

Team Building for Youth Sport

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Coaches play a vital role in making or breaking the cohesion of a sport team.

A major component of physical activity for children is participation in team sports at both the recreational and the competitive levels. In Canada, over half (54%) of children ages five to 14 are involved in sports on a yearly basis (Sport Canada, 2000). Similarly, in the United States, 39 percent of children ages nine to 13 participate in organized physical activity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). Weinberg and Gould (2007) indicated that the primary reason children become involved and stay active in sport is to have fun. More precisely, a review of more than 1,000 male and female youth-sport participants' reasons for athletic involvement ranked having fun first, followed by skill improvement, challenge, and being physically fit (Gill, Gross, & Huddleston, 1983).

Unfortunately, youth sport participation begins declining after the age of 12. This finding is especially worrisome because that age is also a crucial time for the development of children's social skills and self-esteem. A number of reasons have been proposed to account for this dropout behavior. These include personal aspects such as lack of desire, as well as social aspects such as negative experiences with coaches (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004; Wankel & Mummery, 1996). One way that coaches can improve the sporting environment is through group activities that promote team building. The purpose of this article is to explain the value, use, and advantages of team building for enhancing the youth sport experience.

Coaching Youth Sport

The role of youth sport coaches is complex and multidimensional. Coaches at the youth level have been found to assume at least 13 different roles: instructor, teacher, trainer, motivator, disciplinarian, substitute parent, social worker, friend, scientist, student, manager, administrator, and publicity fundraiser (Gummerson, 1992; Smoll & Smith, 1996). To accomplish these various roles, coaches are expected to have both sport-specific knowledge (techniques and strategies of a particular sport) and general coaching knowledge (information used to obtain an optimal learning environment). They must also develop and use knowledge from a wide array of disciplines, including anatomy, biomechanics, pedagogy, nutrition, and sport psychology (Martens, 1990).

Although coaches are expected to have an extensive knowledge base, in reality the majority of youth sport coaches are volunteers with little or no formal training (DeKnop, Engstrom, Skirstad, & Weiss, 1996; Smith & Smoll, 1997). Coaches have repeatedly cited direct experience and observation of other coaches as the primary sources of knowledge for coaching (Cregan, Bloom, & Reid, 2007; Saury & Durand, 1998). Moreover, findings on the characteristics of coaches indicated that most coaches became involved because their children played the sport (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Because the majority of coaches are involved due to their children's participation, the average coach is active for five years or less (Gould & Martens, 1979). Thus, it can be concluded that most youth sport coaches are not equipped with enough knowledge to enhance the youth sport experience and make it fun for its participants.