



Ruth E. Nicholson, CPF  
Nicholson Facilitation & Associates, LLC  
Youth Sports Services

## Improving Your Off-Field Team: *Integrating Club Operations to Support Players and Coaches*

### Three (3) Elements of a Successful Club or Youth Sports Organization

The secret to a successful club is a balance and partnership between high-quality coaching and coaching support, effective governance and leadership that provides direction and not micro-management of club programs, and efficient operations that make the best use of volunteers to support players and coaches on the field.



1. Quality Coaching and Coaching Support
2. Governance and Organizational Leadership
3. Operations and Administration

### A Different Kind of Team: *The Off-Field Team*

- ❑ The Governance and Operations legs of the stool exist to support Coaching, and through Coaching, our Players.



- ❑ Coaching is an important member of the Off-Field Team in club leadership and program delivery



- ❑ The three parts of the team are equal in importance. None of the legs of the stool is subservient to any of the others. They need each other in balance for the organization to be successful.



## Quality Coaching and Coaching Support



Coaches are the usually the most visible face of most clubs and youth sports organizations. It is no secret that without good coaches, players will have a very difficult time developing and improving their skills in the game.

One of the most important criteria a player family uses for selecting a club is the quality of the coach for which its child will play. Whether volunteers or paid staff, coaches spend a significant amount of time off the field preparing for training sessions and games, as well as their own self-improvement. Much of this effort is invisible to players and their families even though it contributes significantly to the quality of the player experience.



Quality coaching at a club is comprised of three (3) components:

- A clear Player Development Approach supported by an age-appropriate training curriculum for players
- Coaching Quality
- Coaching Support System
  - Coaching recruitment and retention
  - Coaching leadership, often a Director of Coaching or Technical Director
  - Professional development and coaching education
  - Administrative support at both the team and club levels



## Governance and Leadership - Good News and Bad News

Many clubs are non-profit organizations lead by boards of directors made up of parent volunteers.

- Good News:** The leadership of clubs can be comprised of people who care deeply for the success of the organization.
- Bad News:** It can be a challenge for parents to separate their natural advocacy for their individual children from their broader responsibilities to the club as officers and leaders of the organization.



## Governance and Leadership - Roles

Clubs operate most efficiently when board members have clear roles and areas of responsibility that enable them to focus on the organization, including

- Strategic direction and program priorities
- Development of organizational policies and procedures
- Financial management
- Personnel and human resources management
- Delegating program delivery to others



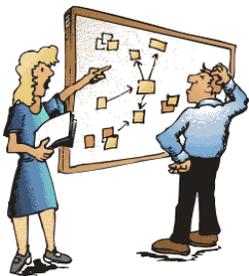
It is important for board members to resist the temptation to micro-manage club activities. Engaging a broader spectrum of staff and volunteers not only spreads out the work, it also invites more people to become invested and supportive of the club. Engaging a broad spectrum of people is also a critical component of attracting club members and implementing fundraising programs. Board member leadership is key to making these activities successful.

## Operations and Administration

Club administrative activities should support coaches and players on the field in a way that aligns and implements the club mission, player development approach, and strategic plan.

The operations and administrative activities of a club are often overlooked because people are too busy to build or maintain efficient business processes. This can be complicated by

- High turnover and burnout rates in volunteers
- Concentration of institutional knowledge in only a few people who may leave when their child leaves the club
- Lack of understanding of the complexity of the jobs needed to run a club
- An assumption that coaches will pick up the slack even when their skills, knowledge, and interests lie with training players on the field, not pushing paper.



Although the day-to-day operations of a club can seem mundane, without player registrations, fee collection, field use schedules, registration for leagues and tournaments, uniform and equipment procurement and distribution, and other activities, no club can put a team on the field to play.

## What About Parents?

- Parents often serve in volunteer roles on boards of directors and in administrative support positions at the club and team levels
- Parent education begins with clear expectations and positive modeling in the collaborative work of the Off-Field Team



## The Alpha Dog Syndrome and Conflict

- Board members are accountable for the legal and financial management of the club
- Coaches are in a position of leadership and power with their teams
- Administrative staff manage day-to-day club operations (non-coaching)
- Parents are responsible for their children/players



The competition belongs on the field between players, not within the Off-Field Team between alpha dogs and adult egos. When someone says, “Soccer decisions need to be made by soccer people” - what do they mean?

*We are all soccer people with overlapping roles and responsibilities.*

## Characteristics of Successful Off-Field Teams

- Understand their club’s mission and player development approach
- Respect the roles of the three (3) elements of the Off-Field Team: Coaching, Governance, and Operations
- Know why rules and processes exist and look for ways to streamline them
- Actively work to communicate and collaborate within the Off-Field Team to support players



**Ruth E. Nicholson**, is the Principal of Nicholson Facilitation & Associates, LLC, a woman-owned consultancy offering services in organizational development, facilitation, conflict resolution, training, and professional assessment in North America, Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Europe. The firm’s Youth Sports Services provide training and custom consulting, which strengthens club operations and enhances coaching effectiveness to enable clubs and coaches to devote more time to their players. Ruth is an internationally certified facilitator, mediator, and instructor who has worked in soccer governance, administration, and coaching for over 25 years.



Nicholson Facilitation & Associates, LLC - Youth Sports Services  
914 - 164<sup>th</sup> Street SE #1702, Mill Creek, Washington 98012 USA  
[Ruth@NicholsonFacilitation.com](mailto:Ruth@NicholsonFacilitation.com) (425) 385-2700  
[www.NicholsonFacilitation.com](http://www.NicholsonFacilitation.com)