



Have We Lost the Fun in Youth Athletics?

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Youth sports are extremely different today compared to 20-30 years ago. Although we expect sports to be a business at the professional level, we do not generally expect them to be business-like at the college, high school and youth levels. Unfortunately, however, youth sports have become more of a business than most people would like to admit. And with this business attitude comes pressure. Parents make comments about their children being the next Mia Hamm, Michael Jordan, or Tiger Woods. Furthermore, it used to be that only colleges recruited student-athletes, but now it is very common for high school coaches, parents, and student-athletes to be “recruiting” student-athletes in middle school. Wanting our children to be successful is normal, but we need to keep things in perspective. We need to make sure that the FUN never leaves youth sports. Here are some tips to remember as you grow with your child in sports:

1. If you are having fun, your kids will have fun

Have fun when watching your kids’ practices and competitions. They notice how you are feeling and reacting when at their competitions - if they see you having fun and enjoying yourself, they will be able to relax, have fun and ultimately perform better. If they see you upset and angry, however, they can become nervous, have less fun, and as a result, perform poorly.

2. Keep score with effort and character, not just results

In sports, we keep score by emphasizing wins and losses and by how many goals, points, or seconds. We need these measures in sports to evaluate progress, but it is not the only component of keeping score, especially in youth sports. Keep score not only with points, but through your kids’ amount of effort, character, sportsmanship, teamwork and other similar qualities. “Winning” does not always mean a team or student-athlete is successful and “losing” does not always mean failure.

3. Maintain balance and time away from sports

Because youth sports are much more competitive, monitor your kids’ stress levels. Make certain they take occasional breaks, whether for a few days, couple of weeks or sometimes even a season. Kids will not play to their potential if they are mentally or physically burned out and overloaded. Many kids are very talented in their sport skills, but if they are burned out or tired, this amount of skill does not make a difference.

4. Maintain a sense of humor

Research has shown that children and adolescents enjoy sport much more when their parents have a positive attitude and can laugh at themselves, even when they make a mistake. Furthermore, one of the main reasons that youth report quitting sports is because of too much pressure from their parents and coaches.

Sports can be both competitive and fun. Youth sports is one of the greatest things in this world and let's keep it that way – make sure that FUN always remains an enormous part of youth athletics!

Play Hard, Play Smart and Play Well!