

Coaching Kids - My Experience Coaching My Own Child - Page 2

Emotions

By taking a hard look at what had happened, I also realized how easy it is to become emotionally over involved in your child's sports. The first time he got on the mound to pitch, I was really nervous for him. I thought it was something he really wanted and I was afraid he was going to fail. I think that's one reason I wanted to work with him on his pitching. He told me he wanted to pitch and as his parent I wanted him to be successful. I felt my intentions were good, but motivation must come from within. You can't force kids to be dedicated, they have to learn it. It's funny how I want him to learn about perseverance, hard work, and dedication, and yet I wasn't giving him the space to learn. I always wondered why some parents become so emotional when they're at their child's game. I think by coaching kids and my son up to this point, I was shielded from many of the emotions that parents go through as they watch their child. I was simply too busy coaching kids to have time to focus on every move he made. I've never thought of myself as a controlling person, but the sense of having no control while watching my son's game was more difficult than I imagined.

Aligning My Expectations

I now realized that my expectations didn't match up with those of my son. In addition, my focus when I watched him play was on him succeeding at my expectations. No wonder I was so worried about him pitching that day. Since my expectations had been focused toward competition, I felt bad when

he didn't do well that day. I thought he would be discouraged and not want to pitch anymore. When I asked him how he liked pitching after the game, he said he really liked it and thought he did pretty well. It's funny how the comment of a child can sometimes catch you off guard and make you feel stupid about worrying. That's how I felt when he told me about his experience. He didn't expect to get on the mound and strike everyone out. He just wanted to try it out. He felt good about the experience and that made me feel good about it also.

Sports provide opportunities to learn many lessons. After that game I decided to turn my attention to benefits that would be more aligned with what he wanted to get out of playing. I decided to try and support him by emphasizing those benefits. Here are a few that I think are important:

- Positive thinking
- Respect for coaches, umpires, teammates, and the rules
- Dealing with winning and losing
- Teamwork
- Leadership

This list will probably be different for each child and parent; for me, these were items I felt wouldn't require me to push him to perform at a higher level. Since that is what started us down the path, I wanted to make sure I didn't complete the circle and end up back to where I started.

Communication

A couple of days after that game, I felt confident enough to have a talk with him and to tell him what I had been thinking about. The first thing I told him was that I was sorry for the way I had been trying to

help him. I told him that he was right about me not letting him try anything and that I would try to do better. I let him know that I enjoyed playing in the yard with him and I hoped we could start playing again with the goal of having fun. I also told him that I would try not to coach him unless he asked me to. I wanted to let him be in control of the situation.

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He's In Control

After our talk everything went really well. I felt that our relationship was back on the right track. We started playing in the yard again and even though it was tough, I managed to play and have fun instead of coach. A few weeks later, he asked me why his coach hadn't put him in to pitch anymore. I told him that he had pitched twice and both times had a difficult time throwing strikes. I told him he probably wouldn't get another chance unless he could show his coach that he had improved and could throw the ball over the plate. I left it at that and a couple of hours later he asked me if we could go out in the yard and work on his pitching!

When we got out in the yard I asked him why he thought he was having a tough time throwing strikes. He said he didn't know. I said I thought maybe he was off balance and suggested a game to work on it. I had him pause at the top of his leg kick to make sure he was balanced and then throw the pitch. I'd call balls and strikes and tried to act like a real pro announcer. It was really fun.

We did this for a couple of weeks and added

a few more fundamentals along the way. He then asked his coach to give him another chance at practice. He did much better and his coach let him pitch in the last game of the season. He pitched pretty good in that game and I was really happy for him.

Once I stopped pushing, he ended up learning something about perseverance and dedication after all.

Conclusion

Many parents with good intentions let youth sports drive a wedge in the relationship they have with their child. I hope, if nothing else, this article has given you motivation to think about the relationship you have with your own child. Take a step back and see if your expectations and interaction are age appropriate. If not, make a change in your approach. You may think that your child could be the next Roger Clemens or Derek Jeter but you must keep in mind that the odds are against you. Only 1 in every 100,000 kids that start playing baseball will make the major leagues. Every one of those kids will want and should have a good relationship with their parents. Make sure that athletics is something that binds you together and doesn't split you apart.

Side Note

I coached my older son in 2004 as a 10 year old and what a difference two years made. By not coaching him for two years, he was really looking forward to having his Dad be his coach again. We talked about our relationship as father and son as well as coach and player before the season began. We agreed to both work on keeping those relationships separate. We went over what had gone wrong in the past and we both

agreed we didn't want those same problems to happen this time. We both were able to hold up our end of the bargain and we had a fun season together, both as a coach and player, and father and son. I continued to coach him on and off through the age of 14 and it is something that I'll always look back with fond memories. That last season I coached him as a 14 year was so much fun and a great way to end coaching my son. I'm glad we were able learn from our experiences and have the father/son coaching experience be a positive one.

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