

Are participation trophies worth giving out?

In November 2013, Keller Youth Association football decided to stop giving out participation trophies at the end of each season. Needless to say, this local sport's league decision went national with parents and coaches taking hard and fast stances on whether or not participation trophies were a good or bad thing in youth sports. It's arguably one of the most debated things in sports these days, so what's your opinion?

Participation trophies undermine the "real" winners

According to a poll released by Reason-Rupe, an estimated 57 percent said "only winners" should receive a trophy for their participation in kids' sports.

TODAY contributor Michele Borba said, "*Kids see through it, they know when they deserve the trophy, gold star and the red plate. Those unearned accolades also make kids hooked on those rewards. There goes the internal motivation and the joy of doing your best. What's the point of effort? Everyone is going to get a trophy for just showing up and breathing.*"

Participation rewards give kids the unrealistic expectation that attendance matters more than effort. Kids need to learn that "just showing up" isn't going to be good enough for the real world. Having studied recent increases in narcissism and entitlement among college students, Jean Twenge, author of ***Generation Me***, warns that "when living rooms are filled with participation trophies, it's part of a larger cultural message: to succeed, you just have to show up. In college, those who've grown up receiving endless awards do the requisite work, but don't see the need to do it well. In the office, they still believe that attendance is all it takes to get a promotion."

In life, "you're going to lose more often than you win, even if you're good at something," Ms. Twenge comments. "You've got to get used to that to keep going."

Giving everyone an award actually means you are undervaluing the hard work and effort and talent of a team/player that really excelled. Why should a kid push themselves if they know they don't even need to be "good enough" to get rewarded? If they just show up most of the time that's enough to get them that trophy and that is NOT the kind of generation we should be raising.

Participation trophies can be a good thing

Just because a player wasn't lucky enough to be sorted onto the winning team, that doesn't mean their well-played season should go unrecognized. Participation trophies can be a big self-esteem booster and a source of pride for kids who are just starting sports.

As one soccer mom argued, "*Sending him home empty-handed at the end of a hard-fought season won't help him learn the lesson of losing, it will teach him early that there's no value in the attempt.... Most participation trophies are given to the peewees, the tiny tots, the youngest players who will probably escape with their Ivy League futures intact and perhaps a sense of accomplishment for other qualities that we still appreciate—like just giving something a go even though you may not be any good, sportsmanship, teamwork, losing with grace, and finding joy in an endeavor, even when you know you won't be the best. Leaving with a symbol of those things can't be so bad.*"

Hilary Levey Friedman, a sociologist and author of ***Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture***, said, "While parents are wise to the general worthlessness of participation trophies, the kids are even savvier. The first trophy means something, even if it's just a participation trophy. It's very exciting, and all the kids I studied remembered the circumstances from the first trophy they got. But very quickly, these participation trophies lose their meaning unless it's for a really big win."

Yes, as players get older they realize that a participation trophy isn't worth much, but giving a 6-year-old his/her first trophy isn't going to ruin him/her for life and make them think that he/she deserves a reward just for showing up. Any kid that thinks that attendance is the only thing that matters is missing the real point of being on a youth sports team, and that is something the parents and coaches need to address with the individual player.