



## **Politics Get in Way of Youth Sports**

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Politics in sports. When I was growing up, that phrase seemed to mean the Iron Curtain rearing up against Uncle Sam and our Olympic teams.

For instance, the 1972 United States men's basketball team lost the gold-medal game to the Soviet Union under controversial and bizarre circumstances. At those same Munich Olympic Games, 11 Israeli athletes were killed by politically motivated Palestinian terrorists.

President Jimmy Carter decided the U.S. would boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics, protesting the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan.

This is the way I remember politics and sports mixing "way back when".

What role does politics play in sports today?

The government has stepped in and tried to force major league baseball to police steroids, and Sen. Arlen Specter has pressured the NFL to thoroughly investigate the New England Patriots and their videotaping practices.

More and more we seem to hear about politics in sports at the local level.

Coaches get fired over personality conflicts with administrators. Parents run coaches out of town because their system isn't exciting enough. Parents run for office as booster club members to protect their selfish agendas.

Are the intended beneficiaries of youth sports being thought of through all of this? Are we thinking of our kids?

People involved in sports are getting tired of the mounting parental pressure. Quality coaches are resigning prematurely, and athletes are quitting before they really get going. Talented prospects choose not to pursue careers in officiating for fear of unnecessary criticism.

Have we become completely soft as a society and unable to accept constructive judgment?

Respect for our fellow man has plenty of room for improvement.

Thankfully, there is time to change and there are ways to help our kids through political situations.

Here are several ideas:

1. Parents aware of athletic ability taking a back seat to politics on a team need to do whatever they can to keep the kids out of the politics involved.
2. When kids realize playing time may be determined by politics instead of athletic ability, parents should continue to encourage kids to give 100 percent effort at all times.
3. Kids need to understand that sometimes, life isn't fair. Parents have a hard time in situations where their kids may be getting unfairly handled, but it is very important we hide our intense feelings about the situation from our kids.
4. Kids must be taught to give their best for every game and practice so they can fulfill their commitment to their current team. Down the road, they can pursue other options.
5. Parents must avoid having kids overhear venting about the political situation with the team. The athletes will be affected.
6. Get all the facts before creating a scene over a perceived political situation that may not exist.