

Parentally Speaking part 4 – January 2008

For parents who coach athletes at the youngest age levels, what is the best way to handle the short attention spans – especially when it comes to your own child? Should this issue be ignored, in which case it might send the wrong message to the other players, or should it be addressed. Where do you draw the line?

I would imagine that it is difficult any 4- or 5-year-old to pay attention to much of anything for more than a few minutes at a time. That's normal. Don't allow yourself to get too worked up about the situation, and certainly don't single out your child in front of everybody on the field. That can create a sense of embarrassment that may turn him or her away from the sport you are coaching. Instead, enjoy the time that you have together, knowing that every child matures at his or her own rate physically and emotionally. You really can't rush that. It happens naturally.

The best approach is to spend some time working on his or her skills at home and try to give him or her easily attainable goals that can be achieved on the field. The goals may be as simple as not falling down, kicking the ball in the right direction every time or throwing to the proper base, depending on the sport. Then, when he or she achieves one of the goals, celebrate it publicly. Make the child feel like he or she just made the greatest play in the world. At that age you really want to promote having fun first and to develop a love for the game. If you make sure not to dwell on the problem areas and really get excited about the good things, your child is likely going to start striving to do what makes you happy.

By Cal Ripken Jr.