

Dear Parents,

Below are some insights on the Carolina Elite program - both what you can expect from me, as well as what I expect from you throughout the tournament seasons. Many of you have read this before, so to make it easier I have included the “new” insights at the top. I have also included a cliff note version for those of you that are really busy and don’t have time to read my novel.

Cliff Note Version

Don’t address a playing time issue over the weekend - all playing time questions/issues need to be dealt with via phone, or email during the week. If the kid you are talking about doesn’t have your DNA, then stop talking. Copyright March 2010 :)

New Stuff

I first of all want to say I appreciate the trust that you all have placed in me to coach your son. I further appreciate your willingness to allow me to do my job for your son, even when you may either disagree, or get upset/defensive about things that I might say during the weekend. The responsibility I feel to help your kids is something I do not take lightly, and I am very humbled at the fact that so many of you have made the decision to allow my experience in the game of baseball to be something you want to be passed along, and instilled in your children.

Random new thoughts that may help answer some questions, or address things that may happen in the future:

- I do not believe in, nor allow parents to talk about other kids in a negative manner (within earshot of me of course). If you think someone is talking about your son to me then you are mistaken. If you don’t believe me please give me a call and start talking about someone else’s kid and see what happens :)
- Exceptions to the above:
 1. If it’s me talking to another player in the program. I will very often let players on different teams know what is going on in the other games, both good and bad. If your son has messed up, I may tell a player on the other team what your son did, both as a teaching point, and also to let them know that all players are subject to the same performance evaluation (this often works great if an older player has messed up - I can pass that along to a younger player. It helps not only to teach them, but also for them to see that an older player that they look up to makes mistakes just like they do, and also how the older player handles my criticism - they are accountable to it!!! I always love it when I can let a younger player see how one of my older players deal with a mistake, and how they handle my criticism of that mistake!
 2. If it’s one of my volunteer dad coaches talking to me about the game that I was not at. I have to allow my volunteer coaches to feel they can talk freely with me about what happened in the game. If you think this is a privilege for them (they get to talk about your kid to me, but you can’t talk to me about theirs) think again. Remember they have agreed to do a thankless job. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard parents and kids say “Yea Moli’s here” as I’m running up to the field from another game. My volunteer dad’s hear that too guys, and I guarantee you it doesn’t make them feel all warm inside. They have volunteered to do a job where they can’t succeed, and 99% of the opinions of their job performance will be negative. It’s not a privilege what they’re doing, it’s a sacrifice - thank you very much dad’s. *Also, please keep in mind that I am capable of thinking, and processing information I receive from my volunteer coaches. For example, I know that many of the dad’s may have a slight, subconscious agenda to relay information to me in a manner that least implicates their son for any mistake. If I hear something that doesn’t sound quite right, I am fully capable of interpreting the information to come up with the most logical conclusion (i.e. a dad whose son is constantly making bad throws tells me his son made a good throw and the kid that never misses a ball dropped it for an error....well.....hmmmm.....okay dad, I might follow up on that one with some innocent, yet fully loaded questions to the kids themselves to find out if that is what really happened on that play). Bottom line, is don’t think anybody’s son is getting an unfair advantage over yours because of what you perceive their relationship with me to be. Your son will play if he deserves it based on how he practices, and how he performs when he gets his on field opportunities.*
- What should you do if I hurt your son’s feelings??? **NOTHING!!!** Let his feeling be hurt, and then let him get over it. This is a necessary part of his training as a ballplayer. DO NOT, DO NOT, DO NOT, DO NOT, DO NOT cater to your son’s fragile ego. His fragile ego is something he needs to get over, not protect!!! If his feelings get hurt, he’ll get over it - trust me. And then the next time he’ll get over it more quickly, and more quickly, until his feeling don’t get hurt anymore when it comes to something that happens on the field (a failure, or a harsh criticism from a coach). The only way your son won’t get over his hurt feelings is if you as a parent don’t let him, by constantly making a big deal about it. You parents have “hired” me to train your sons in the game of baseball - this includes both the physical, and *mental* skills necessary for your son to gain REAL confidence to succeed in a very mean, failure-based game. My job is not to be your son’s friend, it’s to be his coach (in the end we all know that the people in our lives that put what they are trying to do “for us” above their temporary desire for us to “like them” at that moment are, in reality, our best friends). I would rather your son get mad at me in the short term, in exchange for equipping him to be personally successful in the long term. It’s not about my feelings, nor my desire to be liked - it’s about your son’s development, and future ability to handle adversity, success, failure, and challenge.

This is a true story of something that happened last year that I think illustrates this perfectly:

An Elite team had just finished their 2nd Saturday game last year - a game we had lost (8 - 5 was the final score I believe). In the post game I called out 2 players specifically. One of the players that I called out happened to be one of the best players on that team. I told him one of the reasons we had lost was because he had been outplayed by his counterpart on the other team. The other player was a kid trying to work his way into the lineup (had the ability to play a lot, he just needed to be more aggressive and assert himself more - he played very timid all the time and I was trying to break him from that). I told him he was playing the game scared, and that I wasn't going to keep playing him if he didn't show a desire to work harder, and be more aggressive on the field.

Anyway, that night I received a very critical email from the dad of the 2nd kid informing me his son was quitting. He criticized me for many things, among them saying I was out of line for blaming the loss on his son (didn't mention anything about me putting blame on the other kid too), and saying he took exception to a grown man telling a bunch of kids they were wimps (which I didn't say - I have said a handful of times that players have "played" like wimps - I'm very careful about trying to separate a personal criticism, from a criticism of that person's behavior at a moment in time).

I heard nothing from the 1st kid, or his parents. Instead, he was at the ballpark early the next day working on the very skill that I told him the other kid had outplayed him on. In our first game Sunday, I put him on the mound in a game we were leading by 1 in the bottom of the 6th. He didn't just shut the door, he slammed it, and we won.

I do not have kids of my own, and therefore I cannot sit here and write that I know what it's like to hear someone else criticize my son. Just writing that sentence makes me a little upset, and defensive of a kid I don't even have. Therefore, I hope that nobody interprets this as me preaching about parenting.. That is not my intent, and I am in no way qualified to do that. I do hope, however, that in those moments where you see your son hurt over something that happened on the field, or something that I (or any coach for that matter) said to him on the field, you will stop and ask yourself: In the above story, which one of those kids do I want *my son* to be?

Tournament notes (Old Stuff):

3. The "team" arrival time for the 1st game of the day will be posted on the website before each game. Arrival times for subsequent games will be announced after the 1st game. This is youth baseball, so I am not going to count minutes. If you are going to be a few minutes late that is no big deal. However, if you are going to be significantly late (anything over 15 minutes - which starts nearing game time) you need to text/call me (I prefer text - I am most likely in the middle of pregame and it's easier to quickly read something than to answer the phone). I make the lineups out the night prior to many games, so I need to know if a player is going to be significantly late so I know how to handle changing the lineup, or whether I need to change it at all based on when you expect to arrive.

4. We will always wear black on Saturday and blue on Sunday unless otherwise indicated.

5. Many of Sunday's games are TBA based on Saturday's results (which may not be official until late Saturday night). If this is the case, I will text message everyone Saturday night as to what time we play on Sunday. This text message may come very late (after 11 pm) sometimes, so please turn your phones on silent if you go to bed and do not want to be disturbed (it will be there for you in morning). Also, sometimes things happen with text messages where they don't come through immediately (or at all). If you are expecting a text, and didn't receive one, please call me. On the other hand, if the text comes through at an odd time (like 3 am), please rest assured I did not send it at that time, it's just been bouncing around on cell towers for a bunch of hours!!!

6. **Please DO NOT address a playing time issue during the weekend.** I don't have the time (or desire) to talk with you about your son's playing time while I am at the ballpark. If you do have questions about playing time, they need to be addressed during the week via email, or phone. Also keep in mind that the way you voice your questions does matter. I have had parents email/call me with very genuine questions (what can my son do to earn more playing time, what do you see as his strengths and weaknesses, etc...). Those are the type of questions that can help your son help himself, and I am very receptive, and happy to answer them. However, statements that are meant to start an argument, or lobby for your son (I'm not paying money for my kid to sit the bench, other kids are making just as many errors as my son (this may be true, but if the kid you are talking about is playing shortstop, and your kid is in right field he should be making more errors, because he's involved in about 10 times the amount of plays as your son) are not welcome, and will not go over well. Perception is reality in sports many times, and I will not allow the "perception" that bullying me will work. I have in the past actually changed a lineup after I had already made it out, and removed a kid from it after his father got unruly with me before the game. If you really want to lobby for your son, address your questions with their best interest in mind, and then sit back and let them earn their playing time, don't try to earn it for them.

7. Lastly, please try to be mindful of how much you talk to your son during a game. It's awesome to cheer, and I don't have a problem with an occasional motivational comment that may be critical. However, parents that are constantly talking to their son in between every pitch are being counter-productive (or standing behind home plate when I put your kid on the mound and trying to talk him through every pitch - take the training wheels off parents :). Keep in mind that I am trying to teach your kids how to "tune out" the other side of the fence and focus on the game (this includes you parents, sorry guys)! *The irony is that most times parents are*

harping on their kids about the very thing their constant harping is not allowing them to do! If you want your kid to focus, and “get their head in the game,” then stop taking their focus away from the game on every pitch by talking to them. If you notice your kid is looking at you after every pitch, that is not good thing, and the best thing you can do is notice this and either take a walk to the outfield fence, or start shoveling a bunch of food in your mouth so you can’t speak. They love you, and want to impress you more than anything (I know they respect and look up to me, but their desire to impress me will never be in the same stratosphere as their desire to make you proud). When you have a chance, observe a player who you consider “hard-nose,” or the kid that always gets complimented for how he plays the game. Then take a moment to notice where his attention is during a game. It is not on his parents - it’s on the game, his teammates, and his coach!

8. I will obviously not be able to attend every game, for every team. Realistically I expect to be in attendance for 50% of your teams innings throughout the course of the season. If I cannot divide my innings equally, I will make my decisions based on both the impact of the game (for example championship, or semifinal games will be given obvious preference). Beyond that I will give preference to my older teams, both because they have less time remaining in the program, and it is also more important that I am there from a teaching perspective. With my younger guys many of the skills they are learning are things that I can realistically expect my parent-volunteer coaches to help me teach - they are very basic skills like taking good leads, getting good reactions on steals, competing with 2 strikes, pitchers coming set and throwing legal pitches without balking, etc...With my older kids, many of them have been in the program for a few years, and they have already learned those basics (many are actually more knowledgeable than their parents by that time). Therefore, the things I am teaching them are very specific details, and skills that it took me many years, and hundreds of games to learn. Those skills are things I can’t simply pass along to a parent in a pregame conversation, which makes it more important that I am there to teach those things as much as possible. ***It is very important that all my parents understand that the parents that have agreed to help me coach the teams when I am not there, have done so knowing that they cannot possibly do the job that I do.*** Not only do they not have the knowledge of the rules like I do (both baseball rules, as well as rules specific to the tournament we are competing in), but more importantly they don’t have the knowledge of the players on the team (I am at all the practices, so I am obviously much more familiar with the skill sets of all the players on all the teams). I try to give them tips on who does what well, so that they know where to use certain guys if they get the opportunity (especially the guys not starting), but obviously it’s not the same as having the opportunity to see them everyday in practice. Moreover, the kids (especially young kids) do tend to respond differently when “Moli’s here!” :) This is something that I try very hard to have them “unlearn,” because the reality is it’s fake confidence (I want our players developing genuine confidence, which takes time to develop, and is completely internal). Nevertheless, it is a reality for our young guys that they do gain fake confidence when I am there. The bottom line parents is all those factors do exist, and make it impossible for any parent-volunteer to ever feel like they can run the team the same way I do. Please understand this, and put yourself in their shoes. The reality is without them I couldn’t do this at all, so please keep that in mind and give them a break. Also understand that if you do happen to be one of those parents that is constantly complaining about a coaching decision when I’m not there, that’s probably the reason I didn’t ask you to help :) I think it takes a special parent to step in, and have the patience to do a thankless job that will never be “as good” as when I’m there!

What you are paying for:

It is important that everyone understand that the monthly fee, and any additional fees for tournaments, uniforms, etc...are for me to ***coach*** your son, not ***play*** your son. ***This is not a pay to play organization, but a pay to learn organization.*** Playing time will always be based on the current available roster, and which players give the team the best chance to compete and win.

Team Rosters:

Team Rosters are never set, and will be adjusted as the program/teams add/drop players throughout the season.

Joining mid-season

Any player may join Elite at any time during the year. The only exception to this is if the player is quitting another team mid-season against that coaches wishes to do so. If you have made a commitment to another team you need to fulfill that commitment before joining an Elite team (practice squad may be joined at any time). If the opposing coach is okay with the way in which you left (i.e. it was handled with class, and was a mutual decision) then I will make an exception. I will have a conversation with your former coach before allowing you to join mid-season, so do keep that in mind.

Quitting mid-season

Players that quit Elite mid-season will not be allowed to return to the program. Current members are expected to fulfill your commitment to Elite teams, just like I expect new members to fulfill their commitment to their prior teams. There are always exceptions, and in the event your decision to leave was done in both an appropriate manner, and for an appropriate reason then I will take that into consideration if you decide you want to rejoin down the road.

Players that swap rosters for a weekend:

In the event that a team is short players, I will ask players from other teams to attend. It is important to understand that when I do this, I am not doing it as a favor to that individual player, or because I simply like them. I am asking that player as a favor to the team they

are joining. I will always look to carry at least 10 players to every tournament, so that in the event that a player either doesn't show up, or gets hurt in a game we can still compete with a full team. I will also not take advantage of the extra player rule and start all 10 players when I have them, because that defeats the purpose of having the extra player. If you bring 10 and start all of them, and then someone gets hurt/sick and cannot continue to play, that spot in the lineup becomes an automatic out. Although you still have 9 players on defense, you have crippled your offense when/if that happens. With that said, the 10th player that I invite has to have a certain set of skills that the team can use, either in a starting, or substitute role (speed, overall defense, and/or RBI ability are 3 things that are very valuable off the bench, and are things that I look for in that 10th player). This way, they don't end up sitting the bench the entire weekend when everyone shows up, and nobody gets hurt. That is unfair to ask of anybody – to give up their free weekend with the hopes of only playing if someone gets sick, or hurt.

Also, players asked to help out other teams will not be treated as red-headed stepchildren. Remember, I have asked them to come as a favor to your team, because they can help your team. You don't ask someone to do you a favor, and then treat them like a cancer. They will play according to their ability level, and how it stacks up with the current members of the team. In situations where the ability of the "borrowed" player is similar to the "rostered" player, I will give the benefit of the doubt (and playing time nod) to the actual rostered player, so there is a certain level of preference given to the rostered players in situations where there isn't a significant difference in the overall team's chances of winning that game.

Policies (or lack thereof):

I have no policies, other than to try and apply good judgment in each and every situation as they present themselves. I know this has been an issue with some parents, who have complained about "borrowed" players taking at-bats, or playing time away from their "rostered" son. I have tried having a set policy for borrowed players in the past, and it has tied my hands. Fact is I trust my ability to apply good baseball judgment when a situation presents itself a whole lot more than I trust my ability to sit down and write a policy that will apply to every possible scenario that will come up in a tournament. Here are some examples of why this is important:

If I have to play rostered players over borrowed players without exception:

- What happens when a rostered player has had 6 at-bats in a tournament and struck out all 6 times? Now, I have to send that kid out in that 4th game to further crush his confidence, because the only player I can play over him is "borrowed", and to do so would be violating my policy.
- What happens when I have a rostered player that has been doing a great job in practice on his baserunning, but has been really struggling with his hitting? If I have to start him (because the only sub is "borrowed") he is forced to hit (which he is struggling with), and therefore never gets on base. I have now put him in a position to only have an opportunity to compete in the area of the game that he is struggling with the most, and he never gets a chance to sub for someone on the bases and experience the satisfaction of helping his team in an area that he has been excelling in.
- What happens when we're in the last inning of a game, and a rostered player who has been really struggling is up to bat with a chance to drive in the game winning run? To let him hit in this situation is almost certainly going to result in him striking out and losing the game. I can't pinch hit for him, however, because the player I have available on the bench is "borrowed", and would be a violation of my policy. The result is the player fails, and is left with the feeling that he lost the game for his team.
- What happens when a player hasn't been showing up to practice, and is simply not up to par with the other players on the team (and that team has a collection of good players with a great chance to win the game, or the tournament as a whole)? Is it fair to the other 8 members of that team who have been working hard, to force them to play with someone who hasn't been to a practice in 4 months simply because he is listed on the roster, over a "borrowed" player that always shows up, works hard, and can give them the chance to compete and win that tournament?

These are just a few examples of situations that can arise on each and every weekend. The fact is I can't even think of all the possible scenarios that can arise (they are really limitless) which is the exact reason why I can't tie my hands behind my back by coming up with a policy that takes away my ability to look at every situation individually, and then to do what is best for both the team, as well as the individual player.

How I will treat teams:

This is kind of similar to the last section. I will not treat each and every team the same. Some teams are a bit farther along in their competitiveness than others, and will be treated that way. Examples:

1. I will be much more strict with playing time, and the borrowing of players for teams that are a bit more advanced in their knowledge, and ability to compete. It is not fair to the players that have been in the program for a long period of time, have paid their dues in both practice and games (including going through their share of losing) to force them to play with someone who doesn't know what they are doing simply because they joined the program and began paying their monthly fee. If you join an older, or more advanced team, you will be expected to prove thoroughly that you deserve to be on that field, even more than someone joining a start-up team. ***This is done as a courtesy to the other members of the team.*** Again, it's not fair to the experienced players to put them along side someone who doesn't know that they are doing, and can compromise their chances to compete and win. This doesn't mean that a new player won't play on an experienced team. As a matter of fact they may start the 1st game, if what I have seen from them physically is something that can immediately help that team.

2. On the other hand, teams that are just starting out (or are made up of players that are all at similar levels experience-wise) will be treated accordingly. I can give players more opportunities to play and gain experience when they are in an environment where the players around them are going through the exact same learning process.

Again, I won't have a policy on this, but will always try to exercise good judgment in every situation based on where each team is at in their development and level of play.

Parental Conduct:

Everybody knows this, but I will continue to repeat it. Please be mindful of what comes out of your mouth during our tournaments. We are all human, and I understand that in the spur of the moment sometimes we might say/yell things that we regret. There is a huge difference between that, and a parent that repeatedly makes premeditated comments that are hurtful, and insulting towards another player. Many of you have told me you have joined this program because I am not influenced by parents (which is true). The best players will play, regardless of who they are, or who their parents are. I don't want your opinion of where your son should play, hit in the lineup, or your *negative* evaluation of another player (if you want to compliment another player feel free)! ***I do, however, want your feedback if it relates to the one of the following:***

1. If it helps me, help your son. I realize that my kids look up to me, and so many times would never tell me if something was bothering them, or if they didn't understand something that I did. Therefore, if your son has confided in you something that you feel I need to address then I want to know that. If I know what they are confused about, I can take them aside and explain it to them so that their confidence doesn't continue to suffer. Also be aware that what you think may be helping your son, I may feel is coddling your son. Every child, and every player is different, and any coach that is worth his salt knows, respects, and is willing to adjust his approach to each player based on these differences. The challenge for me is always going to be trying to connect with each kid based on what they respond to best, without doing something (or catering to a pattern of behavior) that I know will be crippling them in the future, based on the reality of how the game is approached, and how future teams and coaches will treat them.

2. If there is a recurring problem with a parent, then I need to know this. Again, isolated events are one thing, but if you are having a recurring problem with a parent that has no filter than I need to know this. I won't promise that I will take action, because I won't act on one person's hearsay alone. However, chances are if you are having a problem with someone, then you are not alone. If it gets to a point where I have had numerous complaints about a certain individual then I will act. I will also have zero tolerance on any premeditated comments that I hear, so be aware of that. Just try to use your best judgment on a pattern of behavior that I need to be aware of, versus your personal opinion of another parent (of which I don't care). Again, I do not want, nor will accept any feedback that is directed at another parent's child that is negatively performance-related (if another child is doing something mentally to your son like threatening him, or something extreme like that then it's different....you all know what I'm getting at)!

Also keep in mind that many problems will work themselves out on their own, without having to overreact after a couple tournaments. For example, if there is a parent who is constantly complaining about playing time, coaching decisions, or otherwise behaving in a way that is making it miserable for you, you will probably not have to deal with them for very long, because they will most likely leave the program in the near future. Those of you that have been in the program for a few seasons have seen that happen. This reality allows me to sit back many times and not simply react immediately to what one person says about another (sometimes individuals have complained about other parents, and the one doing all the complaining turned out to be the real problem). Because of this I will let a lot of things unfold (especially if it's he said, she said). If what you say about another person is true, they will eventually show it to me. When they do, and they see they are not going to get what they want from me (unless their child earns it), they will usually decide to leave on their own. Therefore, in many cases these problems will simply go away (literally) over time, and we don't have to create travel baseball drama each weekend for that to happen! In most cases I think the best course of action if you are around a parent that is bugging you is to simply find an excuse to walk away and sit somewhere else (or don't find an excuse - just walk away - that's works too)! Over time, those parents will move on....trust me!

Final Thoughts

All of you have chosen to get your child involved in travel baseball. In doing so, you have made a decision to engage in a higher level of competitive baseball. ***Make no mistake about it, travel baseball is very competitive, and everyone needs to understand that.*** When we play in tournaments, we are being matched up against other teams that are recruited, and in most cases are all-star teams from their respective recreational leagues. Because of this, I cannot treat this organization as an "everybody plays" utopia. Doing so blindly would result in games that would consistently get out of hand resulting in mercy rule blowouts, and our players being completely demoralized after almost every game.

I can't tell you how many times I have heard someone say "Moli doesn't care about winning." If you hear that, you have my permission to smack that person upside the head. Everything we learn is to give our players an opportunity to outplay, and beat an opponent. I am human, and I want to win every game we play (trust me on that....that fire doesn't go away). However, the reality is if I made winning the ***only*** goal of this program it would force me to sever relationships with a lot of families that have become such an important part of my life, and I will not allow my ego to cut an 11 year old child that simply wants to be coached by me. I will never cut a player based on their performance, and I love my opportunity to coach players of all ability levels. At the same time, I

have an obligation to each team to try and win. How can I ask a player to work hard in practice, and give their all in a game, if I am not willing to do the same thing for them? I can't, and I won't.

The line between competing to win, and keeping youth baseball in its proper perspective is thick, and gray, and I don't think it can ever be quantified. It is my job to try and find that line, and do my best to balance those two things. Certain situations will arise where I feel obligated to do something that many parents may disagree with, in the interest of doing what's best for a team, or the program as a whole.

Thanks for reading, and I hope this helps you get a better idea of what Carolina Elite Baseball is all about, and my approach to each of these tournament weekends!

See you on the field!

James Molinari