

FAMILY Bless the Coach

Be it t-ball, baseball, soccer or hockey, most little league coaches are there for the love of children. For some it's even more personal. Their kid is on the team.

The value of participation by children in little league sports is manifold. Children get to learn the game, develop physical skills, social skills, sportsmanship and most of all have fun.

The attitude with which children enter little league sports is generally a reflection of their parent(s). So while most children enter sports with the above values in mind, some are given the impression by their parent(s) that winning is most valued over anything else in the experience. These children lose focus of the other values, instead learning to base the value of their experience on winning alone. With the focus on winning, all other values take a second seat. Hence sportsmanship goes out the window as does social skill development, not to mention fun. The only experience of value becomes skill development because that can facilitate winning.

For these children the love of play may be lost and their participation can become a job, often to fulfil parental wishes for a winner. Even anti-social skills may be reinforced if the behaviour fulfils the pursuit of winning. Hence these kids are at risk of learning unsportsmanship behaviour. For some, unsportsmanship behaviour is reinforced by parents who reward goals and winning over participation and fun.

Pity the coaches who may feel caught in the middle between parents pressuring for the win versus children seeking fun. Parental intrusions and demands upon their child can set up a tension not only for the child but also for the coach whose attention is now divided, needing to manage the parent(s). In the worst of cases, conflict erupts between parents

whose focus is on winning versus coaches who focus is on participation and fun. In some cases the conflict turns ugly and in all circumstances this occurs in view of the children. As a result, unsportsmanship behaviour is thus role modelled by the parent to all children witness to the event. Fun and participation is spoiled for all.

Children have enough on their plate attending to the demands of the game whilst trying to have fun. So it is also true for the coaches. Coaches only concern should be the children and facilitating the joy of the game. As unpaid volunteers, giving up their time for other's children, they should be left to serve the children, not parental wishes for winners. The pursuit is participation and fun. When those goals are achieved the initiative for skill development and mastery of the game comes naturally to kids who want it.

If you really want your child to succeed at little league sports, sit back and enjoy the game. Let the coaches manage all else and be grateful they stepped up to the plate on behalf of your child. Their kids are likely there too.