.

Fumble Recovery – Whoever gets the ball when a fumble occurs is said to have “recovered” the ball.