Hunterdon Hoosiers, Inc.
RELATIONSHIP POLICY

Creating the Right Relationship Between Instructors & Athlete:

There has always been a visible black-and-white line between the Instructor and the athlete that separates them into their proper places, but as technology has improved over the years, that line has grown a little grayer and harder to see. Coaches and athletes are now closer than they have ever been, and it is important to remember that certain boundaries need to remain intact. These boundaries have been established as policies for Hunterdon Hoosiers Inc. as of August 1, 2014.

1. **Always Be The Instructor**
    a. Establish appropriate types of conversations to have with your athletes.
    b. Outside activities should be team-based, not individually based. Coaches should not be socializing with players/families unless it is a team-based activity.
    c. The athlete should know that you are there to be their Instructor and not their friend.
    d. Athletes come from a variety of home environments, and coaches need to be cautious how they relate to their team members. Resisting the temptation to act as a parental figure is critical in helping athletes understand that there are just some things you cannot do for them. Coaches should make sure that they are not attempting to replace the parent or guardian and to keep the relationship professional.

2. **Don't Become Too Much of a Friend**
    a. As coaches work closely with their athletes, obvious bonds are forged that give the appearance of friendship. Respect the boundaries between yourself and the athletes, and be cautious in how you communicate with them because if you are too casual, it will give the athlete a sense of familiarity that could lead to a difficult situation down the road. Coaches would not act or speak around their athletes in the same way they do with adult friends – both in and out of the profession – so they should encourage the same frame of mind with their athletes.
    b. Be careful in the advice that you give athletes, especially anything outside the scope of coaching. Let's face it, there are certain conversations that take place between coaches and athletes that should not occur. Some of those conversations should occur with parents only. Be cautious in the advice that you give because your values might be different than the parents, and you could be sending a conflicting message. Remember, your job is not to help athletes with their relationships, family problems and other serious issues. Coaches can provide some basic advice, but if the conversation starts to shift to a more serious topic, it is a good idea to get the parents involved.
    c. Have rules and expectations for your athletes and stick with them. Do not play favorites, even if you have some you like more than others. It is important to treat all of your athletes equally and enforce the rules unilaterally.

3. **Be Professional**
    a. Work hard to keep your personal life and professional life separate because once they start to mix, the job can become difficult.

b. Inviting athletes to your home is not allowed. Once they find out where you live, your status changes from Instructor to friend in a hurry.
c. Your cell phone number is to be shared with parents only (not players). While it is important for your athletes to be able to contact you, more often than not, that contact is better made through e-mail because then conversations can be documented.
d. Coaches are not to be connected with players via social media (Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, Instagram, etc.) These types of easy electronic communication can make getting in touch with your athletes easier, but it can also be a connection to things that could place you in a negative light. As these types of communication become larger conduits for athletes to share information with friends and family, be aware that colleges and universities are watching these sites as well searching for inappropriate activities and potential rule breaking. Again, like phone numbers, you would be best served by avoiding these types of situations.
e. When in doubt, place yourself in the position of a parent. If you think that you would consider a particular activity or conversation between your child and their Instructor inappropriate, then chances are the parents of your athletes will as well. Place yourself in their shoes when considering if the situation you are in is something that you should continue participating in.

4. **Keep Conversations Appropriate**
   a. There are subjects that coaches should discuss with their athletes and others that parents should discuss with them. If you are having conversations outside the scope of basketball, it is not difficult to determine if that conversation is appropriate or not. Conversation topics should deal with the basketball and discussion about personal matters must be avoided – unless it is something that has started to affect their on-the-field performance.
   b. When an athlete comes to you seeking advice on aspects of their personal life, it is best to direct them to their parents rather than attempt to give an answer yourself. If the conversation starts to drift into those types of areas, have the athlete talk to their parents to resolve those problems. Obviously, coaches need to be aware of things like abuse or drug problems because they are legally obligated to report them, but talking about their love life and things of that nature should be off limits.