



Make Sure Everyone Feels Appreciated

Following the end of each youth league season, there's frequently a team party at which the head coach stands up and says a few words about the players. It's also customary to give each child a small trophy, plaque or certificate to recognize his or her efforts during the course of the season.

Many times the head coach may decide to take the award ceremony one step further—to single out an individual player or two with special trophies that symbolize their outstanding athletic accomplishments.

When a coach decides to do this, he or she is merely trying to give that talented player an extra pat on the back. And of course, there's nothing wrong with this sentiment.

As a coach and motivator of young children, however, you should be sensitive to the fact that, sometimes, these kinds of "extra" awards can backfire. That is, by merely trying to recognize and salute one or two players on the team, you may be deflating the other dozen or so members of your squad.

How is this possible? How could a seemingly innocent act have such a negative impact? Because kids ages 5-12 are rarely able to determine which of their peers was most valuable, or which was the best playmaker or defender. In fact, in their youthful minds, each youngster is secretly hoping the coach will select him as the "best."

So what happens? The kid who receives a larger, fancier MVP trophy is, of course, thrilled. Problem is, the other players on the team instinctively begin to think, "Hey, he's no better than I am. How come I didn't get that award?" or "I guess I'm not as good as I thought I was" or "I thought the coach really liked me as a player too."

The problem is that while the coach is simply trying to give an extra pat on the back to a well-deserving player, he's also inadvertently running the risk of alienating the rest of the team. It can accidentally add a sour note to the team celebration.



A LITTLE JEALOUSY IS TO BE EXPECTED WHEN AWARDS ARE GIVEN OUT.

Does this always happen? No, of course not. But it happens enough that, as the coach, you might want to think twice about the impact such a ceremony might have on the kids.

Here's a thought: As each player accepts his or her individual trophy, take the time to make at least two or three positive comments about that child's performance, effort, improvement, a special game, whatever. It won't be easy in some cases, but come up with a plaudit for everyone. Believe me, these glowing comments give a player (of any age) a tremendous boost—especially when it's done in front of parents and peers. Each player comes away happy, sharing in the limelight and knowing he or she has been singled out by the coach for a job well done.

An end-of-the-year awards party should celebrate each child and reinforce how much fun it was to play on the team—so much so that the youngster will want to come back next season and participate again. That's the ultimate purpose of the awards ceremony, or at least it should be.

Some Friendly Advice

- ✓ If you are the team's coach, ask one of the other parents to videotape the party, especially when you praise each child's performance. Then make a copy of the tape for each player.
- ✓ Every young athlete expects some sort of positive salute at the team party. Make sure you provide it.
- ✓ The good feeling of the party can also be the ideal occasion to privately mend any hurt feelings that resulted during the year.

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