
A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILY SPORTS

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“It’s About the Kids”

One of my proudest moments was to be on the sidelines sharing the state championship basketball game with my oldest daughter in her senior year. A final shot with a few seconds left lifted our girls to victory and the end to a remarkable 32-1 season and a highly successful four-year varsity run.

Youth sports truly are a microcosm of our society. Sports provide an environment for teaching many virtues like the value of teamwork, goal setting, dedication, commitment and dealing with adversity. As the parent of two boys and two girls I also appreciate the concept of equality in sports because I have seen first hand the opportunity it is has provided.

Unfortunately, many of the positive attributes of organized sports are tempered by the bad behavior of parents and coaches. Parents in particular forget the number one goal of any athletic endeavor should be the development of good sportsmanship, win or lose. Youth coaches too often believe they can make the jump to the NBA if they win the local league title, or they think they are coaching at that level.

- Rule #1: It’s about the kids!
- Rule #2: When in doubt, remember Rule #1.

I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to coach for many years from primary school aged kids to the high school level. I have been a high school basketball official and league organizer in my community. My number one goal always has been to teach sportsmanship through respect towards the game, which includes teammates, opponents and officials. Interestingly, I have found teaching the fundamentals and making having fun the primary goal in the long run also takes care of what many think is the bottom line, winning.

Organized sports can be a rewarding experience and valuable tool for educating our youth, when done properly. The proper foundation is good sportsmanship. The following is my primer on sportsmanship based on my experiences:

- 1. Good sportsmanship begins with trying to achieve balanced competitive teams.** Coaches and parents should not try to manipulate the selection process to give their team the advantage. Equal teams fighting out every game is far more desirable than blowout victories. As an example, recently in my local softball league a coach came in with nine pre-selected players that “needed” to be on his team.
- 2. If you want to criticize the officials, become one.** Officials are people and will make mistakes. They are underpaid, if paid at all, and do not have a stake in the outcome. When we attack the officials in front of our children we teach our children to be disrespectful towards the rule of law and authority. This is an ugly trend in our society. Try it before you criticize. You will learn it is not as easy as from the cheap seats.

3. Teamwork is the key. This means everyone in your charge is important, not just the “superstars.” Involve everyone on the team. I see too many teams in which the basketball never leaves the hand of the best player or a player spends more time on the bench or buried in the outfield. You might be surprised how good your team will be at the end of the year when you have developed everyone on your team. Even Michael Jordan could not win a championship without a good supporting cast.

Few things are as productive as a positive sports experience, but equally as destructive when the experience is negative. Be positive—For the Kids!

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