When a Parent Becomes an FPS Coach

By Matt Rich, Stallings Island Future Problem Solvers, Martinez, Georgia

A wave of nostalgia hit me when I learned my daughter’s elementary school teacher had invited her to participate in a “new” program called Future Problem Solving. Thirty years ago, I had participated in FPS as a middle and high school student in West Virginia. My team attended the International Conference twice. While I was in college and graduate school, I evaluated booklets for WV FPS, and I continue to exchange Christmas cards with my Middle Division FPS Coach. So, I was thrilled when Mrs. Farr introduced Future Problem Solving to Bekah and her classmates.

With Mrs. Farr’s outstanding coaching, Bekah and her teammates excelled at FPS. However, when they reached middle school, the school resources were not available to support FPS. Mrs. Farr willingly agreed to continue to coach the team, but as parents, we recognized the additional burden that was for her. So, this past year, I offered to coach both the team and one individual competitor.

Being a parent-coach for FPS was a true gift in so many ways. I was able to arrange my work schedule so that each Wednesday I could pick up the students from school and bring them to our house for practice. I learned more about Middle School daily life during the ten-minute ride home from school than I learned the entire rest of the week! After a snack (no matter how much food we put out, they always ate it all), we spent an hour or so working on the FPS steps, learning vocabulary, discussing articles and videos, practicing with sample future scenes, trying to understand evaluator comments on their booklets, and generally having a lot of fun. Due to their hard work, both the team and our individual competitor were able to compete in this year’s virtual International Bowl.

If you find yourself in the same situation as our team, I hope that you will consider being a Future Problem Solving coach. If so, I would suggest:

1. Ask your child’s permission - It worked well for us, but I am not sure that is the case for every parent and child.
2. Use available resources - Georgia FPS sponsored a 1-day training session for new coaches that was invaluable as the booklet and terminology had changed from when I was in high school; talk to other FPS coaches and take their advice on how to structure practices, find resources, etc.; and buy the Readings, Research, and Resources (RRR) from FPSPI.
3. Be willing to learn something new - While I initially reviewed materials and searched the internet to find appropriate resources to share with the students, with each topic, I quickly recognized my own lack of knowledge and desire to know more.

I am glad to have had the chance to help Bekah and her teammates continue with FPS with energy, dedication, imagination, and commitment. As the program did for me, I know that FPS will change their lives forever, and through them change the world. Plus, someday I may get some new Christmas cards.

Note: This coach and team transitioned to Zoom online meetings in March 2020. Mr. Rich suggests a parent needs to become familiar with the teleconferencing technology first. He observed that the most challenging part was when all team members started talking at the same time, but isn’t that typical for excited, passionate FPSers wherever they are???