

## Parentally Speaking – January 2008

***How can parents ensure that their children are participating in athletics for the right reasons and not because they are being pushed too hard?***

As with anything, parents can set the tone when it comes to the way our children perceive sports. If we show a lot of excitement and enthusiasm to take our kids to their games and practices, there is a better chance that they are going to enjoy the activity. If we get there a few minutes early and offer to practice with them or stay for a few minutes after practices or games to play with them, they may start to look forward to that extra time with mom or dad. The key is not to pressure your kids to play or practice the sports at home, but still be willing to play with them or work with them – even if we are not very good at that sport – when they ask us to. Let the kids dictate their level of involvement and support them in whatever they decide. As they grow to enjoy sports, they naturally will gravitate toward the ones they like best. At some point they will decide whether or not they want to get really serious about one specific sport. Give them your full support no matter what they decide.

Our teaching philosophy is to focus on the fundamentals, keeping the game simple, while still making it fun and allowing kids to be kids. Sports get serious enough fast enough these days. If your kids want to practice or play, let them do it and join them if you are able. Don't force them to do things away from practice or games, but also keep in mind that one of the important life lessons to teach them is that if they are part of a team that they need to attend the practices and games (unless they are sick or injured, of course), or they are letting their teammates down.

You can use the games to address sportsmanship and other standards of behavior as well. Ask your kids how they feel about the way one of the coaches yelled at the umpires and what it means to respect authority. Discuss why it is important to actually look someone you have competed with in the eye and give him or her a firm handshake at the end of a game. Explain to them how in every aspect of life they will have to accept final outcomes

and decisions that are made without crying or complaining, and that as long as they truly gave their best effort there is no reason to be upset about those outcomes.

Between work schedules, school schedules and extracurricular activities it seems as though there are fewer and fewer opportunities for parents to participate in activities with their kids and have meaningful dialogue with them about life and its lessons. Sports can provide a means to do both, so try to take advantage of the opportunity whenever you can.

**By Cal Ripken Jr.**