**Letter from Mike Matheny...**

I always said that the only team I would coach would be a team of orphans, and now here we are. I am saying this because the biggest problem with youth sports has been the parents. It is best to nip this in the bud right off the bat. The concept I am asking all of you to grab is that this experience is ALL about the boys. If anything about it includes you, we need to change plans. My main goals are as follows:

**(1) to teach these young men/women how to play the game of baseball/softball the right way**

**(2) to be a positive impact on them as young men/women, and**

**(3) do all of this with class.**

We may not win every game, but we will be the classiest coaches, players, and parents in every game we play. The boys are going to play with respect for their teammates, opposition, and the umpires no

matter what.

That said, I need to let you know where I stand. I have no hidden agenda. I have no ulterior motive other than what I said about my goals. I also need all of you to know that my priorities in life will be a part of how I coach and my expectations for the athletes. My Christian faith is the guide for my life, and I have never been one for forcing my faith down someone's throat, but I also believe it to be cowardly and hypocritical to shy away from what I think. You, as parents, need to know for yourselves and your boys/girls that when the opportunity presents itself, I will be honest with what I believe. That may make some people uncomfortable, but I did that as a player and hoped to continue it in any endeavor I get into. I am trying to get as many potential issues out in the open from the beginning. The most significant role of the parent is to be a silent source of encouragement. If you ask most players what they want their parents to do during the game, they say "NOTHING." Once again, this is ALL about the kids. I believe that little league parent feels they must participate with loud cheering and "Come on, let's go, you can do it," which adds more pressure on the kids. I will put plenty of pressure on these boys to play the game correctly with class and respect, and they will put too much pressure on themselves and each other already. You, as parents, need to be the silent, constant source of support.

Let the record stand right now that we will not have good umpiring. This is a fact, and the sooner we all understand, the better off we will be. We will have balls that bounce in the dirt, called strikes, and balls over our heads that will be called strikes. Likewise, the opposite happens with the strike zone while we are pitching. The boys will not be allowed to show emotion against the umpire at any time. They will not shake their head, pout, or say anything to the umpire. This is my job, and I will do it well. I once got paid to handle those guys, and I will let them know when they need to hear something. I am doing all of you parents a favor that you probably don't realize at this point. I have taken out any work for you except to get them there on time and enjoy. The thing that these boys need to hear is that you enjoyed watching them, and you hope that they had fun. I know that it will be very hard not to coach from the stands and yell encouraging things at your son, but I am confident that this works negatively for their development and enjoyment. Trust me on this. I

am not saying that you cannot clap for your kids when they do well. Let me do that job if you hand your child over to me to coach them.

A large part of how your child improves is **your**responsibility. The difference for kids at this level is the amount of repetition they get. This goes with pitching, hitting, and fielding. As a parent, you can help out tremendously by playing catch, throwing batting practice, hitting ground balls, or finding an instructor who will do this in your place. The more of this your kids can get, the better. This is the one constant I have found with players that reached the major leagues.... someone spent time with them away from the field.

I am okay with your son/daughter getting lessons from whomever you see fit. My only problem is if your instructor tells your son/daughter not to follow the team's plan. I will not teach a lot of mechanics at the beginning, but I will teach a mental approach and expect the boys/girls to comply. If I see something that your child is doing mechanically that is drastically wrong; I will talk with the instructor and

clear things up. The same will hold true with pitching coaches. We will have a pitching philosophy and teach the pitchers and catchers how to call a game and why we choose the pitches we choose. There is no guessing. We will have a reason for the pitches that we throw. A pitching coach will be helpful for the boys to get their arms in shape and be ready to throw when spring arrives. Every child on this team will be working as a pitcher. We will use these young arms sparingly and closely watch the number of innings the boys are throwing.

I will be throwing so much info at these boys/girls that they will suffer from overload for a while, but eventually, they will get it. I am a stickler about the thought process of the game. I will talk non-stop about situational hitting, pitching, and defensive preparation. The question they will hear the most is, "What were you thinking?" What were you thinking when you threw that pitch? What were you thinking during that at bat? What were you thinking before the pitch was thrown, were you anticipating anything? This game is more mental than physical, and the mental may be more difficult, but it can be taught and can be learned by an 11 and 12-year-old. If it sounds like I am going to be demanding of these boys, you are exactly right. I am demanding their attention, and the other thing I will require is effort. Their attitude, their concentration, and their effort are the things that they can control. If they give me these things every time they show up, they will have a great experience.

The best situation for all of us is for you to plan on handing these kids over to the assistant coaches and me when you drop them off and plan on them being mine for the two or so hours that we have scheduled for a game or the time that we have scheduled for the practice. I would like for these boys to have some responsibility for having their water, not needing you to keep running to the concession stand, or having parents behind the dugout asking their sons/daughters if they are thirsty, hungry, or too hot. Please share this information with other guests...like grandparents. If there is an injury, we will get you to help, but besides that, let's pretend that they are at work for a short time and that you have been granted the pleasure of watching. I will have them at games early so we can get stretched and loosened up, and I will meet with the boys after the game. After the meeting, they are all yours again. As I write this, I sound like the little league Nazi, but I believe this will make things easier for everyone involved.

 The family is the most critical institution in the lives of these athletes. With that being said, family events are much more important than sports events. I ask that you are considerate of the rest of the team and let the team manager and myself know when you will miss, and let us know as soon as possible. I know there will be times when I will miss either for family reasons or other commitments. If your son/daughter misses a game or a practice, it is not the end of the world, but there may be some repercussions, just out of respect for the kids that put effort into making it. The repercussions could be running, altered playing time, or position in the batting order.

Speaking of the batting order, I would like to address that right from the top as well, seeing that next to playing time, this is the second most complained about an issue or tied for second with position on the defensive field. Once again, I need you to know that I am trying to develop each boy individually, and I will give them a chance to learn and play any position they are interested in. This team will also be competitive, and when we get into situations where we are focusing on winning, like a tournament, we are going to put the boys in the position that will give the team the best opportunity. I will talk with the boys/girls individually and have them tell me their favorite position and what other positions they would like to learn about. As this season progresses, there is a chance that your son may be playing a position that they don't necessarily like, but I will need your support about their role on the team. I know that times have changed, but one of the greatest lessons that my father taught me was that my coach

was always right...even when he was wrong. The principle is a great life lesson about how things work. I hope to have enough humility to come to your son/daughter if I treated him wrong and apologize. Our culture has lost this respect for authority mostly because the kids hear the parents constantly complaining about the teachers and coaches of the child.

You should know that we will likely lose many games this year. The main reason is that we need to determine how we measure up with our talent pool. The only way to do this is to play against some of the best teams. But, if the boys/girls put their work in at home and give me their best effort, we can play with just about any group. Time will tell.

The boys/girls must be ready to play whenever they come to the field. Shirts tucked in, hats on straight, and pants not drooping down to their knees. **There is no excuse for a lack of hustle on a baseball field. From the first step outside the dugout, they will hustle.** They will have a fast jog to their position, to the plate, and back to the bench when they make an out. We will run out every hit harder than any team we play and learn how always to back up a play to help our teammates. Every player will be required to move to a spot**in every single play. Players that do not hustle and run out hit balls will not play.** The boys will catch on to this quickly. The baseball game becomes very boring when players are not thinking about the next play and what they could do to help the team. Players on the bench will not be messing around. I will constantly be talking with them about situations and what they would be doing if they were in a specific position or if they were the batter. If the boys want to know, there is as much to learn on the bench as on the field. All of this will take some time for the boys to conform to. They are boys, and I am not trying to take away from that, but they can bear down and concentrate hard for a little while during the games and practices.

I know this works because this was how I was taught the game and how our parents acted in the stands. We started our little league team in a little suburb of Columbus, Ohio, when I was ten. We had a very disciplined coach that expected the same from us. We committed eight summers to this man and were rewarded for our efforts. I went to Michigan, one went to Duke, one to Miami of Florida, two to North Carolina, one to Central Florida, one to Kent State, and most of the others played smaller division one or division two baseball. Four of us went on to play professionally. This was coming from a town where any colleges had ever recruited no one. I am not saying that this is what is going to happen to our boys/girls, but what I do want you to see is that this system works. I know that right now, you are asking yourself if this is what you want to get into, and I understand that it may not be the right fit for some of you. However, there is also an excellent opportunity for these boys to grow together and learn lessons beyond their baseball experience. Let me know as soon as possible whether or not this is a commitment you and your son want to make.

Thanks,

Mike Matheny