

October 3, 2008

To: Smitty

From: Monty Aldrich

THOUGHTS FROM THE UNIT OFFICE...

There has been a great deal of scuttle about the overall sports programs and the state of sports at North Clay. I want to share my observations and my philosophy of sports in general, and at North Clay.

First, we do have a mission statement in the Athletic Handbook, but I've written many mission statements that were put away on a shelf and never referenced. In the heat of the battle when a parent becomes irate, will they care about what our mission statement is, and will that cause them to refrain from acting the way they've acted for years? I want to express my opinion (and mine only) as to how I feel about the state of North Clay sports.

When I was a small child, I remember hearing and experiencing the same exact nonsense that I am hearing now. Some things will never change, even when you do everything in your power to make change for the better. Looking back, I remember the good times of "getting to start", winning, receiving awards, etc. I also remember the bad times of "not getting to start", losing, having people say things about me, having others jealous because I was getting to play, being jealous because others were playing ahead of me, etc. I also remember the viciousness of student and parental relationships because of one person getting to play in front of another for a variety of reasons that many stated. Some of those reasons included brownnosing, playing because of the kid's last name, playing because the parents gave the coach a side of beef, playing because a kid told bad things about another kid (true or not), and not getting to play because a parent told something bad about another kid. I also remember playing ahead of some older kids and having to deal with my teammates excluding me from their group and calling me names. Even after all of that, I survived and my "self-esteem" wasn't crushed. I didn't seek counseling and I wasn't destroyed for life. All of the certificates, trophies, and other awards that I received in grade school and high school are gone. Not in a box. Gone. I'm still not damaged by that.

Now, we can still list the same types of things going on as I mentioned above, but there's a different philosophy and a different approach in how many parents deal with the issues. Back then, it was an embarrassment for a parent to approach a coach and "chew him out" for fear that the other players would humiliate the child. It was also a very rare occasion when it did happen and it was in private away from children and fans. After all, the coach was the coach and the result was that we just had to deal with rejection, disappointment, etc. These issues were not the kind of issues that a parent went to school to complain about. These issues weren't the kind that caused us to generate discussions and lengthy meetings. This wasn't the focus of conversation among our staff and community.

I've had a great deal of people ask me why we no longer have the "big crowds" with the excitement of everyone in the stands grouping together to have a good time at the games. They all talk about the times when we all wore red cowboy hats, got painted up, acted goofy, and had fun. They talked about how we gathered after games and shared in the fun with the kids. Bluntly, here is the reason. I will use my father as the example. Back then, whether I played or not and whether I was on the team or not, he went to the "North Clay" games and cheered for "North Clay". He didn't just go to "my games" when "I" was playing. He went to the park and

cheered for kids in Little League. Even when I played in college, he built a relationship with the others on the team and cheered for them. I'm using my dad as the example but most if not all people went and "cheered for North Clay", not just for "their kid when they got to play". The day after the big game, everyone talked about "the game" instead of how the coach played someone over another, and how their kid didn't get to play as much as some other kid. Now that's a thing of the past. There are only about five older gentlemen that do that now. I can name them but you all know them if you go watch games. They are at every event that we have. They eat popcorn, smile, and cheer for "ole' North Clay" with no strings attached.

Face it. It's a "me, me, me" society. It's also a busy world and we don't have time to go to every other event and "cheer for North Clay". Watch on television and you'll see almost every professional athlete striving for individual attention. Forget the team. It's all about me, me, me! I've seen football player after football player run ten yards away from all others after making a tackle, only to do a dance while pointing at himself. It used to be that someone made a tackle to help the team. And sadly, those are the athletes who are making it big. I see it with many of our parents now. It's only about "my kid's playing time and being in the spotlight". I hear parents ripping other kids apart who obviously shouldn't be playing ahead of their child. I see the viciousness in front of the kids. I guess that reassures us that it will carry on for another generation. Then it extends to being the coach's wrong doing for being unable to see their kid's talent above all others.

We may or may not have the greatest coaches in the world, but it's North Clay. We are a small district and a small town and we cannot attract world-class coaches. We've had a great history in sports and a great amount of awesome athletes and teams throughout the years. I've also seen great "potential" teams that never achieved because of the dissention and viciousness that existed. Again, I've heard a great deal of coaches being scared to even continue coaching because they know how this is. Whether we want playing time for all kids or whether we want to "win at all cost", we will have difficulty getting and keeping coaches because some things never change. If we change our philosophy to reflect something different than how a coach feels, we'll lose more people. I'm not sure if we'll gain any or not.

I'm not sure how our board and administration got so involved in the inner scope of athletics, but I think we need to step back and allow the people do the jobs they were hired to do. There wasn't an athletic director and there wasn't a person that was really in charge of carrying out duties to insure that all of the issues were addressed in earlier years. Many worked it out themselves. I think we should back off of all of the parents coming to us with complaints. I think we should back off and become less involved in lending information back and forth that will create more conflict. I think we should be less judgmental when it comes to making assumptions about something we heard from someone who is usually unhappy.

When I was an athlete at North Clay, I remember that it was a huge part of the best time I had as a kid. When I was a coach at North Clay, I remember that it was a huge part of the best time my kids had while on my team. I don't remember coaching being a pleasant experience outside of spending time at practices and games with the kids. The other portion of coaching was not always pleasant.

So, what is it that we're ultimately after? It's easy to say that we want the kids to have a good, positive experience where they build physical skills, team relationships, and learn how to practice good sportsmanship. Is it to learn how to work with others cooperatively and learn how to accept disappointments while turning those disappointments into successes? Is it to have memories of how good the days were when "we, the team" won the championship? Is it to show others that

“my kid is the best”? Is it to ultimately win individually without regard to others? What are we “ultimately” after? Can we change it? How do we change it? The best answer that I have is that we should model our own behavior and have an influence on others.

Now, back to school! I talk to several parents about other issues involving academics. Please note that I continue to say not to wait on the “official” Parent/Teacher Conference dates if your child is having issues that need addressed. Although these conferences are a valuable time to meet and confer, please schedule appointments with your child’s teacher as often as needed.

Please do not park in the fire lanes located near the entrances of each school. I know that parking is sometimes at a premium at ballgames but we have to keep these areas open to emergency traffic. These areas are posted by signs and will be monitored.

I’m looking forward to another Fall Festival that is planned for October 25-26. Hopefully it won’t rain “again” so that we can enjoy the contests, booths, pageants, and parades outdoors. Thanks for those who continue to serve on committees and take the time to reassure that we continue to have this festival.