

*"I want to say thank you. My daughter is loving every minute playing for you as a coach and with her teammates. I'm blown away at the incredibly high level of instruction you're providing. Super impressed with your program, so major props to you in what you've established with Kokoro. It's truly incredible." ~2019 Fall League Parent*

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*"I just wanted to give you a shout out regarding this season so far. I have been quietly observing my daughter throughout the past couple of weeks. While I have lots of opinions that I would love to share with her, as a coach myself, I know better than to interfere. So I remain supportive, stay positive, and keep my parent coaching in check. (It's not that I am some zen parent - I am a product of our generation, afterall.) It's because I have found that we can trust her to your capable hands. I tell everyone who will listen how much we love Kokoro and it has little to do with the actual volleyball instruction (although that is excellent).*

*My daughter is a highly competitive athlete who loves to push and challenge herself. She is a perfectionist and she holds everyone around her to that same standard. I knew this season would be a challenge for her because of this. She is used to playing up in all of her activities, which generally results in her being surrounded by players that really push her. And while there are several players on this fall ball team that do push her, she is in unfamiliar territory in terms of being a leader. She is adjusting and figuring it out, learning when to jump in and when to back off. She is becoming aware of how her behavior affects others. Watching her grow emotionally over the last couple of weeks has been so gratifying. It is a well-timed and perfect challenge for her. My point is - I know that this is no happy accident on your part. I know that you are facilitating this. Body Mind & Spirit isn't just a tagline. It is deeply embedded in everything you do.*

*I know youth sports well, and it isn't always pretty. I just wanted to tell you that you and Kokoro are unrivaled. Thank you - it means the world to us." ~2019 Fall League Parent*

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*Hi R.T. and Jen!*

*I know you're in the midst of tryouts today, but I thought I'd share this with you.*

*As you know, I teach at a school that places a much higher emphasis on academic achievement than athletic achievement. Because people are aware of this, I am sometimes challenged by other parents in the stands (kindly, of course), about why I send my daughter to Kokoro. One parent has, on several occasions, challenged me that my real reason is that I expect her to get a full ride to college with a volleyball scholarship - even though absolutely zero of the schools she is considering right now offer full sports scholarships.*

*So, I've been using a lot of the points from the article that you shared last year, "Why I Won't Pay for Club Volleyball," but people will then sometimes challenge me as to why Kokoro and not <insert whatever club here>? After all, we all know that recruiters only care about one club in Minnesota, right? (Even though I can tell them, if I want to (though I usually don't) that she's been contacted by several Division I recruiters already.) So, I wrote this out to organize my thoughts a while back.*

*- Kokoro Mom*

*1. Kokoro helps my daughter become a better human being - well beyond volleyball.*

*From support with nutrition to homework help to help dealing with stress, the entire Kokoro club recognizes that my daughter is more than volleyball and supports her in the development of herself. The coaches and directors wholeheartedly tell her that her entirety - behavior, health, academic work, social relationships, and*

*the way that she comports herself- off the court is more important than the numbers that she is putting up. What's more, they help her learn the skills that are necessary to become a fully functioning adult. They require honesty, self-awareness, and a commitment to growth - but they are all there 100% to help her when those things are hard. Kokoro offers homework help to its players, offers nutrition seminars run by a dietician to help them develop healthy habits.*

*As an educator, one of my favorite aspects of Kokoro, however, is the insistence that my daughter communicate for, advocate for herself, and understand her own place in the team - that these things are not my role as parent. These skills are absolutely essential for adults and are difficult for many girls to learn in their outside lives. By communicating directly with her coaches about her ideas, needs, wishes, etc., she is learning that she is worthy and capable. That she is an independent human being outside of me. In 2.5 years, my daughter will be heading off to college, where I will not be there to walk her through her daily struggles, her conflicts, and her desires. Kokoro is giving my daughter the skills she needs to be successful without me.*

*2. This is a club that truly becomes your village.*

*We have been part of Kokoro for three years - entering our fourth season with Kokoro. Even early in our time at Kokoro, though, I knew that my daughter was known by her coaches. So, when things are hard in any area of her life, I know that I can call them and that they will help our entire family through challenges.*

*Last year was one of enormous personal change for my daughter. The family structure that she had known dissolved, she changed schools, her friendships were challenging, as a teenager, her relationships with parents were changing, and her workload changed dramatically. She considered quitting volleyball. I called RT, who met with her and reminded her why she loved volleyball. Later, half way through the season, she thanked me for keeping Kokoro part of her life. She looked at me and said, "My entire life is screwed up. The only thing that is right about it is Kokoro." Her coaches, her team mates, the other girls in the club, the directors - all have her back. They are all there to support and love her for who she is - and to remind her of that when she forgets. If that isn't the single most important thing a parent can give their child in the life of an adolescent girl, I don't know what is.*

*3. This is a club that allows girls to fail, to make mistakes, to grow, and to experience the joy that comes with improvement.*

*Ultimately, this is a team that values "grit" - a club that teaches girls that hard work will be rewarded. It is a team that believes that you learn by challenging yourself. It is a club that believes that*

*Here is part of an email that RT sent recently:*

*"Being a part of Kokoro Volleyball is about being a part of something that is greater than yourself. It is about being a part of a community that values growth, grit and giving. It is about valuing the true definition of success. We are here to provide opportunities for our athletes, families, coaches and administrators to develop and grow in all areas of their life: BODY, MIND and SPIRIT. We are here to display that true success is measured against one's full capabilities and the effort needed to achieve at one's full capabilities. We believe that growth can only be achieved through challenge. Challenging one's behaviors. Challenging one's thoughts. Challenging one's emotions... and challenging is GOOD!*

*We implement rigorous physical training that forces our athletes to question their physical stamina to continue, therefore their mental fortitude to persevere. We require our athletes to achieve what they are capable, not*

*simply an objective standard of success in relation to others. We challenge and push our athletes because we know they are capable of more than they currently believe! We challenge our athletes to grow and hold them accountable for their attention, and accountable to the process of learning. We know that accountability leads to EMPOWERMENT!*

*We teach mentor leadership through service to others... Knowing that the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts, requires actions that are founded in a service to others. Teams that excel are those that ensure the team's success takes priority over any individual's success. These selfless actions extend outward and include arranging schedules and other commitments to honor the commitments and schedule adjustments teammates and families have made to ensure the team's success.*

*Our actions, which display our values, make us different than all other volleyball clubs in the area.*

*Do you desire to be held accountable for your success? Do you desire to be a part of a community that shares the values of growth, grit and giving? Do you desire to be a part of something greater than yourself?"*

*As a math teacher, this is my example:*

- You want to be a good math student, so you keep doing addition - because you're good at it. At some point, someone wants to teach you how to do multiplication, but you just want to keep doing addition. You don't understand why multiplication is necessary because you can do the same thing with addition and you're already good at addition. After all, you want to be a good math student and you're good at addition. Therefore, I am good at math.*

*Doing the easy stuff does not necessarily mean that you're good at something! This is why it's important to try new things, even though it might be hard at the beginning and it may feel overwhelming or impossible. If things are never difficult, I believe you're not putting yourself in a position of growth. What's more, research tells us that challenging environments support development of healthy self-esteem. Telling someone that they're good at something doesn't actually mean anything - instead people need to experience that they are capable and that they are growing.*

*There will be times when volleyball will be hard and times when my daughter "sweats through her eyes." As a parent, I love that I can trust that this club will never ask my daughter to do something of which she isn't capable - even though it might be hard - and that I can simply remind her that I know she can handle it - even if that means talking to her coaches to tell them that she doesn't think she can handle it so that they can tell her why they think she's capable. I love being part of a club where I can trust that they will respect her while they have that conversation and that they will honor her by having it. And I know, because I have experienced it multiple times, that she will come out stronger than she was before.*

*4. Kokoro Volleyball is a club with integrity.*

*I first became intensely aware of this during one of the first Fall Tournament games that my daughter played in for Kokoro. The ref made a call that helped our team but was incorrect. The coach calmly walked over and asked the ref to reverse the call. It's not that our coaches don't want to win - they do - but, they care more about modeling honesty and integrity than they do about the score.*

*Over the last years, there have been countless other examples. I have seen coaches helping parents understand how to support healthy competition from the stands without negativity, I have seen the directors consistently model patience and care toward all, I have seen girls challenged to be their best selves all the time. This is a club that teaches girls to win with grace and lose with dignity. This is a club that reminds our*

*girls to pick up their trash at tournaments and to leave the area that they inhabit better than they find it. This is a club that volunteers. This is a club that welcomes everyone. This is a club that understands that winning - although awesome - is not the only acceptable outcome as long as you comport yourself with dignity and compassion. This is a club where older teams support the younger teams in their successes and encourages one another in times of challenge.*