

Youth Sports- Prepare the Child for the Path, Not the Path for the Child

4 Votes

I originally wrote this in 2008 when a few hundred people read my blog. This might be a good lead in to tryout week for winter sports.

I have a favorite quote that is particularly applicable when it comes to training kids.

“prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child”

The reality is that you will not always be there to pave the way for your child, fix things, argue with coaches etc. etc. Kids will grow into adults and experience grumpy co-workers and mean bosses. Constantly insulating kids from difficult situations and consistently cleaning up the mess they create defeats the purpose of sport.

Sport is about learning to succeed and to fail, not just to succeed. Sports should primarily provide life lessons. If the life lesson learned from sport is that Mom and Dad can and will fix everything, later life will be difficult. If the lesson is that school is something you have to do but sports are what is really important than, be prepared for some really big problems down the road.

Youth sports has become all about success and scholarships instead of about learning and sportsmanship. I have some bad news for all the parents out there. Your child more than likely won't get a scholarship. If he or she does get a scholarship, they probably won't make the pros. I'm not trying to rain on anyone's parade, I'm just a realist.

I have more bad news. Those parents who consistently prepare the path for the child by confronting teachers and coaches, changing teams, changing leagues and changing schools are making life-long losers out of their children.

Remember the purpose of sport is to teach kids about success and about failure. The failure lessons may in fact be more important than the successes. Everyone wants their child to succeed, it's universal, it's part of being a parent. However, it is when we attempt to alter the normal path that we screw things up. Protecting your child from difficult situations only delays lessons that are very necessary. Failures experienced at twenty one are far more painful than those experienced at ten or twelve. You don't do your child a service by protecting them, you do them a disservice.

Remember you are a parent. You are not a friend, a manager, or an agent. Your job is to help create a competent, capable adult, not a dysfunctional child.

My mother had a wonderful saying on our wall when I was a child. It said “Children learn What they Live”. The same one hangs in my kitchen now. If you consistently prepare the path for the child you postpone the inevitable. The key is value education. Teach your children what is really important. Teach hard work, commitment, loyalty and dedication.

The next time you make a decision involving your child's sport or sports, ask yourself "Am I preparing the child for the path or the path for the child". This simple step will guide your decision making every time.