

Sport Philosophy Paper

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## Abstract

Youth engagement in sport, and the coaches that guide these sports, is a widely discussed topic. It is important for those that are interested in coaching to have at least a general idea of what coaching means to them, and also, what they believe their role in sport to be. A coach should know what they want athletes to get out of sports participation; they should understand the functions of sport in the lives of the youth that they are interacting with. A good coach knows what success means to them individually, and sets goals that will bring the athletes to a level of success. A coach should have thought about what winning means – is it a championship title, or smaller, individual success? They should know the law, and their understanding of gender equity, as well as equity for people of color. A coach is more than just a person standing in front of a group of athletes saying, “Go run.” A coach is a leader, a role model, someone to help athletes succeed in, not only their given sport, but their lives.

**BELIEFS ABOUT THE ROLE OF SPORT****Youth Sport**

The role of sport for youth is fairly simple. Sports participation should teach young children to be active and healthy. They should be taught a variety of skills, in a laid back and enjoyable setting. Too many rules and too much focus on winning too soon can turn children off of sport forever. At this level, sports should be about learning to work together with others, and to teach proper ways to warm up, exercise and be healthy. Some discussion of what foods are good for a growing body would be appropriate, as would a discussion on what foods are not nutritious and do nothing to help your body. Participation in sport, beyond the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, should be the idea of community. Practices, or camps, for young athletes should involve community and team building activities. Sports should promote the idea of working together, and should also teach that success is not gained by one individual alone; it takes a whole team to reach success. Youth sport should be available to all. There should not be cuts, a loss of participation time because the athlete's skills are low, or any discouragement to participate in the future because of skill level. Youth sport is about getting out and being active with a group of other kids.

**High School Sport**

The role of sport in high school is not terribly different from the role of sport at the youth level. Involvement is still about being healthy, and learning how to work with a team, but there are some differences. Community reaches beyond the team at this level. The community in which the school is located is made up of a group of people that support the team in their endeavors, it is only right that the sports teams give back to this community in the form of community service. The players can read to children at the elementary schools, participate in the various walks and

runs for particular causes, run free day camps in the summer months to promote healthy lifestyles to children in the area, and be supportive of the various events within the community. When the athletes do well, the community buys t-shirts, attends games, and puts signs in their yard; it is only fair that the athletes show that they are a part of that community through their actions. This involvement, coupled with coaching and sport participation, should teach the athletes a level of responsibility. They should be taught that they are role models, and be held to a higher standard than others. Participation in sport can be exciting, and take these athletes to levels they have only dreamed of, but they have to have a level of responsibility and understanding to be able to succeed in life once they reach these levels, and positive coaching can help them to achieve this.

### **College**

The role of sport in college builds on the ideas discussed in high school and youth sport. The participation is still about fitness, community, responsibility and a healthy lifestyle, but the level of participation becomes more intense. The role of sport from a college or university standpoint is far more economic. A university that has a great football program – for example – could make more money on enrollment due to students who enjoy watching a great football team. For the athletes, the role of sports in college becomes more specific, more consuming. The athletes are typically involved in only one sport, and it becomes more about technique and sport specific skills. The sport can also become the vehicle for continuing on in to professional sports. At the college level, sport participation becomes more multi-faceted.

## **FUNCTIONS/OBJECTIVES OF SPORT AT VARIOUS LEVELS**

### **Youth Sport**

In youth sport, the most important objectives are fun and learning. At this level, sport participation should be enjoyable, and should be an activity that young children are excited about attending. The sport skills should be taught through fun and interesting ways, and be done in such a manner that engages as many athletes at one time as possible. There should not be much standing around, the athletes should be active and learning. Fitness is next. Sport participation should teach children the values of a healthy lifestyle, while showing them how much fun being active can be. Entertainment ranks right along with fitness at this level. Many parents enroll their children in sport for something to do. Sport is something to keep them active, and sport has many competitors for a child's attention. To make activity entertaining is not always easy. For the youth level, promotion of activity as entertainment is important. According to the latest reports on obesity in America, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) website, the number of individuals that are reaching unhealthy weights has more than doubled across the board – from adults to children – since the 1960's. Becoming involved in sports activities at a young age, and continuing to be involved across the life span, could help these numbers decrease. Next, being involved in sport can build confidence in youth. Activity shows them that they can be a part of something, and it also gives them skills that will help with performances later in life. A coach who supports and teaches skills – rather than the alternative of yelling and ridiculing – can increase a child's self esteem and self worth. Being validated in one's actions can be helpful in achieving confidence at any age. The objectives of sport participation for youth that fall more or less underneath those mentioned above are the building of moral character, determination and work ethic. These skills are important for athletes, and a sense of community should be taught, however these should not be the biggest focus of a youth program. If the coach does well, moral character should be covered in the way that the coach

allows the athletes to interact with one another. Teaching how to win and lose is touched on, but the true ability to do so comes later, when the athletes are older. Winning – this is the least important objective in youth sports. Participation at this level is not about winning and losing, it is about growth, and success. While parents may sit in the stands and keep score of a non-scored game, a coach should not put any value in such practices. A coach's job is to teach the youth participating in sport to enjoy what they do, and participate because they want to, winning may be an outcome, but it is not the most important.

### **High School**

In high school sports, the objectives are similar, but the way in which they are achieved changes. Fun is still important, however, fun is defined by success. Whether the athlete feels validated, listened to, understood and used to their full potential comes in to play. Success is also defined differently at this level. Some may define success as winning. This is not always true. If an athlete achieves a certain level of confidence in their ability, is determined to do well, comes to any and all practices and works hard, and does well in areas of moral character as well, then a coach can feel as if objectives have been met. Sport in high school becomes entertainment for both the participants and for community members. This objective falls a little lower on the importance scale, in terms of entertainment for the athlete, but moves up on the scale of entertainment for others. That being said, the athlete may find entertainment in shooting hoops in the driveway, or jogging around the neighborhood, so elements of the sport are still entertaining, but it is not as important an objective as it was when the athletes were smaller. Winning should not be the main focus, even though it is an incredible motivator. In high school sports though, winning is more important to players, coaches, the school, the community, and so on. If a coach is doing well with players in all other areas, winning should become part of the plan anyhow.

**College**

The focus changes in college. Self motivation, determination, work ethic and fitness should be built in. They are important to success, but also, they are attributes the athletes should have internalized by making it to the college level. The coach should have these objectives as important areas of focus for the athletes to work on continuously. Education is next on the scale of importance. At this point, an athlete needs to focus on sport specific skills. Learn exactly what to eat before and after a contest. They need to know what workouts are most important, what muscles need to be strengthened and so on. Education of an athlete on the collegiate level is important to their subsequent success. Winning is pushed up on the importance level of objectives at this stage. Winning is critical for a program's success, for an athlete's continued participation, and for a coaches ability to retain their job. The activity should still be fun and entertaining. If it is not enjoyable, then the athlete will be less likely to give their all. Finally, though very important, confidence and moral character are objectives that fall lower on the scale but should be addressed consistently. All of the objectives discussed above are important to the success of the college athlete. Though they are somewhat ranked, many cannot occur without also focusing on the other.

**SUCCESS OF A COACH AND ROLE OF WINNING**

The success of a coach does not rest on their wins versus losses record alone. The success of a coach is shown through the athletes and their demeanor both on and off the field of play. Success is shown through the growth and improvement of the players on the team. The athletes should gain skill as the season goes on, and they should show a certain degree of mental improvement as well. This mental improvement is based on knowledge. The gaining of knowledge in areas of nutrition, activity, game situations, quick thinking and being aware of strengths and weaknesses

should be evident. The athletes should grow not only as athletes, but as members of their community as well. Consistency in participation, or stick-to-itiveness, also shows the success of a coach. If athletes are willing to come to every practice, finish out a season and return to participate the following year, this reflects on the coaches abilities to some degree. In high school and youth sports, there are many options for the athletes as far as activities are concerned, so when athletes choose to continue to participate in a sport, it is because they find pleasure in participation. It is an even greater testament to the coach's success when other students who have not yet participated begin to come out, and the program grows. The commitment of the team is a sign of success. When the whole team shows up to pick up the stadium after another contest, to run a concession stand, to participate in a run or walk, or to show support for other teams, it shows that there has been success in the realms of community building and moral character. The team should show support of one another and their accomplishments, and should help one another with academics and positive decision making as well. When this is happening, it shows that the coach has fostered an environment in which the athletes are comfortable, and supportive of one another. The role of winning in sport is motivation. It is the motivation to do well, to build up work ethic, determination and self direction. It is what keeps the athletes working and improving. They succeed at becoming better athletes, better people, and then they are rewarded – to a certain extent – by winning. Winning comes at the end of a long process. It may take a few years to see the results of all the hard work and dedication the athletes put in. This is why winning is not the most important thing, it will not always happen immediately; however it does drive the athletes to succeed.

## **GENDER EQUITY**

### **Title IX**



Title IX was put into place to ensure that there was gender equity in sports. It states that no one can be discriminated against on the basis of gender. What this means, is that unless the sport is specifically titled “Boys” basketball or “Girls” volleyball, a person of any gender can participate. During any given season in high school, there should be an equal amount of sports available for each gender.

#### **Pros and Cons of Cross Gendered Coaching**

There both pros and cons to cross gendered coaching. One con of cross gendered coaching is the lack of supervision in the locker rooms. In some school policies, it states that supervision in locker rooms is the responsibility of the coach. Also, there are certain lengths that must be gone to, on the part of the coach, in order to make sure that no attempt to help an athlete is taken the wrong way. In some realms, for both males and females, particular injuries or ailments may not be discussed with a coach of the opposite gender, and may result in a misinterpretation of the athlete and their mind set. Some athletes may feel that a coach of the opposite gender may not relate to their situations. One of the pros of cross gendered coaching is that the coach is being selected for their expertise, and not their gender. What a coach can do with the athletes is far more important than what gender the coach is.

#### **Coaching, Marriage and Children**

Sometimes, it is believed that a woman cannot perform a job as well once she has had children. I disagree. In some cases, it is the male that takes on the household duties, so that the woman can work. To say that all people have difficulty doing a good job outside the home once they are married, or have children, is too general a statement. Are there cases where this is an issue? Sure, but it is not the rule, it is the exception. Some coaches have situations where it is necessary to bring their children to practice on occasion. In some levels of sport, this is acceptable in order to

make it so that the coach can function. Having children, or being married, does not make a person less of a coach and it does not make them less effective.

### **EQUITY FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR**

Within the United States, it is unlawful to deny someone the right to participate in a sport based on their race. There has been some research done however, on the sports selected by athletes based on common, though not biologically sound, assumptions and stereotypes. In some of these studies, the authors have been researching sports chosen by athletes, and have found that many do choose a sport, though at times subconsciously, that their particular race is supposedly, "good at." So African Americans may be more likely to sprint than swim, and Caucasians may be more likely to play tennis than attempt jumping. It has also been noted that some populations may gravitate toward certain sports because of the possibility of being transported from one standard of living, to one that is substantially higher. Again, there is no biological evidence to back up these choices, and so it remains the belief of some, that such choices are a result of institutionalized racism of a sort. In short, participation in sport should be available to all, regardless of race, orientation, and gender.

### **CUTTING PLAYERS**

Cutting players is something that must be done at some levels, but not at every level. In youth sports, this should not happen. Youth sports should be available to all who are interested in playing, no matter their level of skill. Given the debate over choosing teams based on age, versus choosing teams based on size, the idea of selecting teams is one that many coaches consider. At young ages though, youth should be given a chance to participate. In some cases, children who are late bloomers may be overlooked, or discouraged from participation, and then do not have a chance to reach their full potential because they were pulled early. When cutting becomes

necessary, when there is simply not enough money to back up multiple teams, or when only one team – such as varsity athletics in high school – is necessary, there should be a plan in place for making those cuts. Some coaches use an evaluation plan to keep track of player ability, and help with the cutting process. This evaluation plan could consist of categories such as: affective characteristics, specific skills, team skills and physical ability. In this way, the coach is not only relying on memory, but also given a form in which to compile data which can, if so desired, be compared to the data taken by other coaches and compared. In addition to best practices about how to make cuts, it would be ideal if there were club programs available for students who did not make the cut. Instead of giving up activity all together, they could work on skills in hopes of getting better. It is understood that this is not always possible, but it is something that should be looked in to in order to keep American children active and participating.

### **PAY TO PLAY**

#### **Youth Sports**

The idea of pay to play is not foreign in the world of youth sports. Even as a member of organizations such as the YMCA, there are fees to participate in activities. That being said, the fees are minimal in organizations such as the YMCA, and the coaches are not always fantastic, but for the price there is very little complaining. If one considers organizations such as the AAU, and other “club” type organizations, the fees can become quite large. There should not be much cost to participate in sporting activities at young ages. When there is too much money involved, the activity can be viewed differently, making choices scarce because of the amount of money already put in to any given activity, and can lead to specialization in sport at far too young an age. Sports for young children should be affordable, and the offerings plenty, in order to get as many youth participating as possible.

**High School Sports**

Pay to play is an often discussed topic for schools. The pros of going to the pay to play system are almost equally matched with the cons – on paper. The variables lie within the districts looking to adopt the pay to play system. The pros are that the amount of money gained through the participants can lead to more sport opportunities within the school. The money coming in can support the school financially, and can set up a system for uniform purchasing and such based on a more reliable and steady income. In addition, the money used for sporting equipment and resurfacing and such comes from those interested in the sport, and not from tax payers who have children that may not be utilizing the equipment their tax dollars pay for. This would, in turn, save tax money for use in other areas of the school that all students could enjoy. In additions, some schools have gone to a “buy two get the third free” idea, in which this can be between siblings, or for an individual student. This idea could result in higher numbers of participants in three sports to take advantage of the “free” sport. On the flip side, the pay to play system could discourage some athletes from participating due to socioeconomic status and income, and though there may be many structures in place for helping such students, not all are willing to put themselves out in such a way. In the pay to play system, playing time becomes a more volatile issue. The parents have paid money to have their student compete, and so they expect to see them on the field of play. Complaints in this realm already exist, and going to a method which requires athletes to pay may exacerbate the issue. On the topic of parents, they may feel more entitled to decision making processes because they have helped fund the activity, making them a share holder in some ways. Parents are a common issue to be dealt with, in both positive and negative ways, and pay to play may aggravate this relationship further. Finally, parents and guardians may feel that fundraising is unnecessary, or not their responsibility because they have

already put a portion of money into the fund. Issues arise concerning where the money goes, and could eventually hurt the team financially. Whether the school chooses to go with a pay to play option or not, the coach will have issues to sort out in relation to this decision. In either case, a good coach will be open with parents, and work toward success regardless of monetary concerns.

#### **PERSONAL ETHICS AND SPORTSMANSHIP**

Coaches are role models. Some claim that they do not want to be, but the reality is that they are. They stand in front of young people and teach them the ways of the world through sport and nutrition. They teach athletes how to get along with one another, and how to work together as a team to achieve the same goal. A coach should understand that all students have the right to participate in sport, and to participate at a level that coincides with their level and maturity. The coach should provide the athletes with a safe environment, and remember that (in the case of high school level participants) they are still children, not adults and should be allowed to play as a child. On that same note, the athletes should also be given a level of responsibility and ownership, helping to develop a coaching contract and player contract consisting of best practices and expectations. The coach should also remember that the athletes have a right to have fun in sports, and to be treated with dignity and respect. They should show the players what they expect through modeling of positive behaviors in their interactions with other coaches, players and officials. A coach should have the mental and emotional strength to contain themselves when they feel a bad call has been made, and apologize for their behavior if they ever get out of hand. Good sportsmanship should be modeled by the coach on a regular basis, they should teach the athletes how to win well and lose well. Sportsmanship should also be taught to parents during scheduled informational meetings. A coach should be educated on the current topics in the field of athletics such as the use of supplements and performance enhancing drugs, and they should

also be up to date on what scientists in the field of biomechanics and kinesiology are saying about best practices for athletes in relation to nutrition, stretching, workout lengths, workout intensity, and workout scheduling.

### **ROLE OF THE COACH**

A coach should be a role model on and off the field of play. They should be an excellent motivator, and be able to explain their motivational methods. The coach should teach using different methods because, just as in the classroom, all athletes learn differently. They should communicate with parents, the community, managers, player and other coaches on a regular basis. These communications should happen often, and work toward keeping everyone informed in an effective manner. They should have a certain amount of knowledge on the sport, and should be continuing their education through professional development opportunities and by consulting professional journals and magazines in their field. They should know the state and conference policies, rules of the game and the regulations the athletes must abide by as well. It is the responsibility of the coach to communicate these rules and regulations to the players and parents. A coach should be fair, approachable, honest and flexible. They should display leadership skills and have the ability to make quick, yet informed, decisions. A coach should have organizational skills and high expectations for their team, their community and themselves. They should take the time to get to know their players, their strengths and weaknesses, and figure out what types of motivation will work for each athlete. Some athletes respond well to quick shouted tips during play, and others need more calm discussions in a one on one setting. The coach should develop and earn mutual respect with the players, the community, the parents, and other coaches. The coach should support the athletes with grades, and help them to understand that athletics is an extension of the classroom, and that in order to do well on the field of play;

they must be willing to be successful in the classroom as well. The coach must always remember that the athlete comes first, and that winning is second. The coach should promote an atmosphere in which both the coach and the athletes have fun. They should help the athletes to reach their full potential physically, psychologically, and socially through cooperation, listening and support. The coach is also responsible for creating and participating in community volunteer opportunities. The coach should set up times for the athletes to be visible in their community, helping those in need, and promoting positive behaviors for younger generations. A coach should develop a yearly plan in which they lay out expectations for athletes, and opportunities for those not participating in other sports to stay in shape and improve. They should remember that coaching is a service profession, and as such, the function of a coach is to communicate with, teach and motivate athletes. A coach should know what they expect, and communicate that to others through the use of a coaching philosophy that is based on what the coach believes are important about coaching, and how the coach expects to fulfill those beliefs. The coach should set goals, and ask athletes to set goals for themselves as well. It is the coach's responsibility to be sure that the athletes have a safe environment in which they participate, and should always keep the welfare of the athletes as a primary concern, taking proper steps when an injury has occurred. As a great coach once said, "We can make ordinary student athletes extra-ordinary student athletes when athletes, coaches, and parents all have the same expectations, that's when we have something going on..." Clarence J. Gardner, Coach – Varsity Basketball, KCHS.

#### **COACHING/PLAYER CONTRACT**

The coach should develop a coaching contract with the athletes. On this contract would be the expectations, developed by the team as a whole, for the coach during the season. In it, the expectations for communication would be laid out. There would be a code of conduct that the

team and coach would agree on. The coach would include information on how they could support other teams and programs within the school, and agree to accept responsibility when they did not achieve what they had set out to do. There would also be a section that would speak to how the head coach would support other coaches. The players would then develop a contract of their own, in which they state expectations for behavior and performance. The team would develop five qualities that they felt all members of the team should possess and live up to, and how they could accomplish that goal. The player contract would also include goals, both short term and long term, examples of acceptable attitudes, ground rules and expectations for team work, a team constructed section on commitment, and an agreed upon idea of what it means to be loyal to your team mates. These contracts, both player and coach, are then signed and kept on file for the team. Each member receives a copy to keep and discuss with parents and guardians, and the contract is referred to often, and the goals may be added to as the season goes on.

#### **DISCIPLINE POLICY**

The coach should be required to work with the athletic department, and the school, to determine a discipline policy to follow regarding the athletes. This policy should be discussed and reviewed with the parents and students prior to the start of the season, so that questions can be answered and expectations for behavior are clear. This policy should cover tardiness, missing practice, grades, problems at school, drugs, alcohol, conduct, and so on. There should be clear actions that will be taken, and these procedures should be followed and recorded.

#### **EVALUATION**

It is a best practice of coaching to constantly evaluate the athletes and give feedback. However, the athletes should also have a chance to rate the coach, as should parents and assistant coaches. In the student evaluations, the coach should look at skills, character, athletic ability, and behavior



at competitions and practices. This should be completed and given to athletes during the season, and should include an area where the coach explains what the athlete can improve. On the forms for parents to fill out concerning the athletic program there should be sections on educational priorities, safety, health, conditioning, player-coach relationship, coach as role model, equipment and facilities, player attitudes concerning their athletic experiences, and instruction and evaluation. The parents then have a forum in which to discuss the positives and negatives in the program, giving the coach and the athletic department ideas on how to improve. The athletes would have similar questionnaire forms to complete to help with the growth of the program.

### **COMPETITION**

Competition is a widely disagreed upon subject. There are many researchers who believe that it leads to dishonesty and disrespect. Others argue that competition is not a negative aspect of activity, but a necessary and healthy aspect if approached properly. Motivation and goal setting play an important role in true competition. Competitors can be intrinsically motivated, which means they participate because they find the activity enjoyable, or they can be extrinsically motivated, which means they participate because it may benefit them in some way. When it comes to true competition, intrinsic motivation is the road to happiness. Connected to these motivators are two types of goal setting personalities. There is the task oriented goal setter, whose goals are intrinsically motivated and therefore rest on their personal betterment, and by contrast, there is the ego oriented, who define success by being better than others. True competition is not one person striving to beat someone else in a battle; it is someone pushing themselves, bringing their best and hoping their opponent does the same. It is important for athletes to understand that beating a team that is not on their athletic level is not an example of true competition. Instead, they can make themselves better by competing against teams that are

challenging. When they play teams such as this, it makes the athletes work hard and bring their best. It pushes them to achieve personal records, and to reach beyond goals they may have set. Too many times athletes talk about how much fun it is to beat teams that are small, or not very skilled. It is important for the coach to teach athletes that this is not acceptable behavior. They should be aching for a real contest, and it is the coach's job to show them what it means to work hard, and succeed against someone equally matched.

### **MOTIVATION**

The motivation behind participating in a sport affects the way a person views the contest. If they are largely extrinsically motivated – they are given money for a good performance, they enjoy getting items for free because they are recognized, or they participate to please others – they are more likely to cheat, to be unhappy, and to ultimately quit the activity. When the athlete is intrinsically motivated – they challenge themselves, work to improve because they love the challenge – they are more likely to be happy in the activity, to be successful, be able to concentrate longer, be more creative and to be a lifelong participant. Not all extrinsic motivation is bad. There are degrees of extrinsic motivation. Contest cannot exist without some extrinsic motivation, because instead of play for pleasure, it becomes play aimed at working toward a goal. This change does not make the action negative; it just makes the reasons for participating more complex. Intrinsic motivation is what makes the activity enjoyable. Enjoyment is what makes the activity more than a game, it becomes a part of one's life, it is in this idea that true competition can thrive. Love of the activity stems from this. It is important for coaches to make athletes understand that participation is not always fun, sometimes it is hard. There has to be a certain amount of enjoyment in the activity during the present, when the focus moves from the present to the future the love of the activity itself is lost. Preparing for the game, the practice,

being with the team – all of those activities can be fun, there is room for lightheartedness. Having fun, while preparing for a contest, promotes love of the game. Competitors who love their activity, live their activity. They are interested in other players, in the history, the superstitions, and the myths. The game becomes more meaningful. These students are often the true competitors. They are quiet about the sport, they do not put down the other team, or flaunt their abilities – their abilities speak for themselves - and they often know and respect their opponents. They show a true love of the game, and they are likely to pass that love on to others in a positive way. It is these participants that enjoy the game for what it is, and get more out of life because of it. It is important for a coach to teach athletes how to be motivated or to find the one specific way to motivate them, showing them what competition looks like and how to be excited about it. A coach should want a team full of true competitors who are willing to try their best to get better. It is not feasible to think that every athlete that comes out for a sport will be that way, but leading by example can do a lot for a team, and other athletes can be role models too.

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