

Kids Sports  
How the Lack of Age Appropriate Adjustments hurts kids  
Physical & Psychological

After spending over 25 years coaching many kids and parenting 2 male and 2 female athletes all the way from 1st grade CYO and YMCA through NCAA Division 1 athletics and everywhere inbetween, I have witnessed and learned much. I also spent 2 years as a Physical Education Major at St. Mary's University. The following information is taken from those experiences and generally accepted sports knowledge

*When should we start getting our children involved in sports?*

Answer: When you can find an organized league that makes age appropriate adjustments to accommodate the age of the kids involved.

*Are we starting our kids out too early in sports?*

The answer to those questions are affected by two primary factors.

1. The quality and level of the age appropriate league adjustments to accommodate the different age groups.
2. The proper attitude towards competition, and player development by coaches and the league. (parents not excluded)

In CYO, and in particular Zone 6, I see the effort that is constantly being made to adjust league rules to accommodate different levels of ability by player's age. This is one of the reasons CYO is a better developmental league for children than other alternative leagues. It is an ever evolving organization, at least at the zone level. At Zone 6, there are ongoing efforts prior to each sport season to address any additional adjustments. We have made courts smaller in volleyball, the field and ball size smaller in soccer. We use smaller balls for Tots thru Mites in basketball. In baseball and softball we have adjusted ball types to the appropriate age groups. I see good progress in physical adjustments being made, but we all seem to miss the target on necessary adjustments to mental attitudes concerning competition and player development expectations.

Whether we like it or not, coaches are very influential to their players. Coaches are looked up to as role models. Good or bad example, you are being watched by your players. Note the finding below.

Several years ago, The Office of Youth Ministry of the Archdiocese of San Antonio had a self study conducted as to how they could better minister to the youth of our Catholic Community. One of the major eye opening findings was something that many in coaching already knew. **"A CYO coach is one of, if not, the most influential person in a young athlete's life"**. From this finding the position of "team youth minister" was established in an effort to help the coach make the connection between the sport and the Catholic Church. This finding was discovered while the Office of Youth Ministry was under the direction of Pasqual (Pat) Perillo, who now offices at St. George Maronite. The O.Y.M. is under new direction today, but to this day, I feel they have yet to figure out how to effectively take advantage of this avenue to reach kids. Establishing a team minister is an attempt to address this finding.

Having formally established the tremendous impact coaches have on kids, we have to be very attentive as to what we say and do around them. Most parents already know this and they watch what they say and do around their kids, but when it comes to sports some parents and coaches seem to loose perspective. Over-competative coaches and parents are a negative influence on kids. This is due to how they handle themselves during games and probably after games. The focus on winning at all costs by coaches and parental pressure to succeed on the court or field only serve to have a child to associate sports with pressure situations. They will try to please both and the kids get confused. This is much more so for parents at the TOT1 and TOT 2 level. Being new to the sports scene, many coaches and parents tend to bring too much passion and competativeness to the games. Our goal is to get this under control. They should focus and get fulfillment from the fact that just being on a team and playing is a positive developmental opportunity for the child.

I have seen how very loud screaming and yelling (cheering?) by parents and coaches has intimidated kids. Last year one child, that I know of, was traumatized by the extreme yelling that he ran off the floor 10 seconds into the 1st. game and never was able to return for the rest of the season. This screaminmg and yelling is much more pronounced in basketball due to the confines of the gym. As the years progress parents and coaches seem to tone it down, so the primary purpose of this information is to inform parents and coaches of TOT players.

The goal of parents at the game should be to express supportive comments in a controlled voice. Coaching from the bleachers is what causes parents to yell so that they can be heard above the other screaming parents. This in turn causes the coaches to have to shout their instructions to players even louder which can be translated by the child as him or her being angry at them. Many times the parental screaming is so great that the coach gives up trying to give the kids instructions. TOT 1 & 2 level kids are still unfamiliar with the game, so CYO allows an extra coach to stand at the offensive end of the court to give them instructions. Those coaches need to heard.

All TOT coaches need to meet with or send out a memo to their parents before the first game. coaches should ask parent to keep the noise level down, so that they can coach the kids. They should ask parents to refrain from coaching from the bleachers and to keep the cheering noise at a moderate level.  
Loud yelling / coaching confuses the players and elevates the noise level in the gym

We in Zone 6 need to lower the intensity of fans and coaches at the TOT 1 & 2 level.

Below are some positive things that all can do to improve the situation.

# **POSITIVE PARENTS & COACHES**

## **10 POSITIVE things that Coaches Do:**

1. Have realistic expectations - development is more important than winning
2. Always include FUN in the sport - in practice and games
3. Obtain appropriate training for the sport - coaching is a continuing education
4. Having a desire to win, but enjoying the improvement of player / team
5. Allowing injured players ample time to recuperate
6. Maintaining communication with parent
7. Knowing what is abuse and how to prevent it - verbal & psychological
8. Accepting the performance of referees and officials
9. Having respect for the game - Don't forget it is still only a game
10. Knowing the difference between outcome goals versus performance goals

## **10 POSITIVE things that Parents Do:**

1. Attending athlete/child's events
2. Positive verbalization during events - encouragement
3. Praise of athlete/child - compliment effort
4. Always including fun in events -
5. Encouraging child to focus on more than one sport - at least through 8th grade
6. Talking and listening to athlete/child -
7. Helping child by practicing skills with them.
8. Positive attitude toward coach
9. Giving coach respect during and after events
10. Being appreciative of work by referees or officials