



Coaches Are Critical to Kids

By Bill Gosse

Posted February 2, 2008

Aside from a child's parents, there is only one person in youth sports who is more important - a child's coach.

Based on the emphasis placed on sports in today's society, this is an extremely vital person in their life. An individual can go a long way in determining whether a child will pursue sports in the future. These coaches have opportunities to provide positive, worthwhile experiences, or potentially scar kids for life. It's only fitting how kids remember great coaches - just like a favorite teacher.

In my travels for TeamScore, it's alarming how many times parents have expressed a concern about their child's coach. Sometimes, parents expect too much, but other times, they have legitimate gripes.

I've mentioned before how kids are dropping out of sports at an alarming rate. According to current statistics, the percentage of kids quitting sports by age 13 has reached 75 percent. Something seems amiss.

Because of possible retribution from other parents, I know for sure there are many wonderfully qualified adults who won't touch the youth sports coaching job with a ten foot pole. It's unfortunate, but the result is our kids probably are not getting the best possible coaches at a critical time in their life.

There are very good youth sports programs that train their coaches, but just as many that don't.

In the 2007 Disney movie "Ratatouille," Chef Gusteau believes anyone can cook. I don't believe anyone can coach. Sometimes, programs are desperate, so they take the first volunteers who step forward. Without proper guidance, we can be putting these people in frustrating, lose-lose situations.

Here are some guidelines for potential youth coaches:

- Expect coaching youth sports to be a challenge.
- With preseason preparation, coaching can be a very rewarding experience.

- Knowledge of the rules and fundamentals is the responsibility of every coach. Check out videos at your local library. Attend a clinic.
- Come with an enthusiastic and positive outlook. Neatness helps.
- Coach with the proper attitude, by embracing the individual differences of your players.
- Statistically, realize none of the kids you coach will play professional sports, nearly all of them won't play sports in college and many of them won't even play varsity sports in high school.
- Stress effort, trying your best and hustle.
- Emphasize the values of success and failure, winning and losing, sportsmanship and teamwork, and how to respond in pressure situations. These are the other aspects of sports and the life lessons that make us love playing sports.
- Don't worry about the trophies - worry about the long-term development of each kid.
- Know the difference between being a parent and being a coach. If your child is one of your players, separate these roles.
- Make the experience fun! Take pride in all the kids wanting to come back next season – the talented and untalented.

If youth coaches truly focus on helping kids, it can be one of the most enjoyable experiences ever. You'll be rewarded by the thousands of smiles you help create.