

February 20, 2021

Dear Mayor Samwick and Members of the Board,

When this process quietly started in the fall/December of 2020 there was something I wanted to share with you all but I could not put my finger on it. Then in January when it burst into the public domain and the letters started getting posted, the sheer breadth and depth of Rippy's good works overwhelmed my thoughts and yet there was still something on the tip of my tongue. Finally, during the last BOT meeting, when listening to so many heartfelt stories, I realized what had been missing from all this discourse.

For the BOT to make a truly informed decision you need to know the nuts and bolts, dare I say minutiae of Rippy's philosophy. It is not about the 7th and 8th grade team(s) but rather his philosophy for the entire Scarsdale Youth Football program. I might call it 'the secret sauce' of a successful youth experience. I can authoritatively comment on this since I coached under Rippy in the REC program for over 14 years, from Flag football thru 8th grade and back again a couple of times. I then stayed involved by being the melodic voice of the game day announcer for the Varsity Football program at SHS. That lasted for a few years until my youngest son graduated from SHS in 2015. To be honest, I stopped because I had other things on my plate. Rippy's plate, even after 25+ years, has always been and will continue to be about "the kids of Scarsdale."

So first off, why does SYF need a secret sauce?

The youth football experience is unique because it is a hybrid. It's not travel since there are no tryouts or cuts but like travel in that we play against towns all over Westchester. It's not a single grade or school but multiple schools/grades/ages/sizes and maturation levels grouped together. To put that another way, while youth football is broken up in 2 grade increments, it is not unusual to have a 3 year age difference between the oldest and youngest kids on each team. That gap is less important in the younger grades but as kids mature, it does become an issue that has to be managed. Size and Speed does make a difference in Football.

Another tidbit that makes youth football unique is it is a sport that requires 11 focused, committed athletic kids or more often than not, 11 loosey goosey fidgety distracted boys trying to concentrate enough just to start a play. Think about that? What other sport requires 11 moving as one just to start? Not baseball, not tennis, not lacrosse, not hockey, not basketball, etc etc etc. That requirement is in and of itself an incredibly high bar for playing time for some kids. Trust me, every 3rd and 4th grade practice includes an inordinate amount of time just getting everyone to follow the snap count. I am happy to report, the kids of Scarsdale "get it" after a few years but most need reminding every now and again even when they are in High School. Another piece to this puzzle is that every child needs to remember "the play". You can not just show up and grab a ball. Starting in 3rd and 4th grade we have playbooks. Each child/ pre-teen/ young man has to know the entire play book, and it gets more complicated at each grade level. Again, it is a sport that requires 11 kids to actually study and remember what to do

under sometimes stressful conditions (like when a larger boy, who is already shaving, lines up against you). Each year of playing adds to the foundation of football knowledge and as that knowledge grows it enables them to react instinctively in the scrum and compete. All things being equal, experience is an advantage i.e. a 6th grader has a deeper reservoir of knowledge and reacts faster than his 5th grade teammate.

So what is the secret sauce? He makes the drudgery of preparation and practice fun. From 1st grade to 8th grade, he has made sure there is a payoff for their hard work. He builds on each year of participation so the kids grow individually and as a group. He has institutionalized this knowledge and shares it with new coaches, parents and players. He has countless team meetings, parent meetings and dinners so everyone knows what to expect, good, bad or indifferent. Rippy is a master at quality control. He makes sure each coach at every level is well versed in the latest practice drills and how to run them properly. The playbooks are uniform in terms of terminology and numbering from 3rd thru 8th and even on to 12th grade. He also makes sure via his coaches that each child and parent understands what the team expects from them in terms of time, effort and commitment. Overlaying all of this is a laser-like, never ending focus with every coach and player on SAFETY. If a player is not prepared, they can get hurt... or if a player is not prepared, the person next to him or her or behind them can get hurt. Coaches make evaluations at every practice and are constantly coaching up the players in drills and intrasquad scrimmages. The never ending goal is to practice the way you play so you are prepared. If a player doesn't take practice seriously, then they may not play as often as they like because SYF errs on the side of SAFETY for them and their teammates. BTW, a near universal lesson that a boy must learn is the effort that worked at a lower grade level doesn't always work at the next grade level because the game speeds up. Truth be told, all three of my sons did not play before they were ready or at times were taken off the field to get an emphatic tutorial by one of the coaches on the finer points of not letting the QB get killed or make sure you tackle with your head up and shoulders square. His goal, across the program, is to put children in a position to succeed but not before they are ready. I know it took me a while to realize the method to his madness. For Rippy, the sun doesn't rise and fall on winning and losing. It's nice but it's not the be all and end all. From Flag Football thru Varsity, it's about the kids, having fun and life lessons learned. Some of those lessons are hard lessons for kids and parents to accept but he never shrinks from those teaching moments. You are not *given* playing time, you *earn* it ...hard work pays off... you cannot take a play off... work together to achieve a goal...your teammates are your family...ice cream for everyone after a hot steamy practice...memories made.

What are real world examples of that preparation? Rippy came up with the idea to start a flag football program to get the kids involved earlier, learn some skills i.e. snap count, and to develop a love for the game. He saw a need for that. We expected 50-60 kids to attend...over 200 showed up. When those 1st and 2nd graders went up to 3rd and 4th grade, they knew some rudimentary things which made it a better experience for all the kids and the coaches. When the influx of all these flag footballers made playing time an issue, Rippy created the 5th quarter for the entire league. Every kid had an additional outlet for playing time. As an aside, Rippy had to cajole the referees to be on board since they went from our games to Varsity

games across the county and were always pressed for time. That one little data point is an example of all the unsung minutiae that Rippy handles to insure a great experience for the kids.

When the 5th quarter wasn't enough, he engineered the splitting of Scarsdale teams. First 2, then 4, and as many as 5 teams. Winning or losing went out the window. When there weren't enough players to split a team, he organized 7th grade only games/scrimmages against other towns to insure the younger or less experienced boys got on the field and had a chance to play. More games, more opportunities to play, more fun for everyone.

The last thing I want to mention is something specific to the 7th and 8th grade team. Specifically, the maturation process and the roller coaster of Middle School. Rippy has lived with his players onset of puberty for 25+ years. He understands the balancing act the 7th and 8th graders are dealing with, whether it's the increased time demands and obstacles of school work, other sports, religious education, the anxiety of high school on the horizon or the advent of the teen years and the body differences in players. In addition, unbeknownst to many of his kids, the measuring stick every player uses keeps changing through high school and beyond and as you have read in the countless letters, he has been there to help them sort through life. BTW, at this time, I need to give a shout out to Rippy's wife, Phyllis, for her commitment and patience too.

The many letters you have received have spoken about the man. In the end, I believe that the purpose of this letter was to give you all just a small hint of Rippy's POV and how he has made sure these ideas were applied by all coaches for the benefit of all the kids of Scarsdale Youth Football. I can tell you first hand his actions have never been an off the cuff, fly by the seat of his pants approach, but rather his philosophy has been distilled from years of learnings and he has applied them universally across the entire youth program and given life lessons that each of "his kids" can apply forever.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

John McCann
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