



**BY GRANT  
MILLER**  
*Editorial*

What kind of message is it that some high school coaches are sending to young athletes and their parents in our community?

“Hire me on the side to give your kid private lessons and pay to play on my sports club travel team,” I’m told these coaches are saying. “It will help your child make the high school team, and possibly even start. Through private lessons or club team membership, your child will get a chance to practice with the coach and have an advantage over other players.”

It is every parent’s dream to watch their kids play high school sports, but at what cost? Are these parents being blackmailed? Does anyone think this is unethical and a violation of Miami-Dade school athletic policy? At the very least, there is a blatant conflict of interest here.

At one local high school, an assistant coach was staying after practice to work with a group of athletes. Some parents thought the paid after-hours sessions seemed odd and unethical. When asked why they failed to speak out, they admitted that they didn’t want to risk hurting their children’s chance of playing.

The situation with club teams is not much different. I got a call from a high school coach who runs a camp inside the high school gym. When I asked who the participants were, the coach admitted that most of them were players from the high school’s team.

It sure looks like these kids are paying for an advantage, a chance to work with their high school coach all the time. I heard one parent say, “If I don’t have my child pay and play on the club travel team, my child will not make the team next season.”

At one high school, the head coach stood up for what is right. The coach told the assistant to make a choice — give up the private lessons or move on. The assistant coach packed up and left. Good decisions by both coaches.

This problem of pay-and-play is not limited to any particular sport. I’ve seen or heard of similar situations in baseball, basketball, golf, softball, swimming, tennis and volleyball.

Who needs to take care of this problem? Parents certainly cannot; they want their kids to make the high school team and play. I urge someone with authority in each of the various school athletic departments to address this unethical situation immediately and take action to end it.

## Letter from **COACH BISCEGLIA**

In cases like those Mr. Miller is describing, where coaches use their leadership position to exploit the very people they should be serving, serious damage is being done to the integrity of the profession. I want to assure all those concerned with the operation of our baseball program here at Coral Reef that it should never be construed that our coaching staff would ever participate in this form of bribery.

Dade County Schools prohibits a teacher from accepting payment for tutoring any student assigned to his or her class. The corollary to this, in my opinion, is as long as the final decision about a player’s participation on a team is not made by the same coach who is being paid for private instruction no conflict of interest or unethical motivations exist. That is where the baseball program at Coral Reef High School distinguishes itself from what Mr. Miller is describing. All final decisions about player selection to each of our teams are made solely and exclusively by me based upon my evaluation of the player and what he can contribute to the overall needs of the program. None of my services are rendered for payment.

My recommendation to parents has always been to carefully research their options before electing to have a son or daughter participate in private training. The decision should be made for the sole purpose of personal development and should never be linked to any form of favoritism. I wholeheartedly encourage extra training, provided the student-athlete still accepts the instruction I provide with regard to participation on the school team.

Here at Coral Reef our weight training and conditioning program runs year round and is open not only for those already in the program, but for anyone wishing to participate during the off season. Over the years we have sponsored summer and fall league baseball with our affiliates in the South Florida Travel League, the Continental Amateur Baseball Association, The Pinstripe Sports League, and many tournament associations for the purpose of offering our student-athletes more playing time. Fees are based on the cost for each player’s participation with regard to league fees, insurance, and equipment needs. Our booster club is non-profit, our coaches receive no compensation beyond the supplement provided by Miami-Dade County Schools, and the upkeep of our facility is provided by the volunteer efforts of our stakeholders.

I refute, unequivocally, that a “pay to play” mechanism exists in our program. By extension, this also applies to any notion that if a player does or doesn’t “fundraise” (*at most schools that means pay*) he will be favored or penalized accordingly. This is contrary to our philosophy at Coral Reef and is contrary to my ethical orientation both as a coach and as an educator.