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# Best of Gilbert 2016



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[David Jolkovski/Tribune]

### Football: Mountain Pointe vs Marcos de Niza

Mountain Pointe wide receiver Ralph Roman (6) has ton of support from the start after it became known that his father has died.

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game on the road used to be done by knocking on the door in order to make sure lights were out and everyone was in their assigned room by curfew.

It doesn't end there anymore.

Not when you when you put unsupervised high school kids with down time in close quarters with cell phones.

"I spend a lot of my time making sure players aren't posting something stupid or inflammatory toward our opponent," an assistant football coach for a local team said. "It's definitely part of the job now. You scroll through your feed and make sure there's nothing we need to be aware of."

That was just the case on the road trip. He decided to scroll though Twitter one more time before going to bed.

It wasn't long before he was stomping down a hallway, looking for a player who posted a compromising picture, one that revealed way too much about a usually private time in the bathroom.

"I couldn't believe it," he said. "We did some



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stupid things when I was a kid, and of course, there was no social media then, but come on!

“Posting something like that is just so dumb.”

Welcome to coaching, recruiting and parenting high school athletes during the social media age.

There are rare moments when today’s kids have idle hands. They constantly have 140 characters at their disposal to spout opinions, share images and crack jokes.

At least that incident didn’t get the chance to go viral as several posts have locally and nationally.

Just recently, pro football player Isaiah Crowell of the Cleveland Browns posted a cartoon of policeman having his throat slashed.

In January, six girls at Desert Vista posted a picture of them wearing T-shirts that spelled out a racially insensitive word. The response online was severe.

They were removed from school, one player reportedly had a soccer scholarship offer revoked and the school took the brunt of the national attention. Desert Vista was portrayed as a school with racial overtones.

“That was a very good example of what not to do,” Desert Vista senior soccer player Izzy Deutsch said. “It definitely teaches you to be aware.”

Everyone is now aware of the ramifications of their postings, and how years of building a reputation can be skewered with one push of a button.

“When I first got on social media, I had no idea how far reaching it was,” Mesa senior quarterback Roberto Baeza said. “I didn’t think it was that big of a deal then I started hearing about all of these athletes getting in trouble. When you are trying to get recruited, you don’t want to do something stupid.”

It’s not surprising anymore. Parents, coaches and athletes all know the dangers, even though it still happens. Most programs have social media guidelines and openly talk about being responsible.

Desert Ridge football assistant coaches spoke to the players about social media during camp in Winslow recently

“You have to do it,” Jaguars coach Jeremy Hathcock said. “There is so much going on with these kids, and you can’t be with the 24 hours a day, but they are associated with your program no matter what they do.

“When social media first came around, I don’t think people realized the impact. They’d say, ‘Did you see that, Coach?’ Yeah, everyone did.”

Everyone would include college coaches in charged of recruiting. There have been countless stories of programs dropping a recruit or rescinding their scholarship offer because of a social media posting.

Many believe postings give insight into a person’s true personality and possible future behaviors.

“If I don’t know the recruit that well, then chances are the relationship ends there,” Mesa Community College men’s and women’s golf coach John Guerrero said. “But if I know the prospective recruit well, and I know a post was uncharacteristic, then I can stick with them. There have been times when I don’t have a relationship with someone and they post something questionable.

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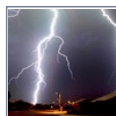
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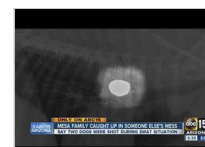
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"Then I have no problem moving on."

The idea of adults—recruiters, sports writers, fans of a team for a potential destination place for a recruit—being dialed into the daily thoughts and musing of a teenager that they have never even met can be odd.

There are things seen on social media timeline of a high school kid that should not be seen by adults.

"It can be a little bit creepy and uncomfortable at times," University of Arizona assistant football coach Charlie Ragle said. "You just scroll past it and try to forget it, but that's the business we have created.

"We are investing in these kids, and want them to be part of our program so we are going to do everything we can to get to know them. That used to be talking to the coach, parents or a teacher. Now, we have it right in front of us every day."

Social media for high school athletes isn't just a barrage of players ripping coaches, taunting the opposition or obscenities.

An athlete can help herself in the eyes of a recruiter with posts saying she is ready for early morning practice or congratulating other successful sports programs at their school.

"There is no doubt you can become sold on an athlete's makeup by something they post," Ragle said. "If they are excited about a workout instead of complaining about it, you might have something there."

Mountain Pointe graduate Ralph Roman saw the positive side of social media at the darkest moment. His father died unexpectedly just before the start of the 2015 football season. The outpouring of love, support and hashtag #RomanStong crushed his timeline once the news started circulating.

"The support I had on social media was ridiculous," Roman said. "It helped a lot to know that people are praying for me to get through the tough times. It really brings a grin to your face."

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 become clear that their online imprint can be just as detrimental as a bad 40 time with the difference being a disastrous tweet sticks with you like DNA.

So it best to make sure your profile is never associated with anything that can be considered a cringe-worthy moment.

"If I have to stop, and do a double take or I am left shaking my head that's not going to end well for you and the University of Arizona," Ragle said. "We want top recruits, but we also want a person we know who is respectable and knows how to handle themselves in all situations.

"If they are being disrespectful to someone one or something publicly what are they going to be like in our locker room? Chances are we are going to take the chance and find out."

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