



What is Really Important in Youth Sports?

ADAM LIGOCKI
GENERAL MANAGER
COMMUNITY FIRST CHAMPION CENTER

Growing up in the 90s, I would have done anything to have the opportunities that are available today to participate in youth sports. As General Manager of the Champion Center for the past 5 years, I have overseen the operations as we have hosted 300+ youth tournaments. We primarily host hockey, volleyball, and basketball but have done others as well including wrestling, gymnastics, and figure skating. In the past 5 years we have had over 500,000 participants and hosted over 50,000 games in the facility.

I wish I could say that every event went perfectly, however with the number of games and tournaments that we host at the Champion Center, it's inevitable that at some point issues will arise. In the day of social media, there is so much information available, both positive and negative, about youth sports. One trend I've personally noticed recently, is an increase in adults (parents and coaches) losing perspective of what is important in youth sports.

Here are a few comments I've either been told directly or have overheard these past few months:

- We would have won that game if we had different referees.
- The coach is not playing my son/daughter enough, which is preventing college coaches from noticing him/her.
- The volunteer parent from the other team doing the scoreboard cheated and recorded the score incorrectly. This is unfair to our players, you need to rewatch the game on the livestream and correct it. (Fun Fact: I did actually rewatch the game and the score was correct the entire time).

In addition to working at the Champion Center, I have coached basketball at every level from youth all the way up to college and have also served as an Athletic Director. I understand frustration, especially when you add it in to a competitive situation. While some of these comments may have merit, I'm more concerned about what we are teaching our youth.

When these issues arise, it's mostly due to parents and coaches losing perspective to what is important, which is the development (both mental and physical) of the athletes. Getting too focused on wins and losses and individual performances is counterproductive to the end goal which is to teach kids how to be part of a team and work through adversity. As a parent, when you're driving your kid home after a competition, I challenge you to focus the conversation around the following questions. Did you have fun? Did you improve today? What is something you wish you would have done differently? Those questions are a lot more impactful than focusing on a missed call by a referee.

While I didn't achieve my childhood goal of playing in the NBA, I am happy that I was able to pursue my passion and carve out a career in sports. The lifelong skills I developed and relationships I made participating in youth sports have been instrumental to my success as an adult. As the industry continues to grow, I hope as a society we don't lose focus on the true benefits of youth sports.