

TEAM DISTRACTIONS

Coaches sometimes talk about distractions. A distraction on an athletic team is something that interferes with the progress the team is trying to make. During the course of a season a team is usually trying to accomplish a few things. Some of those could be things like improving sport skills, increasing awareness of the game, becoming a more cohesive unit, winning games and championships, striving for team success, understanding game strategy, etc.

Various things can become distractions. Some of those things may be out of a team's (coaches and players) control. For outdoor sports, bad weather can prevent teams from getting adequate opportunities for quality practice. Injuries and sickness to players can become a distraction.

Other distractions to teams are avoidable and definitely within the control of the coaches and players. Negative thinking by some team members can become a distraction to a team that is trying to achieve goals. Lack of effort at practices and games can certainly become a distraction to a team. Lack of mutual respect between team members, coaches and players alike, can also be a distraction. Often a good coaching staff is able to eliminate these kinds of distractions as they appear, perhaps even on a daily basis. A coaching staff has the opportunity on a daily basis to address these issues in order to help the team accomplish some of its goals, such as building cohesiveness and striving for team success.

A distraction that is most difficult for a team to overcome is the sort of distraction that derives from consistently poor behavior of one or more team members. For example, a player who consistently arrives late for team functions can cause a distraction. A player who never seems to give the kind of effort that his/her teammates give can be a distraction. A player who commonly whines during practices and games can be a distraction. Sometimes coaches address these occurrences and sometimes they do not. Just because the coaches don't address the issue with the team does not eliminate it as a team problem. Players see these kinds of things and can allow their teammates' inappropriate behaviors to become a distraction.

Most of us have witnessed displays of inappropriate behavior by players which would appear to be a potential distraction for a team. The perpetrator of the behavior inevitably is confronted by one of the coaches. If the poor behavior is an isolated incident and out of character for the particular kid, then usually the coach can deal with the athlete, the athlete learns, and it can be done and forgotten. Often though, it seems that the player who is being a distraction for the team this week is the same player who was a distraction last week, and last month, and perhaps even last season. These are the athletes who bring their teams down, and as much effort as a coach might put into correcting the player's behavior, nothing seems to get through to the kid and he never learns to change his behavior. These athletes often become problems for every team they participate on.

For some of these kids, the best thing to do might be to remove them from the team. Perhaps when something of value like that is taken away from an athlete he may finally see the light and discover that he is the problem after all.

On the other hand, how do you think an athlete advances in sports through youth leagues and into high school while being a distraction on almost every team he plays for? If a kid can get away with inappropriate behaviors, he will continue to exhibit those behaviors. A good coach can sometimes set a kid straight at an early age, often simply by sitting the athlete on the bench for a game or two.

A good parent can certainly play an important role in a situation like this, too. Too often the parents come to the rescue of their children and try to point the blame in another direction, such as at the coaches or teammates or the system. As parents, we have the responsibility to teach our children that by being members of a team, they need to make sacrifices for the team. We want our child athletes to be treated with respect and fairness, but that doesn't mean that we should want them to enter into a team situation with selfish agendas and attitudes.

As parents, we can make everyone's participation easier. We can make demands on our children regarding their behaviors as they have to do with their athletic participation. We can also support the coaches when they discipline our children for being selfish and inappropriate. Children learn that way, and ultimately the team that he competes on may be free from the distractions that prevent it from achieving its goals.