

Reasons kids play sports

Why did your children begin playing sports? Did they watch you play when they were very small? Were they watching sports with you on television? Did you take them to games? Did you take them out in the back yard or the driveway and play catch or shoot baskets with them? How did their interest in playing sports develop?

There could be one or more of several reasons that our kids become athletes. Perhaps their friends in the neighborhood were influential in developing their enjoyment of sports. Maybe their older siblings were their role models and they just followed in those footsteps.

Whatever the reason that our children developed an interest in playing sports, there has to be something that keeps their interest in order for them to continue to be active sports participants as they grow older. For every family that has children participating in athletics, sports has either always been a part of the family culture or it has become a major focus of the family culture.

Some research tells us that the main reason children become active participants in athletics is for pure enjoyment, or fun. Some kids like playing on teams because of the social aspect of it; most of their friends may be competing in athletics. There are kids who find success as athletes and continue to play because they enjoy the attention and it makes them feel good about themselves. There are kids who just have God-given athletic ability, and they get a thrill from being faster and stronger and winning contests and games against others.

A subject of conversation and debate sometimes centers on whether or not it is good to push kids into sports. Sure, most of us probably introduced our young athletes to sports at some point, but then what happened? Once our children get a taste of athletic skill development and some competition, do they follow our cues or do we follow theirs? How is it in your family? Do you have to pull your kids away from the video games to get them to play catch with you in the yard, or is it the kids tearing you away from chores or the television in order to spend some time practicing?

One way is not necessarily better than the other as a general rule, but for some kids one way might work more smoothly than another way. We have all probably heard of kids who got burnt out by being pushed into sports, or maybe a particular sport, at young ages. Sometimes these kids rebel and even quit competing, perhaps even long before we think they have reached their potential. Other kids may play and compete and meet parents' or coaches' demands for so many years until the time comes when they decide it just isn't that important to them anymore.

For some of us parents, and I could easily be one of these, our kids' participation in sports may be more important for us than it is for them. As parents, we should probably take some time each season, or each year, to look into the mirror, or into the eyes of our kids, and figure out what the whole athletic experience is about. Is it about us, the parents? Or is it about having happy, emotionally stable and healthy children?

When my son was about eleven or twelve years old, a parent asked me what I have him do in the winter to develop his throwing arm for baseball, since he always had a pretty good throwing arm. I

told that parent that during the winter my kid does whatever the rest of the kids are doing, that there isn't a concern about arm development.

I do remember when my son told me that he wasn't going to play football as a junior in high school. I told him that if he didn't want to play that it was his decision and it was fine with me. Inside though, I couldn't figure out what the heck he was thinking, and I wondered what I was going to do on Friday nights in the fall. I was thinking about myself. He just didn't want to spend his autumn on the football practice field and in football pads on the high school team.....no big deal really, is it? That didn't make him less of a person or more of a person, and it didn't make me more or less anything, either!

I certainly hope that my kids would never play just because they thought I wanted them to play, but it happens with some kids and may have even happened with my children.

The sports culture is different in each family and in each town or city. In my home, my kids were surrounded by baseball twelve months a year, because as a college coach I lived my life on a baseball field, in the dugout, and in a fieldhouse with winter practices. My kids ran around a college campus as they grew up, surrounded by basketball and volleyball and baseball. My friends were coaches. We watched sports on television and my kids traveled around all spring and summer watching teenagers play ball.

Due to my profession, my kids thought it was normal to be around athletic activities every day.....that was a part of our family culture. What I tried not to do was force them to practice or make them join teams. I don't recall saying to my son or daughter, "Hey, let's go throw, you need to work on this....." It was usually the other way around.

When our kids ask, we must say yes, though, or set aside some time later in the day to join them in whatever positive activities they want to do with us. Making sports a fun thing for kids is what helps to instill a love for sports, and will help them have healthy attitudes about competition and athletic activities. It isn't about winning. It isn't about being the best. It isn't about having the perfect jump shot. It isn't about getting a scholarship or becoming the next Barry Bonds. It is about pure enjoyment, love of a sport, respect of the sport, being part of a team, respect of the opponent.

For us parents, it is about providing our children with a healthy outlook on life, keeping athletics in perspective, and sharing fabulous moments with our kids, for our kids.

Tax headache? MSN Money provides relief with tax tips, tools, IRS forms and more! <http://moneycentral.msn.com/tax/workshop/welcome.asp>