



What Kids Want in a Coach

"Put me in, coach!"

That's what most kids said in response to our survey about coaches. More than 60% of boys and girls said that – more than anything else – coaches should give everyone a chance to play. **Giving everyone a chance to play** ranked above **teaching new skills** (27%) and even **winning** (9%)

Did you think that kids would say "winning is everything"? Think again. Most kids didn't think winning was all that important. Only 7% of girls said coaches should be most concerned with winning, whereas about 18% of boys said so. It sounds like kids think that too much importance is given to winning at all costs. And many adults are starting to think that changes are needed in youth sports. Why? Because as youth sports have become more intense and competitive, it has put a lot of pressure on kids.

Hannah, 11, says she's seen coaches who yell at every little mistake a player makes.

"I can tell those players aren't having a good time," she said.

Wanting to be excellent at something is a great goal, but when coaches and parents push too hard, kids can get overly worried or push themselves too hard physically, leading to injuries. Some kids may even go on unhealthy diets, trying to lose weight or gain weight to be better at their sport. With all this pressure in the air, there have been some awful incidents involving parents and coaches who have ended up yelling and fighting with each other. How awful and uncomfortable for the players!

As if that's not enough, here's another reason why some changes may be needed: When sports become really competitive, kids who are just average but like to play might not make the team, or they might spend all the games on the bench. That's no fun.

Shooting for a Scholarship

You might say, "Well, I expect to get a scholarship in my sport, so I want the team to be really competitive." But the truth is that not many kids actually get sports scholarships to college. It's great if you want to try for one, but no one can count on getting one. And even fewer kids grow up to become professional athletes. Check out these statistics:

- 59% of high school football and basketball players believe they will receive a college scholarship
- 1% to 2% of high school athletes will receive a Division I athletic scholarship
- 12,999 out of 13,000 high school athletes will never be professional athletes

We're not telling you this to bum you out. It is true that some players do get scholarships. It's just that most won't. We're just letting you know that winning and scholarships can be the icing on the cake for some lucky athletes. But the joy of playing can be for everyone.

There are good reasons why kids love being on sports teams. You learn to work hard and work together. You go through ups and downs and often form really strong friendships with teammates.



You also get a chance to surprise yourself. Playing a sport means you have a lot of chances to make mistakes – and by making those mistakes – and learning to correct them – you can feel a sense of accomplishment.

Take it from 10-year-old Brandi, whose coach taught her how to hit a baseball.

Before her coach showed her how, "I was swinging at mostly everything and I wasn't holding the bat right," she said.

Coaches Teach Life Lessons

Lots of kids told us how their coaches taught them important skills that made them better athletes. But kids also said that the best coaches do more than improve your swing or sharpen your three-point shot.

Cobi, 10, said the best lesson he learned from a coach was this: "If I lose, it does not mean I am no good or lousy. And I do not need to get mad or upset if I lose."

Eleven-year-old Lizzy said her coach helped her work through jealous feelings she had because a friend was a really fast swimmer. "My coach showed me that I had to work for what I wanted and helped me reach my goal."

Kids also were very clear about what they do not like in a coach: someone who yells and can't control his or her temper.

"Everyone will quit if they're having a miserable time," said Sara, 12.

But it's also bad news if the coach doesn't care at all about winning, said Katy, 11. She had a coach like that once.

"Even if we were horrible at the drill, he would still say we were great and he wouldn't even tell us how to improve."

Kids know they need to practice, it's just that they don't want it to stop being fun. Deja, 11, said that it's a two-way street – coaches need to be supportive and team members need to listen to the coach and cooperate.

Hannah said she learned a great lesson from her basketball coach this year. He told the team to "try your best and not care about winning." They started out losing every game, but ended up winning a tournament!

A New Generation of Coaches

With all those great lessons learned, many boys and girls were already thinking about how they would handle their teams, if they grow up to be coaches someday.

"I will give them all a second chance," said Jena, 11.

Pauline, 12, said she'd be upbeat and encourage her players to lead a balanced life.

"I would not have favorites," she said. "I also would tell them that sports aren't their only matter in life, that they have to focus on family and schoolwork, too."

Kristen, 12, said this: "I would be tough, but know when to stop, and let them enjoy their sport."

Cobi sounds like a great coach in the making. If he's a coach someday, he'd let everyone play, even the players who are not the best. Why? "That's how they will become better."

Reviewed by: Neil Izenberg, MD

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