

Helping Out in the Community

Softball is a game, it may be very important to a lot of us, but it is still a game. I truly believe in teaching more than just the game. Coaches have the opportunity to teach the players things that will last them past their years in softball and about the game of life.

My assistant, Vicki Schneider, and I would talk to the players a lot about anything that we would encounter along the way, outside of softball. When we traveled, we would see people who do not have the same advantages that we have in our lives. We believe in giving the kids more than just a softball education. One thing that every team at St. Louis CC/Meramec does, thanks to our athletic director Bob Bottger, is a community service project. Every year we would do one or two things to help someone in the community. Some of our projects through the years were hosting free clinics for young players from disadvantaged areas, loading up the school van and taking senior citizens to plays or concerts at Meramec, helping with projects hosted by other faculty or staff members, Christmas caroling at the nursing homes, helping to move people out during the floods of various years, and one of my personal favorites is helping the No Kill Animal Shelters around our area.

Non-profit organizations are always looking for help. Check with your team to see if anyone has a special interest in a specific organization or area like helping seniors or animal organizations. As your team is choosing the type of organization they would like to help, the next step is to start calling those organizations to make the arrangements. It sounds easy, but there are some things to consider before actually making those calls.

The coach needs to have a real heart-to-heart with the team and individuals, if necessary. It is a great thing to volunteer in an attempt to help someone and to teach your own team a little about life. Your players need to be prepared, in a lot of cases. Some players can handle most situations, especially the college players. But the younger ones and some college players may have a hard time dealing with things like going to a nursing home, an animal shelter or even going into the depressed areas of your own city.

The players need to know that if they have any apprehensions about doing or going somewhere, they need to come in to talk to you as the coach. We would sit the players down and tell them exactly what they will see or hear and what it is going to be like when they go to certain places. Do I think after talking to them that they should still go along with the team? Yes, in most cases, that is a part of growing up and being able to handle situations that will arise during their lives.

With that said, there may be a situation where it would not be good for a certain player to do this particular community service event. The coach then needs to deal with that in a way that is the best for the player, team and the place chosen. In most cases, if you know that it just is not the best situation for this player, you may go to a different event altogether. If everything is in place and then something occurs that would not be in the best interest of everyone, the coach needs to make the call and provide a choice situation for that player.

An example would be when the team is going to visit a nursing home where a player has a grandparent and the grandparent passes away the week before the event. That may be an extremely hard time for the player and, if she is in tears the whole time, it would not be good for the player or the residents of the nursing home. That is a very understandable situation. A coach needs to be aware and find out how each individual player really feels about an event.

The NFCA has its "Strike Out Cancer" program and its new "Making Strides" program. Visit www.NFCA.org for more information.

Others choices besides the ones already mentioned are:

- visiting a hospital for children and spending some time with them
- helping with Habitat for Humanity
- cleaning up an area that has been a dumping ground for everything
- helping clean or paint at the home of a senior citizen

Meramec's baseball team has a real "Senior" Prom for senior citizens. The players dance with the seniors. These are only a few of the things that your team can do. A little thought, and you will come up with a project for your team. Doing a community service project not only helps someone else but also puts a part of life in

perspective for your players. It's amazing what happens when you open their eyes to the way others have to live.