

SBMSA Football A Manifesto

Every fall for the past 13 seasons in which I have coached youth football, I've told my players just how fortunate they are to be playing football in the great State of Texas. From the youngest level, where the little guys can barely support the weight of their helmet, up through High School Football, where the stadiums are filled to capacity on a Friday night, football in Texas enjoys a level of participation, support and passion unsurpassed in any other parts of the Country. There is a reason that every major Division I program recruits heavily in Texas and it's not because we grow 'em bigger here. Why is that?

Certainly there is the manly, gladiatorial aspect, but perhaps it is also because we see football as one of the best ways to prepare boys (and a few girls) for the rigors of adulthood. Football is physically and emotionally difficult and uniquely capable of teaching boys the lessons of honor, courage, discipline, persistence, teamwork and trust, as well as commitment to something bigger than ourselves. The very nature of football is to get knocked down and to jump up off of the ground and try again. We cheer the gifted running back as he scampers down the field, but no more than we celebrate the offensive line that opened the hole for him or the Defense that makes a goal-line stand.

SBMSA Football has been a part of this Texas fall tradition since 1965. We are nearing our third generation of players and those privileged to serve on the Football Board are proud of, and committed to, our mission - to provide a positive football experience to as many players as possible regardless of their athletic ability, physical maturity or family background. We believe that playing football is the very best thing that any boy can do. A very small percentage of our players go on to receive a Division I scholarship to play football and fewer still go on to play professionally. Rather than preparing kids for a life of football, we use football as a way to prepare kids for life.

For those who serve on the SBMSA Football Board, and for most of our coaches, football played an important role in their lives. We believe that becoming a football player was, and is, an instrumental step towards becoming an adult and a man. The term "Football Player" describes more than the stereotypical comic book action figure with the shoe-sized IQ. A Football Player understands the importance of practice and punctuality. He knows that his teammates are counting on him to give his best effort on every play just as he counts on them. He has learned to keep his composure and to channel his emotions, disappointments and frustrations into his efforts on the next play or the next practice or game. He knows that he will make mistakes and have his failures, but the mistakes will be made going full speed and the failures will be unacceptable. A Football Player has learned to know the difference between pain and injury. He knows that every one of his teammates has some kind of pain from one play to the next and he ignores it and focuses on his job. A Football Player relishes the combat, the physical test against his peers. He tries with every fiber to beat or bury his opponent, then picks him up and pats him on the head, ready to go at it again. A Football Player must learn the responsibilities and skills of his position. He must apply himself mentally as well as physically. There are no stupid Football Players. He may be small, or slow, he may get picked on by the bullies at the playground. He may be a math nerd or have two left feet, but if you call him a Football Player, he is the guy you want next to you in a foxhole because he would rather die than let you down. Once you become a Football Player, whether your career lasts one year or ten, you will always be so marked.

Key ingredients to a positive football experience are adversity and challenge. We run a competitive league; we keep score. The important lessons football offers, both to a team and to an individual,

require the crucible of competition. While winning is important, we would say that trying our very best to win is paramount. Giving your all to win and falling short is how we learn. If winning doesn't matter, then you learn nothing from a loss. Those who practice and play with conviction and determination will get stronger and eventually find success. The beauty of football is how frequently the smaller, slower, weaker team prevails because of their tremendous commitment to excellence, to hard work and to each other – their ability, as a team, to weather adversity and outlast the other guys.

SBMSA Football strives to create a level playing field - from coach selection and team formation to scheduling and the structure of the playoffs. We want every player, when he reports for his first practice, to have a chance to play for the championship. The goal is equality of opportunity, not the mythical equality of outcome. As adults, we know that we win some and we lose some. We may not get the big promotion next year, but we want the legitimate opportunity to work for it. SBMSA Football recognizes that, in spite of our best intentions, we will always fall short of this goal. There is a human element. Our volunteer coaches have varying degrees of talent and experience, as do our players, who grow and develop at different rates from season to season. There is no absolute way to ensure that all of our teams are balanced, but we try to improve this every season.

Much lip service is paid to "Good Sportsmanship". Every sports organization claims it as a goal. We hear it all the time. The NBA will tell you that as well as "caring" they promote Good Sportsmanship, all the while many of their players behave in a manner we hope our children will not emulate. Perhaps a better term to describe what we mean by good sportsmanship is Respect. We show respect for the things and people we care about. SBMSA Football strives to teach our players to respect their teammates and coaches, to show respect to the referees as officials of the game, to respect their opponents as fellow combatants who have made the same sacrifices as they have. Most importantly, we should show respect to and honor the game of Football and the millions who have come before us, suffered under the Texas sun, and bled on the football field. Out of respect for the game, we will resist blaming a loss on a bad call, throwing our helmet in a fit of disgust, chiding our teammate for a missed tackle, or trash-talking our opponent. We will honor the game by supporting our teammates, jogging on and off the field, congratulating the other player for a good hit, and meeting at mid-field after the contest to shake hands and show respect for our opponent. We should talk about good sportsmanship, but demand respect.

We have participation rules that require every player to play in every game. Every player, regardless of their relative ability, should come home with grass stains on their pants and tales to tell, and feel like they were a part of the winning or losing effort. We do not believe in a requirement for equal playing time or that every player should have a starting position on offense or defense. It is crucial to our mission that playing time be earned.

You cannot give someone self-esteem. Each of us has to find that on our own, by facing challenges, by pushing ourselves outside of our comfort zones. This is, perhaps, the most important lesson football has to offer. If you want to play more, you must demonstrate that desire in practice. You must show your coaches and teammates that you will do everything in your power to do your job and help your team's chances to win. The ideal coach nurtures this in his players, pushing and cajoling each of them. He is honest with them, does not give praise for less than a best effort, but stages an impromptu pep-rally right on the field when they finally push through.

SBMSA Football players run the full gamut of abilities. Some are physically and emotionally mature, or strong, big and fast. Some have more than their fair share of athletic ability. Many, however, are playing

their first season of football or their very first team sport. Some are small but slow, gentle and sweet, and have never been pushed to their limits. The SBMSA Football program is intended to benefit all of those kids and there is an important role for each on every team. The most rewarding aspect of coaching youth football is to see that smaller, slower, timid boy work hard week after week, learn things about himself that he didn't know he had, gain confidence one drill at a time and emerge as a football player. He may end up as a big contributor or he may make one tackle the entire season, but to see the genuine pride he has in his accomplishments, which he will carry with him going forward, is just the best.

In football, as in life, it's not about where you start, but where you finish. The confidence and perseverance, the strength gained from starting on the bottom and working our way up, by our own efforts, fighting through disappointment and doubt, that prepares us to compete for the big prize. On the 1978 Stratford High School State Champion team, over half of the 22 starters played on the 'B' Team as freshmen. It is common for minimum play kids on an SBMSA JV team to go on to play key roles as Varsity starters in high school. And, some of them go on to be the first chair in the trumpet section or to be the male lead in a musical production or to win the Math Olympics. We like to think that SBMSA Football helped to develop the confidence, perseverance, and commitment to excellence that got them there.

Volunteering to be a head coach of a youth football team is a tremendous task. You have to develop offensive and defensive schemes. You have to schedule practice and drills to implement your scheme. You have to evaluate your personnel and place them in positions that give your team the best chance of winning. You have to bring in and coordinate assistant coaches and keep everyone pulling in the same direction. You have the well-being of twenty or so boys in your hands and you have to deal with their parents in a reasonable manner. It is a huge undertaking (a three-month commitment), and, consequently, it is not easy to find willing candidates.

SBMSA has been fortunate to have coaches who are willing to take on this responsibility for many seasons, allowing them to grow as coaches. SBMSA Football is looking for coaches that have a love of the game, a basic understanding of and the ability to teach the fundamentals, the desire to work with boys of varying athletic abilities, and a willingness to disassociate, in some degree, their ego from their win/loss record. We live in a competitive society. The desire to win fuels a passion to work hard and a commitment to excellence. It is not a coincidence that our more successful coaches, in terms of wins and losses, also happen to have teams that are the most fundamentally sound, that throughout their roster are the best at tackling and blocking. The key is to realize that, win or lose; the kids are playing for themselves and for each other. A well-coached team is apparent to anyone whose opinion matters. Ideally, after a loss the players are more upset than the coach and after a win the players are excited while the coach is thinking about what needs to be improved at the next practice. Finding qualified coaches who are interested for the right reasons and willing to make the commitment is SBMSA Football's most important challenge.

Just as we can be only as good as our coaches, SBMSA Football cannot be successful without the commitment, understanding, and support of our parents. The ideal parent understands the monumental task of placing 1,200+ kids on teams in the most equitable fashion and realizes that Tommy can't always be on the same team as Johnny. They recognize that sometimes the answer is "No" for no other reason than making exceptions to rules leads us down slippery slopes. The ideal parent knows that whatever position Chase plays when he is 9 years old will have zero impact on what he does in high school and that not every mom gets to jump up and down when their boy scores a touchdown. The ideal parent

accepts that their coach is not Tom Landry or Bum Phillips, however, just like the most successful professional coaches, he is likely to have kids in the wrong position, be running a dumb offense, manage the clock poorly, and make bone-headed calls and yet it is OK! The ideal parent understands that harsh criticism of the coach and the league with their player does not help the kid and only serves to undermine the overall mission. The ideal parent recognizes that our officials are typically beginners and are going to miss calls. The ideal parent believes that it is every bit as important for them to practice Good Sportsmanship as it is for the players and coaches on the field. The ideal parent will think back to when they were in 3rd or 6th grade and realize that they don't really remember many details about their games, just that they played on a team with their friends. For the most part, SBMSA Football enjoys pretty ideal parents.

So as another fall approaches, as we get ready for a new year of school, as the 7 and 8 year olds put on their new equipment and bump into each other like so many Marvin the Martians, as Texas school boys across the State and the bands and drill teams and cheerleaders prepare for another hot August and September of Texas football, as the smell of sweaty shoulder pads and fresh cut grass, and the sounds of whistles and the impact of sturdy bodies sends us back to some of our fondest memories, let me thank you for lending us your sons, for the trust and support that you have given to SBMSA Football. It is not taken lightly.

Murphy Graham
2009 Program Director
SBMSA Football