

Coaching high school sports keeps getting more complicated, and less worth it | Cooper

What do you think an honest – honest – want ad for a high school coaching job in 2024 would say?

"Come work long hours for pennies on the dollar, get criticized by parents with personal agendas and random vendettas, watch out for boards of education that don't know your value and won't hesitate to fire you without ever having to explain why, and get ready to be vilified on social media and perhaps the local press."

Oh, and you'd better win.

[Two North Jersey softball coaches have stepped away this season](#), one

just before regular-season play started, and the head softball coach at state power Notre Dame resigned last week. It's the latest signal that being a high school coach is a hard job that's only gotten more complicated, more taxing and, for many, way less worth it.

Coaches don't want to talk about it. I reached out to a handful of veteran coaches to ask if their jobs had gotten harder and none wanted to comment on the record. Privately though, the stories are laughable.

Parents want their kids to play and improve and be successful. But in 2024, with social media and cellphones, they're bolder than ever. It's the "All About Me" culture run amok. How in the world is a high school coach supposed to handle it when one of the parents is also the star of a reality TV show? Where is that mentioned in the coaching handbook?

Coaches have to deal with players posting highlights for likes on social media even though their team got shellacked. How do you get a player to buy in to a team concept that way?

One AD showed me a text message from an extremely angry parent insisting that the school, conference and state athletic association do something after their child was roughed up in a recent game, even though every video seemed to show that her kid was the instigator and, well, probably had it coming.

I saw another in which parents at one school reportedly called the college where a player had committed to play to report of what they felt was bad behavior in a recent game. Yes, the college! Vendetta much?

Wait, wait, it gets better. I had another coach tell me a story about a parent suing the school for not creating the position in the offense his son was best-suited to play, and saying they would drop all charges if

the school would pay for the tuition at the school the kid was transferring to.

Come on folks, what are we doing here?

What we're doing is losing out on the "middle class" of coaches. We still have some of the legendary "old guard" in North Jersey: Sue Liddy coaching two sports at Holy Angels, Jeff Jasper at Pascack Valley, Kurt Hommen at Ridgewood, Steve Silver at IHA, Evan Baumgarten at Ramapo. What those five individuals have is enough wins to basically stare at any rogue parent and say "go fly a kite."

But what if you're new? What if you're in your first, second or third year and parents come at you, even if you're winning? One HIB (harassment, intimidation and bullying) charge can stick, even if it's not valid and the coach is completely absolved, and if a second one comes trumped up again, you're in big trouble.

So why would you stick around? Your AD will probably have your back, but be careful, because there might be a new superintendent walking in, or worse, an interim superintendent, and your AD might be on shaky ground too.

Meanwhile, coaches are also expected to manage kids' expectations, even when a sports rating service just gave their backup third baseman five stars and they signed up for another college showcase where no colleges ever show, but the organizer gets a suitcase full of money.

Maybe the coaches who walked away did the right thing. There are better situations. There are better jobs. There are parents with realistic expectations and school districts with the proper perspective on how athletics fit in. It's not easy to walk away from a job you love and players

you truly care about, but you have to take care of yourself.

No one signs up to be a high school coach with the idea that everything will be sunshine and roses. It's a job designed to support young people in their maturation process as players, and as young men and women. They are supposed to grow physically and mentally.

If we keep losing high school coaches, then we lose a vital piece to the educational puzzle. Too bad we can't make a reality show out of that.