

WRITE TEAM: Equal playing time in youth sports?

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Caption

I recently attended a sporting event where I witnessed a father talking to his distraught daughter.

The daughter was not currently getting as much playing time as her teammates and she was very visibly upset about this. Instead of going and complaining to all the parents in the bleachers or going to the coach to complain, the father asked his daughter these questions: "When was the last time you have been to the gym to work on your skills? Have you been working in the weight room? Have you had a good attitude? Have you been working like a team player?"

She could not answer these questions for her father. He then responded to her, "This is one person's problem, yours. You need to make it so they have no choice but to leave you in because you are that good and valuable to the team." I want to give kudos to this parent for putting the responsibility back on his daughter and making it a life lesson. He did not handle this all-too-common situation by engaging in the whispering bleacher banter or yelling profanities at the coach throughout the game. This father chose to put responsibility on his daughter to make her realize that she needed to improve her performance and her attitude if she wanted to increase her playing time.

By the time kids reach the junior high level the idea of equal playing time should not be seen as a requirement. Lower level activities require equal playing time, enforce no-cut policies, and do a great job at allowing kids to hone their skills and try new roles, positions, etc. so they can find their strengths. By the time kids reach junior high they are competing for larger goals and they are preparing for high school level competition. Not everyone is going to get equal playing time. Not everyone is going to get an A on his or her test. Not everyone is going to get the same amount of stage time. Not everyone can be first chair in the band. Not everyone is going to be a starter. People earn these things by their performance.

When you are on a competitive team of any kind you have to realize you are competing! You are competing not only as a team, but also you are competing for specific spots and roles. This is not a bad thing. This is a time to find strengths and weaknesses. It is a time to find likes and dislikes. It is a time to learn life lessons.

We cannot expect everyone to have the resilience of Rudy Ruettiger, but an attitude like his paired with hard work, listening to coaches, showing up to perform and displaying good character and teamwork can benefit a player as well as the whole team.

Unfortunately, even with hard work and great attitudes, some kids just aren't cut out for certain activities. Me, for example, I am never going to be a performance singer. No matter how much I practice or how many voice lessons I pay for I am never going to be a good singer. Even if I got a spot on the choir I would know I would never be a soloist. We all must understand our capabilities.

Parents need to help their children by setting a good example of sportsmanship instead of instilling entitlement. If you join a competitive activity and you are not able to honorably ride the roller coaster of emotions then maybe competitive activities are not one of your strengths.

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