

Traveling with the Team

Traveling with the team can be a really fun experience or could be an experience you would like to forget. I always had a lot of fun traveling with my college team-even the long trips and the ones when we would get home really late.

The tone has to be set right at the beginning of the year. We never leave anything to the players' imagination or interpretation. They knew from the very beginning what was expected of them and what conduct was acceptable and what was not acceptable. I have seen a lot of teams in the same hotel as we were, and they were allowed to act in a manner that would be embarrassing even as a high school student-let alone a college player.

It is sad to say, but sometimes you even need to give the parents the rules of conduct when on a trip. Here's a sample of things to go over with your team and parents:

1. It would be nice if everyone had a warmup to wear on road trips but that's not possible in a lot of situations. When we traveled on a bus, they could wear what they wanted on the bus. But when they got off to go to a gas station or to a restaurant, then they needed to wear something like a nice warmup (not a sloppy cotton one) or something like khaki shorts or pants with a presentable top. We did not want them wearing anything sloppy or "gym clothes"-especially into a restaurant.
2. Once in the restaurant, everyone waited together until we were seated in a manner that did not draw any negative attention to the group. We have seen teams being allowed to be loud in the restaurant, disturbing customers and also not being courteous to the waitresses and/or the other customers. We make sure that our players have respect for the workers and especially for the older customers.
3. When we got to the hotel, and while I was checking the team in, they would get everyone's gear off the bus and bring it into the lobby. Again, no one was drawing any negative attention to the team. Once in the rooms, it is normal for them to visit other players' rooms and that is great for team unity. However, slamming doors and running up and down the hall was not an option. This includes the lobby or the pool area. The kids can have fun without be wild and extremely noisy. When we knew certain teams would be staying at the same hotel, we requested not to be near them. Some coaches don't care if they are noisy or disrespectful. What I have found out from the players is that they like the discipline; they want to be held accountable for their actions.
4. We had a lot of parents that traveled with us, and I am sure a lot travel with the summer teams also. Some parents wanted the players to stay in their room even though the school was paying for the players' rooms. We did not let them do that, we wanted them to stay with the other players. I really believe that helps team unity. In fact, when we were on a long trip like our spring training trip to Arizona, we switched roommates when we would switch hotels. The entire season we rotated roommates on every trip and the players were fine with that approach. If allowed to choose their own roommates, players will choose the same people for every trip. They never get to really know their other teammates, and most of the time it leads to cliques.

I know that, on summer trips, the player may have to stay with the parents because of cost. As the coach, you can meet with the parents about keeping the players together as much as possible, letting them eat together as a team and hang out together without the parents always being there. Don't get me wrong: we always encouraged the parents to go on our trips with us, but the kids hung out together and the parents hung out with each other. As a coach, you have the right to set the ground rules for their discipline in a restaurant, hotel or at the ballpark. It is your team and your reputation if you allow them to run wild in those places. People do notice not only the rowdy teams but also the well disciplined teams. It's your team, take charge of them, as a coach, and they will respect you more for it.

Look for Celeste's article next month.