



What is Really Important in Youth Sports?

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It seems as though every week I read another article on the horror stories of the current state of youth sports in America. Parents attacking coaches about playing time. Coaches assaulting referees about a bad call. Moms and Dads trying to live out the glory days through their kids by pushing them too hard. Families doing next to anything to land a college athletic scholarship. Unfortunately, these types of stories are becoming more common and can give youth sports a bad reputation. While these negative stories are rare when you look at the total volume of youth athletes, teams, and events, they do tend to garner the most headlines.

On the positive side, it's great to see a youth team win a big championship tournament and post a team photo with their awards and big smiles on social media or make it into a newspaper or magazine. But, if we focus too much on the horror stories or even the wins and losses and championship photos, I think we are missing what might be the most important aspect of youth sports today.

Thanks to advancements in society, every generation has typically had it a little easier than the previous generation. Today's youth are likely not experiencing the level of struggle that older generations did and it's hard to replace the "grit" that is gained by working through life's challenges. Maybe youth sports are the closest thing that many youngsters can experience life's challenges and learn to work through, adapt, and overcome them. Where else in today's society can kids replicate the characteristics that are built during these situations:

- Waking up early to travel for an 8am game and getting your mind and body ready to compete
- Pushing through a hard practice even though you are uncomfortable and your body is sore and tired
- Hearing your coach tell you something you don't want to hear and then working to correct it
- Encouraging a teammate to keep their head up even though things aren't going their way
- Working together to build a cohesive team that all do the little things right on the field
- Building relationships and forming friendships with teammates who come from different backgrounds
- Handling a tough loss with good sportsmanship even though you may be completely deflated
- Managing emotions during a huge victory and remembering to show respect to your opponents

I could go on and on with this list as there are so many positive character traits developed and lessons learned in youth sports today. But, while poor behaviors and championship victories grab the headlines and control social media, the real value of youth sports lies in those hard lessons learned along the way. Striving for success, working through challenges, and learning from failures are the experiences that will set up our children for success in whatever life brings their way in the future.