

Motivation of Young Athletes

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Part 1: Why Kids Want to Participate in Sports?

Why do children want to play organized sports? What are their goals, hopes and aspirations? Each child has his or her own specific answers to these questions. Understanding their reasons for wanting to play sports is a critical first step towards helping children to have the best possible experiences in sport.

Articles in magazines and newspapers as well as some coaching textbooks often suggest that socialization is a major value of participating in youth sports. Certainly, learning to work together in a group and striving to achieve group goals are potentially important outcomes. Learning about and practicing sportsmanship is a worthwhile goal as it understands how to deal with success and failure - winning and losing.

Is this what the kids expect to get out of playing organized sports? Actually, NO! Numerous research studies completed in the last 20 years have asked youth sport participants why they decided to participate in organized sports. Although there is some variation in the ranked order of the reasons that children cite, depending on the particular sport they are playing, the top reasons are very consistent. Children expect to have FUN, learn SKILLS, develop FITNESS, and participate because they enjoy COMPETITION. Socialization related reasons typically are near the bottom of the list, with sportsmanship somewhere in the middle. Winning and receiving individual awards (medals, trophies, etc) also do not appear among the top reasons.

The bottom line is that children want an opportunity to participate in competitive sports, to develop the skills and fitness that will allow them to play effectively, and to have fun doing it.

Next issue: Part 2: Why do many kids continue to participate and why do many kids drop out?