



Nobody Wins if Teams Get Stacked

By Bill Gosse

Posted July 12, 2008

At the conclusion of every one of my columns, there is encouragement for readers to send in their thoughts. Many readers have complied and I appreciate their input.

On more than one occasion I have been asked about “stacking.”

Team stacking is a phenomenon in which players of equal skill and experience are not spread evenly across competing teams.

Some of my high school baseball teammates and I had the privilege of being hired by our local recreation department to coach the little kids in our town. When it came to dividing up the teams, we were told to make them as even as possible, so we would be eager to coach any one of the teams. This was our attempt at creating NFL-like parity.

Youth baseball families make requests for kids to be on the same team because of similarly-aged siblings and carpooling. When you live out in the country like we do and have five boys, it can be a legitimate request in the name of family sanity. Sometimes leagues can accommodate these requests and sometimes they can't.

If these were the only reasons for team stacking, we would live in a perfect world.

But team stacking isn't an anomaly. Because some adults involved in youth sports are focused on selfish motives, instead of the long-term development of kids, teams get stacked in an unfair way. This leads to some pretty dull games in which the more skilled side steamrolls over the less skilled side.

Despite the negative ring to the term "stacking" - and the undoubtedly negative effects - stacking happens more than one would hope.

When looking at establishing a youth baseball league, is it desirable to have an undefeated champion whose team was unfairly stacked?

The answer seems obvious to me.

In this scenario, it's likely there will be unbalance throughout the league and the standings will include a winless team, whose kids won't want to play baseball again.

Give me a league where an honest effort at balance is attempted, and then old-fashioned coaching and player improvement takes place. If an undefeated team surfaces out of this format, all those involved should be congratulated.

Parents can tell when stacking takes place in favor of the team coached by the president of the board or the commissioner.

What sense does this make?

Let's remember youth sports are for the development of all the kids, not just a select few.