

Article of the Week (AoW) Directions

1. Mark your confusion – either highlighting or underlining.
2. Mark up the text. Annotate the article with comments, questions, inferences, etc. You can use a variety of sentences, phrases, and symbols to show your thinking.
3. Write a developed paragraph response to one of the prompts below.

One bad tweet can be costly to a student athlete

Source: Jeff DiVeronica/Democrat & Chronicle/December 30, 2014

Three years ago, Scott Fitch couldn't believe what he was hearing. A college coach recruiting two of his Fairport High School boys basketball players called to say how much he liked what he saw after watching them play an AAU game, and that he thought both were good enough to see court time on his team as freshmen.

"But we're going to stop recruiting one of them," the college coach said.

Stunned, Fitch asked why.

"We found his Twitter account, looked through it and some of what we saw isn't representative of what our university is about," the recruiter explained.

With seemingly every teenager active these days on social media, that type of conversation happens now more often than you might think. It led Fitch to find out more so that the 43-year-old could teach his players and fellow coaches at Fairport what's appropriate and inappropriate for high school students to post on Facebook, Instagram and, most prominently now, Twitter. Since then, he has done more than 40 presentations at area schools with students, coaches, faculty and parents.

Fitch also has presented "Pause Before You Post," at a Section V Sportsmanship Summit and to administrators on the state level.

"Never let a 140 character tweet cost you a \$140,000 scholarship," Brandon Chambers, an assistant men's basketball coach at Marymount (Virginia) University, tweeted on Aug. 25.

On some recruiting forms, colleges ask for a student's social media screen names or addresses.

More schools are using Twitter to give their athletes recognition, in-game updates or final scores. But any individual student can stir up trouble with a single comment, picture or online conversation, and that extends well beyond just an elite athlete trying to get a scholarship. Teens complaining about playing time, bickering with a teammate or trash-talking an opponent have forced coaches to be more vigilant about their players' online activity. It's not as frequent as preparing a plan for the next practice or game, but it's something coaches simply can't ignore.

"It's here to stay and we either get up with the times and figure out how to get through it or we'll be sorry," said veteran Rush-Henrietta football coach Joe Montesano, who'll occasionally tweet inspirational sayings or messages for his players to see. "I think it's part of the education process as a teacher and coach. We try to model for them, try to teach them how to do it the right way."

The wrong way can happen as soon as a student-athlete hits "Send."

"It's instant and it's public and some kids don't realize that," said Gates Chili athletic director Ken Hammel, who is Monroe County's representative on Section V Sportsmanship Committee. "You can start a pretty big disruption with one comment that is tweeted or retweeted and taken the wrong way. It could offend an entire district."

Twitter-cool

Local schools are now starting to include a student's online activity as part of their code of conduct. In Hilton, for example, it's covered under the citizenship category for "inappropriate use of technology/media."

Why did Twitter supplant Facebook among teens as the place to be online?

"When Facebook became more popular with adults and when their parents and grandparents got on (Facebook) it shifted for kids," said Michael Gaio, eMedia editor for Athletic Business. "Facebook no longer was cool."

It became the "hangout" your parents knew about and could monitor, so kids found a new, more private (at least from their parents) space. Now Twitter is becoming old hat, so teens are trending toward Instagram, which is posting pictures (no text) that can receive "Likes" or comments. That can be dangerous, too.

"The big things for kids is to see how many 'Likes' they can get so the more outrageous your picture is, the more 'Likes' you might get so that's a potential pitfall," said Pittsford's Scott Barker, one of the more active athletic directors statewide on Twitter, providing game updates and pictures of games and his athletes.

Many parents have Twitter accounts just to spy on their kids' online activity. Penfield girls soccer coach Libbie Tobin doesn't worry about that much, but said she "can sense when something is going on," among her players that might become a problem, so she'll remind them and say, "Hey, I don't want to hear about anything on Twitter."

Good team captains police their own squads, a couple of students said.

"If I see someone on our team saying something (on Twitter), I'll say, 'Hey, it's not worth it. Maybe you should take that that down (and delete it).' Then it's their choice," said Hilton girls soccer midfielder Alex DiVasta, a senior captain.

R-H junior quarterback Jared Gerbino said Montesano reminds his players often to be careful what they post. There has been trash talk at R-H in the past that he's noticed. "Nothing major, just like 'We're going to kick your butt,' " he said. Gerbino tries to steer clear of it.

Last fall, a wide receiver at one Monroe County school tweeted at a defensive back for another saying he was going to have a big night against him. When a girls soccer player for one school rubbed it in with a tweet about the Honeoye Falls-Lima girls losing the state title match, 1-0, an HF-L player reminded that girl that the Cougars had beaten her team in the sectional final.

Aquinas boys basketball coach Mike Grosodonia takes his players' phones before each game so they can't tweet while it's going on. "I've heard of kids going in at halftime and getting on Twitter if they're crushing a team or something," he said. No parent has taken issue with that, he said.

"They're kids. Sometimes they make mistakes, just like we did," Grosodonia said.

But now it's online and that almost always means it's instantly public, which can create more problems.

Turn-off to college

After that phone call, what Fitch found later that night after scrolling through his players' Twitter feeds wasn't anything criminal or drug-related.

"Classic kid stuff, just not thinking," Fitch said. "He used some vulgar language. There was some partying stuff."

That was enough. In the most competitive age for scholarship money, kids can't afford to take the chance.

East Rochester graduate Ron Whitcomb Jr., now in his eighth year as an assistant football coach at Old Dominion University, said he'll research a recruit's social media presence before he even makes any contact with the player, which per NCAA rules can't happen before the start of his junior.

"You've got to dig through all the avenues you can," said Whitcomb, 30, who is ODU's recruiting coordinator.

He'll check for a Facebook profile, Twitter and now Instagram — all tools he may later use to keep in touch with the player. Recently, ODU stopped recruiting a quarterback because it didn't like what it found on his Facebook profile. There was vulgar language, some pictures with the player posing with his tongue out. "He looked like Miley Cyrus," Whitcomb said. "That can't be the face of your team (as a QB)."

Another "turn-off," Whitcomb said, was finding a player posted too often for ODU's taste. "Sixteen posts a day? He was on social media too much," he said. "Is he spending enough time on important stuff?"

Anything that's racially insensitive or sexist is also a red flag, he said. Old Dominion, he said, is probably one of about 10 college football teams that doesn't allow its players to post on Twitter.

Whitcomb doesn't want to come off as "holier than thou," he said, but he wants teens to know these are factors recruiters watch when evaluating a player's character. In late July, Penn State stopped recruiting a player because of social media. "Actually glad I got to see the 'real' person before offered him," tweeted offensive line coach Herb Hand, a native of Westmoreland, near Utica.

Hand later elaborated to an online publication, 247sports.com, saying: "If a guy makes the decision to post or (retweet) stuff that degrades women, references drug use or cyber-bullying crap, then I

can make the decision to drop them, especially if I have discussed it with them prior, and especially in today's climate of athletics."

Dos and don'ts

Excerpts from Michael Gaio's blog on social media dos and don'ts for student-athletes:

Nothing is truly private ... ever. While many kids think they can delete a tweet or delete their Facebook profile if need be, many don't realize that content posted on the Internet can last forever. Content can be captured in screenshots or saved by other users.

If you retweet it (or share it), you own it. "Freedom of speech does not equal freedom from consequences," says David Petroff, director of athletic communications at Edgewood (Wis.) College.

Personal branding. Every tweet reflects who you are. How are student-athletes choosing to represent themselves?

Say thank you. Teach student-athletes to take time to thank those who support them. Fans, teammates and family, for example.

Support others. Student-athletes can provide a positive example for other students by sending positive messages about their peers in other sports or activities at school.

Respond to one of the following prompts. Use the a separate sheet of paper.

1. Do you think colleges should look into students' public social media account when recruiting? Why or why not?
2. Do you think before you post online? Discuss your social media presence. Does this make you more aware of what you do and do not post? Why or why not?
3. Select a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph and respond to it.