

## **JACK'S CORNER**

**QUESTION:** My husband really wants to push our kids into competitive team sports. It seems that often, such sports take over a family's life. What are your thoughts?

**ANSWER:** No one can deny that kid sports are big in our suburban culture, and that they often do "take over" the lives of many families. Aristotle said, "Moderation in all things." (I would agree with the application to most things in life.) I don't see this issue as an "either-or," but as an opportunity...and a formative one, at that! With some care and watchfulness while setting clear family priorities, sports can be an effective opportunity to learn some valuable life skills and actually shape character in some godly ways. Let me list a few. Competitive team sports provide the opportunity to...

1. Experience hard work that pays off. Besides academics, most suburban kids have few opportunities to do hard work.
2. Experience what it's like to "gut it out" and not give up. From faith to career...what a valuable character quality that is not available to suburban kids in many other venues!
3. Understand that "it's not just about me;" it's about the team. Kids these days are self-focused enough and need opportunities to focus on someone and something else!
4. Understand that one doesn't get a trophy for showing up and breathing...trophies are for the best...essential preparation for the real world.
5. Experience team work and camaraderie while building relationships. Real relationships aren't built by texting, posting or tweeting. Healthy, mature social skills require live interaction.

6. Experience physical exhaustion. When else to suburban kids sweat?
7. Experience being yelled at and then grow some thicker skin. Prepare for that “mean boss” some day by building emotional strength.
8. Learn to be a good sport and lose/win with graciousness.
9. Enjoy a sense of measureable accomplishment through experiential learning.
10. Learn to depend on and give to others in memorable ways. “I am part of something bigger than me!”
11. Accept and value criticism. So many kids these days are emotionally fragile because they have been constantly told how wonderful they are...and that they can do anything.
12. Learn appreciation of people, talents and experiences. One of the great keys to happiness is practicing appreciation.
13. Enjoy the fruits of long-term gratification and patience. Everything is not a “click” away.
14. Experience what it’s like to put the phone/device down for a few hours. Freedom from device addiction! Kids have to “look up” and engage the world face-to-face!
15. Experience the opportunity of a “Fellowship of Christian Athletes” group.

One can easily see how these opportunities can overflow into a child’s faith. With intentional godly conversations and prioritization, mom and dad can make the overflow a certainty. Of course there is not a guarantee that all these things will happen, that’s why I call them opportunities.\* A great coach can increase the odds that these opportunities will be realities. Even without a great coach, there is a good chance many of them will happen. Whereas, how many of these things happen with kids who sit in the basement

playing video games and/or glued to their phones? Where does one get the most “bang for the buck” in terms of lasting benefits and character development?

Of course, there is the very real danger that the attractiveness of the sports experience can draw a young person and his/her family away from time at church, in youth group, praying and family devotions. This attractiveness, however, begs the question, “Why isn’t a kid’s church, youth group and family faith experience more powerful? Kids will make time for a faith experience that is “worth it” in their eyes.

\*On a personal note, my kids experienced all of the above in competitive sports. They still get texts from high school coaches, many of them Christian. They have lasting friendships with old teammates. God worked all of it (and there were some rough times) for their maturity and great good.

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