

Moral Obligations of the Coach

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As sport becomes more and more popular in society, the pressure to win is often overvalued at the cost of fair play and youth development. It is the responsibility of the coach to maintain these moral obligations to their players, both on and off the field.

As a role model to players, coaches are obligated to teach, demonstrate and encourage sportsmanlike conduct and fair play. This includes playing within the designed rules of the game. Cheating, unsportsmanlike conduct and arguing with referees set a poor example for impressionable youth. These behaviors are often associated with the burning desire to win. When winning is not the priority (as it should be), these behaviors become more uncommon. This past summer, we were in a close game when my pitcher thought the umpire was squeezing him on several close pitches. In his displeasure he began making gestures of disbelief that were clearly visible. I went out to the mound and quickly explained that right or wrong we could not control the calls and his actions were now negatively affecting the team. After the game, I apologized to the umpire for his display, but also had a talk with our players regarding sportsmanlike conduct and controlling our actions in adverse situations.

Another moral obligation of the coach is to encourage development by giving every player meaningful playing time. Sports and play in general, play a necessary role in the learning process. Besides the obvious physical skills, sports can teach players valuable life lessons. Teamwork, sacrifice and discipline are just some of the traits that can develop through sports. By shutting out players early in life in an effort to win “at all costs”, a chance for development and improvement is lost. In

academia, when children have difficulty in math, the teacher doesn't excuse them from tests. In fact, those children would most likely get more help from their teacher. Coaching should be the same way. If players are deemed "not good enough" then they too should get more attention in practice, but also continue to receive game action just as a struggling student would continue taking tests. Looking back at my development as a player, I was definitely a "late bloomer." On the freshman baseball team, while I was not considered one of our top pitchers, I did get meaningful playing time as a pitcher. This was a vital year in development. Not only did I mature physically a lot that year, but I also gained pitching experience against high school hitters. If my coach had dismissed me as a pitcher because we had better pitchers at the time, I would have missed a critical year in my development and possibly stopped playing baseball altogether.

As I have experienced first hand, coaches have a unique responsibility that is not always found in other professions. The ability to promote moral good to players should be held above winning in youth sports for the long term betterment of its players.