

## Defining Success

One of the age old questions in every aspect of life is the question of success. How is it defined? In sports, simple ways to determine success are statistics, win-loss percentage, and championships won. But in today's sport culture, especially when it has to do with children and high school athletes, are those the only measuring sticks of success?

If a little league team in any sport wins over eighty percent of its games, does that mean they are successful? If it wins only half of its games, is it not a success then? What about high school teams? If the average conference has eight teams, then only 12.5% of the teams across the state or country can win a conference championship. Does that mean that the other 87.5% of teams were unsuccessful?

High school district champions in Michigan represent only about 20% of the state's teams; therefore only one in five teams compete in regional competition. If winning is the only way to define success in youth sports, then we are obviously failing in providing confidence building experiences for our children in competitive sports. On the other hand, if our definition of success is broader than championships and statistics, then perhaps there are more success stories out there than at first glance.

A youth coach who teaches sport skills to his athletes, even though the team doesn't win very often, can produce a successful team. A coach who helps the team members understand game strategies and develop awareness of situations can lead a successful team, in spite of a mediocre win-loss record. A coach who exhibits care and concern about his players, regardless of what the scoreboard says, can help team members have a successful experience.

On the flip side, a team can conceivably lack success even though they win a championship, if other potential factors of success are not met. Success in sports is not always based on winning, no matter what some people may try to tell you. As parents and coaches, if we base our children's successes on simple results of competition, then we are missing the big picture and the reasons that our kids compete in athletics.

I was recently privileged to attend a banquet for a high school athletic program. The team that was being honored has had a pretty good winning percentage. That is almost always the first measure of success to the general fan base.

What was more impressive to me, and also inspirational, were the words that were used to describe the two senior co-captains of this team. Listening to the coaches praise the team's only two seniors was a delight. It was clear that these two players were about as great as teammates can be, for each other and for all of the younger members of the team. They were described as unselfish, as leaders, as friends, as hard workers, as mentors, and as players whose egos did not interfere with their roles as captains.

No matter what the record of that team was, their season would undoubtedly be a success. The presence of two captains who know their roles and understand that it is a privilege to

compete with their teammates is priceless to a coach. It is something special for the parents of these athletes, too, I'm sure.

As we raise our children and encourage them to become aspiring athletes, we must not forget about the development of our kids as team players. When people in the sporting world discuss the benefits of athletic participation and mention things such as the development of self-confidence, communication skills, leadership abilities, etc., it is a reminder to us that producing quality people through athletics is just as important as winning, and probably even more important than championships.

I'm sure that the qualities that these two captains bring to their team are in part due to the parenting and mentoring they have received over the years. One of the greatest parts of this is that their younger teammates have now been a part of a successful team, and they will hopefully emulate the attitudes of their captains so that they will continue to experience success, and thus pass that heritage on to future teammates.