

My Role as a Coach

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I believe there are several different roles for youth sports. I also believe that the role will change and you have to adapt to the athletes as they continue to play the sport at higher levels. The role for youth sports is to introduce young athletes to a particular sport. Teach them the skills associated with that sport. Teach them the rules of the game. Teach them the importance of participating in sports and the benefits of living an active healthy lifestyle. You introduce the sport and explain what it takes to participate in that sport as they grow and leave it to the athlete to decide what sports they might want to compete in on a higher level, e.g. high school. I believe there has to be an equal part learning and fun for youngsters. Each skill should be associated with a game until they reach the point where they can combine all skills in an organized game. For example; introduce the skill of dribbling a soccer ball. Explain when this is used in the game and how to do it properly. Practice the skill with the only objective is to do the skill properly and get better. Then play a game that only involves dribbling the soccer ball. You can do this with three to four skills (dribble, pass, goal kick) then put them all together in an organized game of soccer. I believe you should allow as many youth to participate as possible, taking in to account resources and the safety of each participant. Try to emphasize the fun of the game and the process of practicing to get better and deemphasize winning. I believe that has a lot to do with the coach's behavior on the sideline during games and in practice as well. Children at this young age are so very impressionable. A coach's role is as much teaching sportsmanship and behavior as skills of the game.

As the level of competition increase the roles began to change for both sport and coach. With high school games now being televised nationally on ESPN and the recruiting process for major collegiate sports being so competitive, it has definitely increased the pressure on coaches at this level to win. That pressure can also be felt by the athletes. Many choose one sport as they enter their high school career and focus on that sport year round. There are summer camps, weightlifting, and recreational leagues that fill the gap between seasons. With this pressure and exposure I believe it has changed the role of high school sports. High school sports to me, has become more businesslike and an extension of the businesslike nature of collegiate sports. With it becoming more and more businesslike, and with the added pressure to win, win, win, what has gotten lost in the bright lights is that this is the last time many of these athletes will be able to compete athletically in many of these sports forever. This is disappointing because there is so much that these young athletes can benefit from being in high school athletics. As the competition increases and the athletes get more skilled the roles began to change. As a varsity level coach I believe you coach and teach more strategies of the game. More situational coaching, you assume the athlete knows the basic skills of that sport and move on and coach more specific skills and strategies. I also believe that even though the game should always be fun the fun factor is more assumed and left to the athletes as you coach and teach more about time management, teamwork, responsibility, and what it takes to become a leader.

I see coaching as an extension to teaching. For that reason I see coaching as a huge asset when it comes to trying to develop life skills and developmental assets in my athletes. I feel athletics are a perfect place to teach character, instill desirable characteristics, and provide lessons that students can carry over into other aspects of their life. You, as a coach are trying to teach skills that students can use outside the classroom or when their classroom days are over. I also believe that these skills can translate into the classroom. It is my job as a coach and teacher to set an example and display these skills. That is why I believe you can't judge a coach's success just by just wins and losses. You have to take in to account the impression he or she is leaving on those athletes. In many cases if a coach does a good job teaching these life skills and the athletes buy in it will show in the win column. I think what most people on the outside don't see many of those things, the bonds created and the work that is being done on a daily basis. The community, school administration, and alumni or boosters must support that coach and that will in turn support and reinforce the life skills that are being taught.

Gender equity, to be honest in my sheltered experience I have not known this to be a huge issue. I know men that coach girls' sports, and I know women that coach boys' sports. I can see where this may be an issue. I know there are some issue with locker rooms and such and coaches in these situations have to realize they are in these situations and know the proper dialogue and procedures. For that reason a coach should disclose their gender orientation. I have heard of lawsuits in such occasions. Administrator may have a fear of lawsuits and want to know. That doesn't make it right or wrong, but unfortunately that is the world we live in. Equity for people of color is a much publicized topic. I believe there should be equal opportunity for everyone no matter what color, sex, married, single, kids, and no kids, whatever. I also believe it should be the best man/woman for the job. I do not think it's far if you have to hire someone to fill a quota when they are less qualified than another person no matter what their skin color is.

Cutting players is and always will be a touchy subject. I believe your strategy should change as the level increases. In my opinion I think it depends on the age group you are coaching. As a middle school and varsity coach I do both very different. At the junior high level I think it is important to allow as many athletes as possible to participate. I will not cut any athlete unless it is absolutely necessary. At this age I believe these athletes are still learning the sport, some may have just began playing the sport. I think this is an age when the athletes are still learning the sport, being introduced to the skills of the sport, and some may have simply not grown yet. To tell a 6, 7,8th grader who just picked up a soccer ball for the first time and tell them they can't play on the team can discourage them from participating forever. The only way I let players go is for academic issue or behavior detrimental to the team.

As students get older into the varsity level the sport becomes more and more competitive and cuts are some time needed. By this time most athletes have reached their growth and have trained and worked toward goals related to their sport. Some athletes may not be able to handle the physicality of some sports as well as the academic pressure of juggling practices and games with homework. Some athletes also may not want to commit the time needed. Most athletes by this time have also "picked" their sport. Students who may not have a "football physique" by the time they reach a varsity level have moved on to a sport that is more suitable to them. Budget reasons, as well as other extra-curricular activities come into play as students get close to college

or life choices. As more and more cuts are needed intramurals and rec leagues become a great option to give all students an opportunity to participate.

When it comes to pay-to-play, this may be an issue we just might have to get used to. This was implemented at my high school when I was a senior. It wasn't that great of an amount, but in this financially difficult time and with the expense of an athlete's personal equipment any amount may be difficult to come up with. Times are difficult and usually athletics are the first ones on the chopping block. Some pros are that it takes some financial strain off the school and district. I believe it's better than cutting athletics all too together. A con may be a player and his/her family having financial difficulty and not being able to participate.

As I touched on earlier, personal ethics and sportsmanship are very important to me and a big part of my coaching philosophy. As a coach you have to lead by example. There is so much more you are teaching than just sports. I believe young athletes can learn so much and benefit greatly from athletics, but the coach has to believe in teaching those aspects of sports along with the x's and o's. As an administrator you have the right to monitor what is going on. If the coach is on the level, he or she would welcome the support or not be afraid of the supervision, without stepping on any toes of course. Hiring a coach with previous issue would be a big risk. As high school athletics become more and more publicized and business like you will see more of this recruiting and a high profile coaches who may have had issues before being hired as the pressure to win grows.

Some of the skills are similar to what every teacher is trying to develop. I do believe in most cases a coach may have a slight advantage, because the students are typically in a sport by choice and feel they don't want to lose this opportunity of being on a team with their friends and classmates. I believe through coaching I can help my athletes develop these life skills; sportsmanship, responsibility, accountability, and the value of hard work to name a few.

No matter what sport I am coaching I begin the season with a few simple rules. If a student can't follow these rules they will be asked to leave the team. I always seem to have a few that it takes a little longer to comprehend these rules and they choose to leave the team, but soon come back knowing the error they've made. I have yet to lose an athlete or have yet to remove one completely from the team. I want to be able to have as many kids as I can on the team, but make sure they follow the rules of the team. I simply explain to my athletes that they are representing everyone at this school, so sportsmanship is addressed. There is a certain way you act and don't use the other teams as an excuse for acting inappropriate. I then explain to them that we are or will be a team, so teamwork and responsibility is addressed. I will then explain to the team the time in which we will be practicing, and that there is a certain level of responsibility that they have to be able to handle. They have to be at practice and games and still be able to complete their school work. We then discuss the value of hard work. Many of my students are never held accountable for their actions. When they let their grades slip and have to sit out a game or two they begin to see the cause and effect. They realize that they are being held accountable for their grades and their actions. They feel as though they have something personal to lose, they don't want to be the one sitting on the sidelines or off the team. You will also have one or maybe two athletes who just step

up and become a leader on the team. They will become vocal and push others around them to both strive for their best, but also encourage them to act according to the team rules. I think these athletes can gain the most.

There are many things I believe you can learn through sports. It is the simple things that I myself learned from my parents along with my coaches. Many of my athletes don't have that support from home. I feel this makes sports and my roles are both more difficult and also more important.