

YouthFirst

Coaches Learning About Youth Sports

The Sports Education and Leadership Program at UNLV

Grade 1-2 Realistic Expectations

"Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence." Vince Lombardi

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Reasonable Athlete Expectations

Children in sports are always trying to live up to expectations of adults. This is either the coach, parents, or a professional athlete that they admire and look up to. Youth have a strong need for adult approval. Unrealistic expectations from adults can leave a child with feelings of low self-worth. Coaches play a key role in young athlete's lives, so it is very important to keep their expectations reasonable. Expectations should be based on the knowledge that all younger athletes vary in their development of skills and coordination, and go through stages and plateaus in de-

velopment, while having numerous growth spurts. Coaches need to be aware of what motivates their athletes to uphold similar expectation levels. Are your athletes motivated because their parents are making them play, or enrolled them in the sport. Are they motivated because of social reasons, their best friends play on the team. Or are they motivated because of enjoyment, they love the sport itself. After assessing each individual athlete, judging the development level, capabilities, and what motivates them, you as a coach should be able to offer your athletes reasonable expectations of them.



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Keeping It Fun

What is the number one reason youth participate in sports? By now you better know that the answer is FUN! It's a proven principle of peak performance that the more fun an athlete is having, the more they will learn and the better they will perform. When a child stops having fun and begins to dread practice or competitions, it is time

for us coaches or parents to be concerned. Follow this rule of thumb: If your athlete is not enjoying what they are doing, investigate the problem. What is preventing them from having an enjoyable sport experience? Is it you, the coach? The pressure? The child's parents? Be realistic when devising practices and implementing your coaching philosophy. Remember that a child who continues to play long after the fun is gone will soon become a drop out statistic and may ruin their sport experience for the rest of their lifetime.

How To Define Success

One of the main purposes of the youth sport experience is skill acquisition and mastery. When a child perform to his potential and loses, and when the coach focuses on the outcome and becomes critical, this is when the child will start to view themselves as a failure. When a child plays at their very best, as a coach you need to make them feel like a winner. Make them feel like a winner by pointing out the positives and things that you could work on to improve together. Remind the athlete of their individual and team goals, and how they should keep trying to advance to meet their goals. Remember to keep goals realistic. The purpose of the goals is to provide incentive and should be perceived as reachable. Base the goal on pass experiences, this will indicate what they are able to do in the near future. Goals should be performance based and not outcome based. This means that goals should be for a runner to keep improving their time each time they race, instead of a goal of winning each race. If you define success and failure in terms of winning and losing, you are playing a losing game with your athletes.

Parental Expectations

Here are a few ideas on how to encourage parents to make their child's season fun, with lots of positive memories

1. Encourage parents to support their child whether they win or lose
2. Encourage parents to be helpful, but not the coach.
3. Encourage parents to be realistic about their child's abilities, attitudes, sportsmanship, and skill levels.
4. Encourage parents to not live their life through their children.
5. Encourage parents to enforce and back up any necessity for discipline, rules, and regulations.
6. Encourage parents to never compare their child with other children on the team.
7. Get to know your athletes parents. This will ensure that they approve of your attitude and ethics.
8. Encourage parents to teach their child the meaning of courage. Courage is overcoming a fear.
9. Encourage parents to remember that winning is important, but winning at all cost is ridiculous.
10. Encourage parents to side with officials. Advise them to not overreact to their calls. Advise them to teach their child to have respect for officials and to play by the rules.
11. Encourage parents to make sports fun for their child. If the child is not having fun, then we are missing the whole point of youth sports.