



September 9, 2016

Brighton Lacrosse Parents & Players,

Welcome to the 2016-17 season!

First a disclaimer: If anyone was omitted from this email it was unintentional. It is intended for all coaches, players and their parents within the Brighton program. Thus, while email distribution lists are still being perfected, please feel free to forward this on to any person in the Brighton program or anyone interested in joining the family.

The purpose of this letter is fairly simple...I want you all to get to know me as a coach...my approach, my beliefs, my expectations, my priorities, and my methodologies. And apologies in advance that this letter turned out longer than I had originally envisioned. But nonetheless a healthy exercise for me and hopefully beneficial for all of you. Along the way, I'll touch on the following topics: 1-player-coach relationship 2-parent-coach relationship, and 3-player-parent relationship. All three are vital to our overall program success.

So let's begin...

Part 1: Players and Coaches and the 2016-17 team motto

First things first...this season, and every season, is about the players. Parents & coaches...I am talking to you here... If there is anything about this season that includes your ego or your personal agenda, we need to make a change of plans. It is and always will be ALL about the boys. I hope everyone involved in the Brighton program understands that, believes that, and lives it.

Next, as with any season before it begins, we have boundless opportunity. At the Varsity level for example, we have a core group of experienced players with the talent to be one of the best in our program's storied tradition. And as with every year, I'm looking forward to seeing the "surprise" players. Those players that rise up and who will play key roles on this year's team. But make no mistake, you don't become a "surprise player" by just growing a few inches or bulking up a bit. It's the dedication and hard work in the off-season, and the mental commitment to get better each and every day. More on this topic later in the email.

Additionally, we have a high school coaching staff that I am sincerely proud of and excited to coach with. Most have experience playing lacrosse at a high level and will bring that expertise to Brighton. But more importantly, they are good people and will be great mentors. I won't get into backgrounds and other details regarding the coaches in this letter as the program will be releasing information about them shortly.

For the 2016-17 season, our team motto will be *Band of Brothers*. First, "the why". I am a huge fan of military history and the inspirational examples that come from our brave service members. And I think that team sports in their basic design of practice for preparation of games correlate very well to the military structure of training for preparation of battle. Thus what makes someone a good soldier can also make someone a good lacrosse player. Second, "the what". The term "Band of Brothers" originally comes from the St. Crispin's Day Speech in William Shakespeare's play Henry V, in which the King inspires an underdog army shortly before a battle. I recommend reading the speech. But I also am drawing inspiration from the 2001 HBO miniseries

titled *Band of Brothers*, a compilation of true stories during WWII in which members of the 101st Airborne Division's Easy Company are followed from training, to D-Day, and through to the end of the war. More to come on this in future communications.

Part 2: My Core beliefs & How they will be used with the players

There are no shortcuts to success. Period. I believe in the process of preparation and the champion mindset. Both are crucial for success in lacrosse and life.

For background, my grandfather was a dairy farmer in Ohio and for anyone who has grown up on a farm, early mornings and tough physical work are commonplace. And repeating that daily was the basic expectation. It was there that I learned to do things right the first time, to avoid doing them again. I learned to value the details and take pride in my work. And then there was my dad...the very accomplished football player. He was demanding and always pushed me in sports. He taught me the value of both physical and mental preparation. He'd push me to do the things I had to do today, so I could do the things I wanted to do tomorrow. In other words, prepare, prepare, prepare so that the games were fun and easy. But both of them also taught me the value of treating others the way you want to be treated. To be honest, to be respectful, and to be humble. Character was very important to them, and I was punished if I stepped out of line. All of this (and a bit more) made me who I am today.

Also worth noting, I do not pretend to know everything about the sport of lacrosse, nor do I know all there is to know about defensive lacrosse technique and schemes. I am forever a student of the game and I put countless hours into attending clinics/webinars, reading books/articles, and watching game film and other videos. But more important than X's and O's is my dedication to engage, inspire, influence, and impact my players. We commit to working together, we need to provide feedback both ways, and we must base our relationship on mutual respect and trust. I make a commitment to be honest and fair in my decisions and put the team in the best situation to be successful. And players must commit to responding to my direction without hesitation and with maximum effort.

Process of Preparation

Our Process of Preparation is lacrosse specific, but it's also an approach to life. In simple form: "concentrate on what you are doing today, and try to build on that tomorrow." We're not going to talk about "what" we're going to accomplish, we are going to talk about "how" we're going to do it. We won't talk about winning championships in May, we will talk about being champions every day of our lives. I'm annoyed by people who don't understand the process of hard work...like little kids in the back seat asking 'Are we there yet?... we will get to our destination one mile-marker at a time or rather one play at a time. Each possession our players will look across at the opponent and commit themselves to dominate that person. It's about individuals dominating the individuals they're playing against. If you can do this...if you can focus on the one possession and wipe out the distractions...then we will all be satisfied with the effort. And if you can continue to dominate through the 4th quarter, we will be satisfied with the result.

Players - Don't think about a State Championship. Think about what you need to do in this drill, on this play, in this moment. Let's think how we can improve today.

+2 (plus two)

I want our players to want to do extra. But I can't force this. It must first be a self-commitment that might have various inspirations, such as to get more playing time, earn the respect of their teammates, to make their parent's proud, to impress a girlfriend, to get recruited, to be the best player ever... whatever the inspiration is isn't important. The important part is when it becomes an infectious

mindset in the team and ultimately the team norm. That is when a Program gets to another level of success. And again, it starts with a mindset. Preparation at its best.

Culture

We don't have one individual on our team that can make our team great, but we can have one individual who could destroy the team chemistry by making bad decisions and destroy all the things we're talking about. Team chemistry begins to surface in the summer. True leaders start to emerge. You start to see the core buy-in that everybody has in terms of how they go about what they do. For the first time, the responsibility becomes the player's, instead of somebody else's. You start to see what the team might be. Every team has its own identity...its own leaders. I love to watch this the annual cycle.

Bottom line to players – You must be responsible and accountable for the job you need to perform as a Brighton player and as a teammate. Equally important is the effort, the toughness, and the dependability you must have in carrying out your tasks. Everything you do, everything you have, everything you become is ultimately the result of the choices you make. You have the power to direct your life. You have to have discipline to do things on your own. There's not always going to be a parent or coach to make you do something. You have to have discipline to do it yourself.

Player's Daily Goals:

- 1) Respect and trust your teammates
- 2) Make a positive impact on someone else
- 3) Dominate your opponent
- 4) Be responsible
- 5) Act like a champion

If we get a critical mass of players to think this way, what tends to happen is they want other players that think this way out there on the field with them. So they influence in a positive way. I like this.

Distractions

Let the record state right now that we will have moments of bad officiating. This is a fact, and the sooner we all understand that, the better off we will be. We will have penalties called against us, possessions called the wrong way, and no calls when the other team commits a penalty against us. If we all realize this and accept we have no control over it, we can eliminate it as a distraction to our plans. The boys will not be allowed at any time to show any negative emotion against a referee. They will not shake their head, or pout, or say anything. Over the years I've been at plenty of games –as a player, a fan, a parent, and a coach and heard plenty of screaming at referees. Never in that time have I seen a referee change a call because he got yelled at. More often than not, I think that kind of thing works against a team. We tell our players all the time to keep their mouths shut when the ref makes a call. We can't play the game without referees. I know most of them and they are regular guys – nice guys who like to stay involved with the sport. If there's a problem, I try to address it. They try their best. They are human and most of the time they get it right. So parents - please, please stay off the referees. It's unbecoming for our school, our Bengal Program, and in theory I am supposed to address fan/referee issues if and when it occurs. I'd really not like to be in that position during a game.

We can control the process of preparation – the work, the approach, the attitude. But we can't control the outcome. We can't control the weather, the officiating, or injuries. And the opponent always has a say. We can't control how good the other team is. So we don't really focus on "winning" – because we can't control that part. In fact, I try not to use that word too much – even though our goal is always to win the game, and for many years that part has taken care of itself pretty well. But we know that if we prepare the best we can, if we try hard and stay positive, if we do our best to execute and support our teammates . . . if we work together as a team, then we'll give ourselves the best chance to win. We try to stay in the process, we don't focus on the

outcome. Because if we focus on the outcome (winning/losing), it messes up the process (players tighten up and get nervous), which in turn affects the outcome! Life works that way too right?

This idea can be simplified in the following equation:

$$E + R = O$$

Event (E) + Reaction (R) = Outcome (O)

I am focused on the "R" - It is the only part of the equation that our players' can control. When the "event" is good, that's the easy part. But how do the players "react" when things don't go their way? Do they hang their head?...I hope not. Do they hit their stick on the ground in frustration?...not while they are playing for me. I want them to focus on making the next play. Everyone will make mistakes. I want to see players that reacts with resilience and determination...a never quit mentality. These players are Champions.

There is a great book I'd recommend titled, *The Obstacle Is The Way*, where the author draws comparisons from various figures throughout time including Marcus Aurelius, Theodore Roosevelt, Steve Jobs, and others, and ties together the idea that how each of us responds to obstacles defines us. It is an educational read in the art of managing perceptions and impressions.

Dare to be Great

What does it take to be great at lacrosse? After all, being great isn't natural for a player. Naturally most are all average. You need to be tall, strong, and fast, right? Wrong.

I'd say lacrosse greatness is 50% genetics and 50% attitude. And the best part is while genetics can only be marginally changed (e.g. you can get a little faster or a little stronger), your attitude can be greatly changed.

Players - If you want to be great, you must bend your entire life around being great. Beating the urge to rest. It's a never ending process. It's mental toughness. Every day you come to practice, you get better or you get worse. You're not going to stay the same and it's all going to start with how you think. How you think will determine the mental intensity you play with. And without that mental intensity, we cannot improve as a team. Mental toughness is a perseverance that you have when you can make yourself do something that you really don't feel like doing. For example, I will not allow my players to put their hand on their knees or show in their faces they are tired going into the fourth quarter. If they do, they are going to get extra conditioning that next practice. Because if they show they are tired, they are showing the other team they can be beat.

The mental toughness approach is geared toward showing players that their minds are as important to lacrosse greatness as their bodies. And be aware, I will test each player's mental toughness.

Another book I'd recommend is titled, *The Hard Hat* by Jon Gordon. It is a true story about the 2004 Cornell lacrosse team. It is one of my favorite lacrosse books of all time.

Player Mandate #1: Every Varsity player will be required to read this book before our spring season begins. It's a quick read at only 111 pgs. I read it in one afternoon.

Part 3: Player – Parent relationship

Another disclaimer: Relationships are dynamic and in no way do I have the answers. Rather, in this section, I am attempting to present ideas and perspectives that are thought provoking and will hopefully lead to better dialogue between player and parent.

Message to the Parents:

As a parent, you play a key role in the success of the team and the positive experience of your child. Your sons need and expect your support even though they may not say that to you. In my opinion, the best thing you can say to your son is to encourage him to give it his very best, every day. That's all we can ever expect. You can also encourage him to support his teammates, take advice willingly from his coaches, and to stay positive and team-oriented. I stay in touch with many of my former players, the oldest of whom are approaching 30. What they remember is the feeling of being part of a team. They remember what it means to be a Bengal. The work, the commitment, the togetherness. The laughs, the tears. Being part of something bigger than themselves. That's where we are going with this group. That stuff lasts a lifetime. And if we can get another Championship ring, that's a bonus.

Message to the Players:

Fact: You wouldn't be where you are today without your parents. Give them the respect and acknowledgement for giving you the opportunity to play lacrosse.

Player Mandate #2: After every game this year, before our final huddle as a team, you will be required to find one of your parents, dad or mom, and give them a hug. If neither of your parents are in attendance, you must find another parent and give them a hug. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Message to the Parents:

After a game, players tend to need time to come back from being a "performer" to being just a regular kid. They need time and space. And though I'm sure they want to see you, they probably don't want to talk a lot about the game, or about specifics. I know they don't want to answer questions. Even when we win, players tend to think about ways they can improve, they process stuff from the game for hours afterwards. And that's good in general. They are learning from their mistakes. What they really don't need is advice or criticism in those moments after a game. Knowing you are there and seeing you is sometimes all that is necessary. They just want you to be mom or dad. They already have a coach.

Message to the Players:

I assume you don't always want us as parents to be invested too much in what you do in lacrosse – because if we care too much we suggest that it's as (or more) important to us as parents than to you. It's your thing – I get it. But if it's your thing you also need to own it. You are responsible for it. You need to ask your coach about playing time issues. You need to text a coach when you will not be at practice. You need to communicate fees and fundraising to your parents. Procrastination will lead to issues. And grunting is not an acceptable form of communication. I know-I tried it when I was your age. You want you parent's to back off a bit – then OWN IT!

Message to the Parents:

One day you're going to get in the car with your son's water bottle that he left at home for the last time, that sour-sweaty smell coming from the back seat, and the little chunks of dirt that have been knocked loose from muddy cleats all over the once new floor mats. You're going to climb the stadium stairs one last time, listen to his name announced, watch him take the field and shoot a glance up your way and a little wave. You're going to hear the last whistle, watch the last half time talk, the last hand shake, shade out that last bright sun beam blocking your view, and then you are going to get in the car for the last time as a player's parent. So how will you remember the journey? And how will you want your son to remember the journey? This year, as your player walks onto that practice field, he may be terrible, he may be fantastic, and most likely he will have moments of both. But did he have fun? Did he learn valuable lessons? Did he grow and mature? Will he cherish the memories? Remember that this is his thing. Don't waste time keeping up with the Jones's of sports parents, just love EVERY SINGLE SECOND.

Message to the Players:

When a player complains to a parent, they might be putting their parent in a difficult spot. That parent instinctively feels the need to choose the side of their son and get in defense mode. And thus may react by being negative about the team or the coach. Players – Don't put your parents in this situation! Be a man and take responsibility for your actions. The team is the top priority and personal goals come second.

I was speaking to a few players that graduated in 2012 this past spring and I want to share with you their memories. Not one of them could remember who won individual awards (All State or All Conference). But they recounted in details some great memories from their trip to Colorado, some funny moments in practice, some close wins, during the season, and the heartbreak of losing in the quarterfinals by 2 goals. It was the team successes and failures that endured in their minds. That's what they talked about - what they did together.

Message to the Parents:

When your son comes to you one evening and is a little down (it will happen), resist the urge to go into "fix-it" mode. And please resist the urge to undermine team cohesiveness and discipline. Rather our players need parents to provide discipline and guidance. Parents who really wish to be a positive factor in their son's athletic experience would be best served making sure their son does his part. Don't overestimate your son's potential and form unrealistic expectations. Help reinforce that in a team sport, the team is the top priority. I am always confounded when players make a bad decision and are punished by a coach and parents then complain or try to intervene on their son's behalf. Parents may make excuses or point out other players' faults in an attempt to justify the behavior in question. Why not make your son accountable for his decisions and help teach him that in life he will be judged by his actions?

We are fortunate to have such a great group of parents. They built the program. They are a critical part of what it is today. I will do my part to keep the atmosphere inclusive and transparent. Parents - I ask that you continue to support the program in public and with your sons – nothing negative. It's more important than you know in how successful we are.

Part 4: Coach – Parent relationship

I've been a parent on the sidelines. One of my daughters had a particularly rough season with a coach. At the end of the season, I met with the coach and thanked her for the time she had devoted to the team. My wife, a bit confused, asked how I could actually thank someone whom had done a poor job? But I understood that coaches make a sacrifice of time away from their own families. Regardless of the quality of their craft, I thanked the coach for her time, not for her coaching style, and that was all that needed to be said. I present this perspective so that you (parents) think twice about reacting emotionally – in the heat of the moment. Instead practice the "24 hour rule".

As parents, there must be an acceptance that your perception is skewed because of your emotional investment in your son. To illustrate, imagine you are at a youth football game and the quarterback throws two consecutive interceptions. Do you boo and criticize the kid who threw the ball? Probably not, because it's youth football. So after our initial reaction, we don't boo. But we are still upset. Our anger has to go somewhere. So we say something like, "Why does coach keep calling so many pass plays?" Criticizing a coach's play calling, offensive or defensive schemes or decisions about playing time does much harm to a situation.

Lessons learned in sports transfer to life away from sports. There are going to be good bosses and not-so-good bosses. Are you going to call your son's boss if you think they are treating your son unfairly or you disagree with his approach? Think about this before you call his coach.

Policy: Regarding lacrosse concerns, including depth chart, playing time, etc., the player must have a discussion with a coach before the parent reaches out to that coach. Parents - Don't rob your son's

opportunity to be a man and ask for direct feedback. Therefore, if a parent comes to any coach on this topic, they will first ask which coach the player spoke to.

Parents & Players - For any non-lacrosse related concerns regarding the player, please reach out to me directly.

Anytime a problem has to be addressed by the parent and the coach, make an appointment to see me personally. I want you to know my view of the situation. The story you heard from your son may or may not be completely factual. Parents and coaches should act in concert to help in the development of the athlete. And as a parent no one has a bigger role to play or a better opportunity to affect positive behavior from a son than you do.

Parents – Please reinforce the coach’s philosophy and encourage your son to get involved in all team activities. Understand that lacrosse is a hard game with intense physical and mental demands. Ensure your son never misses a practice – so please schedule vacations, birthday parties, doctor appointments around our practice and game schedules. The player will be penalized for missing practices or games. Cheer for all the players, not just your own son. Better yet, cheer for other players more than you cheer for your own. That reinforces the notion of team. I expect from time to time there will be a player and or fan(s) from an opponent who are less than sportsmanlike – everyone makes mistakes in the heat of the moment. But please under no circumstances say anything to an opposing player (or coach or fan) that isn’t positive.

Parents – in the spirit of inclusiveness and transparency, all are welcome to attend and observe tryouts and practices – at your own risk of course (lacrosse balls hurt when they hit you, just ask a goalie).

Part 5: Coach – Player relationship

I’ve already discussed many topics that the players will experience. But there are a few others I will discuss here.

Player Academics

Student-athletes must prioritize school. I expect all players to maintain a 2.5 GPA or higher with no F’s in any class. No exceptions. Any player who fails to meet this requirement, will have a meeting with me and their parent to discuss recourse. I will be monitoring grades from Jan 1 through the end of the school year.

School

During season, discipline from the school administration equals discipline from team coaches. Suspension from school = suspension from team. Be warned, the principal has me on speed dial and Officer/Coach Shirts has eyes on all of you.

Pay it Forward

All Varsity players are mandated to volunteer 10 days to assisting the youth program. You will see me dedicate a lot of time to the youth program (I already have over the past month), because it is important to our future success. And I am asking that players be a part of that dedication.

Player Mandate #3: From Sept 2016 through June 2017, every player should look to attend a youth practice, a youth game, or a school in an effort to grow the sport and connect the high school and youth programs.

Some of the days will be directed by the Varsity coaches and some can be at your own will (just let me know when you have volunteered). And while you are volunteering you are answering to the head coach of that team to maximize your impact.

Communication

I expect respect and honesty from players. Communicate with your coach before you will be late or absent from any lacrosse related activity – a punishment might still be appropriate, but it will be more severe if there is no communication. Also communicate any team feedback to your coach in a respectful manner – that’s what leaders do. Finally, be a man and ask a coach for feedback if you are looking for advice on how to individually get better.

Players - everyone on the team has a role, everyone has a purpose, everyone has an equal stake in how we do. Some will play in games more than others because they earn it – not because they are entitled to it. We will have depth charts this year so you can see where you stand. If you want to play, it is up to you to earn it.

Players - Starting on a Varsity lacrosse team doesn’t automatically make you a good person. These two things are neither correlated or mutually exclusive. To me being a positive influence to others, and being respectful of others matters a whole lot more than being a great athlete. When you can be both, it is exceptional.

Players – Don’t define yourselves solely by your success in lacrosse. If you do, you will be disappointed. Because someday relatively soon, sports will be over and you will have to be the person you are going to be. Hopefully your athletic experience, and your experience of being a Bengal will help you in your post sports journey. At least that’s how I am approaching all of this.

Lastly Players - Stay above the garbage, honor the game and play to the best of your ability.

Final Thoughts:

You are going to see me focus a lot of time on the player’s mindset during practices and games. The question that the boys are going to hear the most is "What were you thinking?" What were you thinking when you threw that check? What were you thinking when you passed the ball? What were you thinking when you slid on that play? I am a firm believer that this game is more mental than physical, and the mental is more difficult to coach and control. And if it sounds like I am going to be more demanding of these boys, you are exactly right. I am demanding their attention, effort, attitude, and concentration every day – all the things that they can control. If they give me these things every time they show up, they will have a great experience and we will be a successful group.

There is an old Chinese proverb that states:

*Watch your thoughts, they become your words.
Watch your words, they become your actions.
Watch your actions, they become your habits.
Watch your habits, they become your character.
Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.*

I couldn’t agree more with this statement.

If anyone needs to contact me, my preferred channel is via phone or text. (203)858-2026. If a face to face meeting is needed, please send me a text or email and I will fit it into my schedule. I am looking forward to a great season.

-Coach Schaf
Go Bengals!