

Coaches, parents shocked by alleged assault

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As news spread of the alleged assault of Blue Springs South soccer coach Steve Bettlach by a parent, reaction was mostly of shock and disbelief.

Bettlach said he was assaulted by Joseph Soto, a parent of two players who had quit the team, Monday afternoon at the high school. Bettlach went to the hospital after the incident to receive 12 stitches on the inside and outside his mouth.

Area coaches, parents and administrators talked of the event and its impact on youth and high school athletics.

John Picerno, a criminal defense attorney in Lee's Summit, is also the father of two student athletes at Lee's Summit and is a former high school coach.

"As a rule, I don't even approach a coach," Picerno said. "Hitting someone stuns me. I was just shocked. As a parent there are times when you might not agree with a high school coach, but you would never resort to violence. There should be a zero tolerance for this type of action."



■ Steve Bettlach

Former Blue Springs and Blue Springs South girls basketball coach Kenny Vance said parents have become more involved in sports in the last few years.

"I think parents feel like they are on the team sometimes," Vance said. "They're not on the team. They aren't at the practices. Maybe we need to start having intramurals for parents."

Both Picerno and Vance said lack of communication and allowing the children to learn how to deal with problems is at the root of the confrontations.

"There are coaches you are not going to agree with," Picerno said. "As a parent you won't always agree. But you know what? I've had bosses in the past or coworkers that I didn't like or agree with, but I had to deal with it and learn how to get along."

"That is a lesson you need to learn, and as a parent you have to let your child learn how to deal with these things."

Vance said communication is the key between the players and the coaches.

"You see a lot of people just go right over the coach's head," Vance said. "If they could teach their children to handle their issues instead of just going to the next level this could be something they could take with them their whole life."

"I knew it was getting bad, but I never thought it would turn to violence."