

DEALING WITH COMMITMENT ISSUES

One of the problems I've had in my 10 years of coaching high school volleyball is getting athletes to make a commitment to the team. I'm sure you've heard the excuses – I have a hockey practice, I don't have a ride to practice, it's my birthday tomorrow so I can't come to practice. Without any ramifications to these actions, the athletes will continue to sacrifice the team for their own priorities.

What I did was instill a demerit system, where if an athlete accumulated a certain number of demerits, they would sit for an entire game. However, for these demerits to be removed from their record, the athlete had to come to the match as if they were playing. In other words, they had to show up to support the team.

Some items that constituted an athlete receiving a demerit were:

- An unexcused absence from a practice or game
- Being late to a practice or game
- Not making a strong effort in a practice or game
- Speaking to other players in a negative manner
- Unsportsmanlike conduct towards opponents, officials, and/or coaches
- Giving less than 24 hours notice to be excused from a practice or game

There are a couple of things a coach must do for this to succeed:

1. The athletes must buy into the demerit system. This can be done by getting their feedback on what constitutes a demerit, how many demerits are assigned to each item, and how many demerits are needed for a player to sit. If you get your athletes to make contributions to the demerit system, they will buy into it and respect it.
2. Document everything that has been decided between athletes and coaches and provide each athlete with this information for themselves and their parents. The parents should be informed of the ramifications of their child's actions with regard to making a commitment to the sport.
3. All of the above will not work if the demerit is not enforced. The coach must keep track of dates when demerits were received and why and when they were reduced. In this way, if athletes or their parents ask why they are sitting, the coach has everything in writing.

There are exceptions to giving demerits, like a death in the family. There is no "hard and fast rule" and the discretion is left to the coach to determine what circumstances will constitute an exception.