

## Team Sports

I enjoy writing and sharing my views on things. None of you have to read all of this, but I hope you do. It will give you an idea about some of my approaches to this team.

There is so much to be gained by playing sports on a team. Unfortunately, because of the professional ranks about the only reason we ever hear about is money. Sure, some people talk about the joy of winning championships also, which is definitely a joy. But most of us will never get paid to play sports and we will never be on the front page of any newspaper for winning so are you all wasting your time? The obvious answer is 'Of course not'. It's those other benefits that I want to talk about.

First and foremost, it's the friends you make. I can't remember much about any games I played in high school, but I can vividly remember names and faces of a lot of people that I had the pleasure of playing with. Those bonds are far bigger than any score. I coached a select team where we had girls from 9 different high schools. They had a great time together without the baggage that comes with cliques, boyfriends and other such distractions. Many great friendships were formed when complete strangers came together on a team. (Some of these girls are now living together in college.) When I asked for evaluations from the girls, the number one thing that came up over and over again was that they had fun.

Fun. Not something you always hear when people discuss team sports. But shouldn't that be the most important thing for kids? Fun. I've learned that if you disguise other things like teamwork, discipline, responsibility and effort with fun that surprisingly kids do better. So I've never taken myself overly serious. The girls will tell you that I'll poke fun at myself during practice, and I'll laugh because I'm doing my best to have fun. That's what I want them to see as well. It doesn't mean I'm not trying my best and anybody who knows me knows that I coach all through a practice and a game. I'll tell someone when they're doing something wrong, but even more so, I'll tell them when they're doing something right. I'll tell them that it's okay to try something and fail. I've often told the girls that I'd love to see them try some move we worked on in practice in a game. I tell them that we'll probably laugh if they fall flat on their face as they trip over the ball, but I'll also applaud the attempt. You can't fail if you don't try, but you also can't succeed.

So that brings me to the next benefit of team sports and it's a package deal. Team sports give you the chance to push yourself further, try things, take chances knowing that if it doesn't work, you'll have friends by your side who will support you, just like you'll support them. That attitude maybe more than anything else take the 'Me' concept out of sports and makes it 'Us'. Individual sports have you succeeding or failing on your own, but here you have to be looking out for yourself at all times, but also for the person next to you. A good team builds confidence in everyone, not just the 'stars'. A good team learns to support each other and at the same time push each other to do more. If you have the attitude that you're going to do your best not because dad offers you \$5 for a goal and not because you want to get all the attention but simply because you don't want to let down a teammate, then you've truly become a team player.

This feeds into one of the most important things you can learn from team sports. Responsibility. Showing up on time for practice, being prepared, listening, learning are all facets of responsibility. The opposite whether it's in sports or in business is a disaster. If everyone blames everyone else then you have no chance of succeeding. Every single person who plays should think about the game that they played and ask themselves if they did the best they could have on every play. If you can't say yes, then don't start pointing the finger at others. Take responsibility and make yourself improve. I've often heard parents complaining when the defense or the goalkeeper made a bad play that cost the team a goal. Sure, all players involved should admit that they made a mistake if that's what happened, but only for that play, not for the whole game. I rarely hear parents lamenting the fact that in the first minute of the game little Suzy had a breakaway and shot the ball 5 yards wide or over the goal. They all yell "Good try" and so on. But that goal the team didn't get is just as important as the one against them. Maybe more so. Had she scored early it would have given the team momentum and the goal at the end would have been meaningless. What I'd prefer to hear from both players is that they're responsible for the play and they're going to do better next time. And then I want to hear the rest of the team support them. Unfortunately, too often everybody else acts like someone else lost the game for the team and they never consider that they were just as much a part of the loss. Just like the girl who scores a goal in a game that ends up winning the game. She didn't win the game alone and doesn't deserve all of the credit.

Competition. Another great aspect of sports. All your life, you're going to face competition. Sports, school, work. You have to learn how to compete. How to accept winning and losing and come out stronger regardless. If I have a complaint about coaching girls in sports, it's that they're too nice to their teammates. They're every bit as competitive against another team, but in practice they don't want to hurt anyone's feelings or make anyone else look bad. If I was the worst player on the team, I wouldn't want everyone taking it easy on me, I want their best. Because their best will give me the best chance to achieve my best. By taking it easy on a weak player, you're actually ensuring that she will fail when she gets into a real game. Anyways, I apologize for the tangent there. There is a thrill when competing. I doubt there is much difference in how the players feel whether competing in a superbowl or a U16 girls third division tournament. Adrenaline, nervousness, pressure, elation, disappointment, it's all the same regardless of the level and it's all good. Learning how to deal with those feelings makes you a stronger, better person. This is the kind of thing you can't get anywhere else. Video games have ruined a lot of kids and made them weak. If you're losing, you just hit reset and start over so there really isn't much pressure. If you lose a real competition, you'll work harder, prepare more and be better the next time.

If you'll notice, something that I have not identified as a benefit is winning. It honestly isn't. It's a reward for everything else, but it's not a benefit. So for all the players and especially for the parents who go into a game thinking that the only real outcomes of playing are winning and losing (yeah and ties) then I say you're very wrong. I say this especially to the people who believe that anything short of winning is a complete waste of time. Yes, at the highest levels of professional play, that's true because winning is tied to money which unfortunately has seemingly become the only reason the majority of people play sports these days. But at all lower levels, players can learn so much from losing. I'd even venture to say that losing and what you do about it can make you a better person. Do you quit? Blame others?

(Especially blaming the refs) or do you show everyone how great you really are and accept some responsibility for the defeat and then vow to make yourself and your team better?

These are the true benefits of sports: Camaraderie, Responsibility, Competition and Fun. (Amongst other things). Unfortunately, our world focuses on pretty much one thing. Winning. And maybe this is why I think I'm different. I'll focus on the other things, that way I'm guaranteed to succeed. Winning isn't always within my control, but creating an atmosphere of fun, responsible competition is. And if everyone does their best, then we'll win on top of everything else.

Kevin