

## JV and Freshmen teams

Some time ago a friend of mine said, "Isn't the purpose of the JV to prepare the players for the varsity?" That has led to several interesting discussions in the past month or so. Most of us who have had children play high school sports have had the experience of being a freshman and/or junior varsity parent. Just what is the purpose of high school junior varsity and freshmen athletic teams?

The answer most likely depends on who is being asked. A varsity coach might believe that yes, the purpose of the reserve teams is to prepare those athletes for the varsity. In that case, the younger teams probably emphasize the same skills, run the same drills, and attempt to play the same style of offenses and defenses that the varsity team does. Some varsity coaches may not be concerned with the won-loss records of the JV teams, and others might set it as a priority.

A junior varsity or freshmen team coach may agree, but may also have among his/her primary goals the importance of winning. Many times these are young, aspiring coaches who think that if their teams win they will have a better chance at becoming a varsity coach. Sometimes the role and purpose of the JV and freshman teams will be communicated to these coaches by the varsity coaches and other times they may not be.

Each parent in the bleachers may have their own perception about what the purpose of the JV and freshmen teams are. For the parents with kids who see little or no playing time, they may think that just the opportunity to participate and belong to a team is purpose enough. The parents with children who are starters may believe that the reserve teams are there to prepare their young athletes for future varsity roster spots, varsity stardom, or even the chance at college scholarships.

I was recently at a high school volleyball match. One of the teams had a varsity roster of twelve players. Three were seniors, six were juniors, and three were sophomores. All three of the sophomores were starters on the team. The JV team had twelve sophomores and the freshman team had twelve freshmen. If this program, which is annually one of the state's best, is consistent in its roster numbers, then next year there will only be room on the varsity for only three new players. Perhaps some returning players will be cut. Maybe several of the current JV players are playing their last season as competitive volleyball players, but they don't yet know it.

I think that one of the major reasons that JV and freshmen teams exist is for our kids to have an opportunity to participate. Most of us probably agree that participation in extracurricular activities is good for children. If an opportunity to participate is not a reason to have these programs then perhaps it should be. If people (be it coaches, parents, administrators, etc.) really believe that the purpose of the reserve teams is to prepare athletes for the varsity then we are missing the boat.

When my son was on the freshman basketball team at his high school there were about fifteen ninth graders on the team and another on the JV team. By the time he was a junior

he was one of only three juniors playing varsity. Therefore, if the freshman and JV teams were there to prepare the players for the varsity, something must have gone wrong. I submit that there are other more important reasons to have JV and freshmen teams. They are there to teach kids how to be a part of a team, to be unselfish by sacrificing individual goals for the good of the group, to be mentored by their coaches, to develop leadership and communication skills, to learn how to win as a group with class and to handle defeat appropriately, to learn how to accept responsibility for actions, to learn different life/coaching philosophies from different adults, and to understand how to set and achieve individual and team goals.

Therefore, the junior varsity and freshman team experiences are not to prepare the student-athletes for the varsity-----many of them will never be varsity players-----but they are there to help prepare our children for living in our society. If these experiences indeed provide that kind of preparation for our kids, then they become fabulous avenues for growth and development.

What more could any parent want for their children?