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BC SCHOOL SPORTS
ATHLETIC DIRECTORS
SUMMIT

October 23-24, 2026
Richmond, BC

The Principal & Athletic Director Relationship

Presenter

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Overview

- Understanding Rules, Policies and Risk Management
- Clear and Timely Communication
- Open Dialogue Around Budgets and Costs
- Administrative Presence and Support at Events
- Coach Hiring, Development and Accountability
- Responding to Conflict Together
- Shared Vision for the Purpose of School Athletics

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Understanding Rules, Policies & Risk Management

- **Trust is Built Before a Crisis**



Shared Accountability

- Principals are ultimately responsible for school programs, while AD's often become the policy experts
  - Eligibility, Transfers, Compliance
  - Coach Conduct
  - Championship & Tournament Hosting
  - Travel – Forms & District Requirements

- Key Takeaway: No Surprises, Principals should hear about concerns from the AD first.

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Clear & Timely Communication

Trust grows when communication happens before problems arise.

01

FLAG EARLY

Risks, changes & concerns

02

ALIGN QUICKLY

Context, owner & timing

03

CLOSE THE LOOP

Decision, action & follow-up

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Inform, Consult & Escalate

- **Inform – Build time into your schedule each week to provide an update to your Principal about what is happening**
  - **Events – Home games, Tournaments, Results & New Issues**
- **Consult – Supervision, Purchasing, PAC, Coach Selection & Problems**
- **Escalate – Admin involvement in parent complaints, player and fan behavior, and social media attention.**

- **Key Takeaway: Consistent and effective communication with the Principal prevents small issues from becoming larger ones.**

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Budget and Costs

Planning Strengthens the Partnership



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Open Dialogue

- **Principals Need: Predictability, transparency, and advance planning**
- **AD's Need: Understanding of costs, awareness of rising expenses, support when unforeseen costs occur**
- **Annual Budget vs Long Term Planning**
  - **Annual: Shared or individual team costs around transportation, officials, registration fees, equipment replacement**
  - **Long Term: Uniforms, or larger equipment replacement planning**

- **Key Takeaways: A planned request strengthens partnership, a surprise request creates stress.**

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Administrative Presence & Support at Events

- Visibility, Support, Culture



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Visible Leadership

- Athletic Directors and Principals share responsibility for being visible at events
  - Unrealistic for both AD's and Administrators to attend all events
  - Plan your calendar
  - Know your coaches – what teams may require more support
  - Ad and Admin presence supports coaches, officials, players and spectators and helps build school culture.

- Key Takeaway: Know your schedules. Ensure that presence is visible at key games – rivalries, playoffs and championships.

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Coach Hiring, Development & Accountability

Setting high expectations



Athletics Succeeds or Fails Through Coaches

- Partnership Responsibilities
  - Athletic Directors – Recruit and support coaches and evaluate program needs
  - Principals – Oversees staff, addresses serious concerns, and supports coach development
- Topics to Think About
  - Teacher vs community coaches
  - Coach onboarding
  - Conduct expectations
  - Managing parent complaints

- Key Takeaway: Crucially important to set expectations early for conduct, communication and program culture.

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Responding to Conflict Together

Discuss Privately & Support Publicly



Alignment on Purpose Makes Difficult Decisions Easier

- Possibly the most important topic today
  - Is school based athletics about:
    - Participation?
    - Excellence?
    - School Culture?
    - Character Development?
    - Competitive Success?
- Usually all of the above but different teams and schools at different age levels need to prioritize these differently.
- Sit down and talk with your Principal about their experience in or with school-based athletics

- Key Takeaway: When the AD and Principal agree on the purpose of athletics, decisions become easier.

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Strong Partnerships. Strong Programs.

Better Student-Athlete Experiences

Trust	Alignment	Support
Understanding Rules	Shared Vision	Event Presence
Professional Competence	Budget Priorities	Problem Solving
Reliability	Expectations for Coaches	Communication
Transparency	Student-Athlete Experience	Advocacy for Athletes

The most successful athletic programs are rarely led by a great athletic director or principal alone. They are built through a strong partnership between both, grounded in trust, aligned in purpose, and committed to supporting student-athletes together.

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Questions?

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