

HOW IMPORTANT IS WINNING?

Just how important is winning? Are there other priorities in youth sports that some might consider to be just as important or even more so than winning? Where do we place winning on our list of priorities when we are involved in youth sports. What are we sacrificing in order to win? Can we make winning a priority without devaluing other important aspects of our children's involvement in youth sports?

My perception of youth athletics is that some coaches tend to place more value in winning than the most of the athletes and parents. It often appears that coaches feel more successful if their teams win. Perhaps our definitions of success can help us put winning in perspective, but chances are we all have our own definition of success when it comes to youth athletic teams.

Most of us would probably agree that winning is less important for young children's teams than it is for the older ones. But at what age do we cross that line? I recently spoke with a high school athlete who told me that in her opinion it is more important for her team to try its best than it is to win. When posed another question, she said that she would prefer losing a game if her team gave a great effort, as opposed to winning a game in which the team's effort was not good.

I have coached for several years, and I concur with those thoughts.

This same athlete said that by attending the Saints Basketball Camp as a child, she learned from Coach Fred Smith, one of the most successful coaches ever in Lenawee County, that "Winning is not everything." Most of the coaches at higher levels who send that kind of message are the coaches who lose a lot of games. Fred Smith's teams rarely lose games and almost annually win championships and are rated very high in national rankings.

Hopefully the youth and high school coaches in our area are on the same page as Coach Smith. We can not really know where winning is in the priorities of our children's coaches unless they actually verbalize it. It is possible that we perceive youth coaches as being too focused on winning when we see them get upset at their young athletes. Perhaps it isn't the scoreboard that is causing the coaches to show lots of emotion during games. The emotional outbursts may actually be due to the behaviors of our kids rather than the results of their efforts, or lack of effort.

One question to be asked is, "If winning is not the priority, then what is?"

I can think of several things that are more important than winning a game, an event, or a championship. Some of those things are character development, pride in effort, selflessness, positive self-image, mental toughness (being able to handle bumps in the road), confidence, respect for teammates and opponents, respect for the sport, etc. The list can go on and on. If these attributes are being developed in our young athletes, then does it really matter if they win a game or lose a game? Is it really important if they won

last year's championship? Does what happened last year, or yesterday, even matter anymore?

When your child comes home from an athletic event after winning, are they a better person because of the victory? On the other hand, if they lose the event, do you love them any less than if they would have won?

Our kids can learn so many positive, important things through their participation in sports, but they aren't going to learn them just because of their participation. They will learn these great things that will carry them through their lifetimes because of the influences they have gotten from their teammates, from their coaches, and from their parents.

They will learn great things from the feedback they get when they win, and when they lose. We parents are crucial in the development of our kids and their responses to individual achievements and team success, and their reactions to athletic adversity and disappointment. The coaches of our children play a huge role in that, too!!

The next time you sit in the stands and feel yourself getting angry because you believe the coach is not doing what you think he should do to win the game, check your thoughts and remember that there is more to the game than just winning. I don't think most of us would sacrifice some of our most important values just for the sake of winning a game.