

Maintaining a Positive Team Environment

...athletes who had dropped out said that a combination of factors related to the team environment caused them to drop out. What are these factors? The cluster analysis identified eight:

- The coach didn't understand kids
- They didn't get to play enough
- The coach was a poor teacher
- There was too much pressure to win
- They didn't like their teammates
- Poor sportsmanship
- The coach played favorites
- The coach put too much pressure on me

It is important that coaches recognize that the title COACH does not guarantee automatic respect and devotion from their athletes. The children on your team expect a lot from you. Four of the eight factors on the list are coaching behaviors. Even the other factors are influenced by the coach. Most coaches do a great job working with their young athletes. Hopefully you are one of those.

The purpose of this article is not to be critical of coaches but rather to reinforce the importance of each coach thinking carefully about what you say and do as you coach your athletes. Good youth sport coaches are individuals who understand that they are coaching children, not college or professional athletes. These coaches spend much of their time teaching skills the young athletes need to be successful. Having fun is much more important to your athletes than winning. Sure, winning is part of the sport experience, but not the primary focus.

Look at the list of concerns expressed by the athletes. What can you do to change these so that your athletes have a positive experience? Do you pay attention to how your athletes act toward each other? Encourage your athletes to help each other, not criticize a teammate's performance. Sportsmanship is taught by example. Are you a good role model as you interact with your own athletes, other teams and coaches, and the officials? Can you go home after a practice or game, look at yourself in a mirror, and say I did the best I could for the children on my team? If you can, you should be proud of yourself. If you can't, you must try harder the next time. Do everything you can to make the athletes on your team thrilled to call you COACH!

This article provided by Dr. Richard Stratton, Health and Physical Education Program, Virginia Tech