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Our say:

***Coaches need
screening, training
on handling parents***

MANY OF us remember a youth league coach who had a big role in our upbringing. Such coaches were sometimes second fathers or mothers who gave us confidence or even a shoulder to cry on. Today, coaches mean just as much to children eager to compete on the field, have some fun and even please their parents.

Unfortunately, the rewards of coaching are not always as great as they once were. While the parents of the past often left decisions to the coach, many parents today are interventionists. It has become all too common for some to blame the coach for not giving their children more playing time or to scream at umpires for certain calls. Some coaches have even been assaulted by parents.

The county Department of Recreation and Parks recently held a clinic for coaches, and it was as therapeutic as it was instructive. More than 200 coaches, inspired to teach good sportsmanship to children, commiserated about unruly parents. But they were also there to learn from each other.

To the credit of the department and its director, Dennis Callahan, attendance at these clinics is required. This is one of the few counties that mandate the clinics, which are a step in becoming certified. About 8,000 coaches have been certified in the last 10 years, which shows that this county has made quality coaching a priority.

Equally important, all of the coaches have undergone criminal background checks, a process that has prevented 200 people with criminal convictions from taking the field. Just recently, an applicant with a history of child abuse was denied admission to this well-screened corps.

We know the program has not always been well-received by coaches who feel the requirements are excessive and intrusive. But this isn't about them as much as it is about the children they coach. Given the scandals that have made headlines in recent years, the county is simply being responsible by keeping certain people away from the young players. Should parents expect anything less?

The background checks cost the county \$15 a person, a pittance for the peace of mind that comes from knowing that predators have not infiltrated the coaching network.

We would prefer it if criminal background checks and instruction on how to handle irresponsible parents were unnecessary, but for now they are important safeguards for children. The county Department of Recreation and Parks is on the right course in scrutinizing applicants carefully. We commend it — and the responsible coaches who have welcomed the scrutiny — for its commitment to youth sports.