

Writing 1310

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Soccer Moms vs. the Three C's

What is a sport? Some people define a sport as something you play, others say if you wear and number and sweat it counts. Some people even claim that if it's shown on ESPN it can be coined the term "sport," but even Webster's dictionary doesn't have a clear definition of the word sport. With all the confusion of what can actually be considered a legitimate sport so many other important questions and debates come into play. Is cheerleading a sport; what about poker and bowling? And perhaps maybe even the most important question of all: What are the effects of competitive sports in young children? Although competitive sports at an early age can be considered dangerous and detrimental, positive effects such as learning necessary skills and building self-esteem do come from a child's involvement in competitive sports. So the controversy continues over a child's involvement in sports, but people rarely stop to identify both the negative and positive aspects of both sides of the playing field.

A child's participation in competitive sports can sometimes lead to negative developmental problems. Jessica Statsky, author of "Children need to play, not compete," claims that "...few children benefit from these programs and that those who do would benefit even more from programs emphasizing fitness, cooperation, sportsmanship, and individual performance." (Statsky 279) According to Dr. Bolter, Psychology professor at the University of Central Arkansas specializing in sports psychology, the one misconception of sports is that it builds character. No evidence actually supports this statement; in fact, there is overwhelming evidence that contradicts that statement. Incidents involving Serena Williams threatening people with a tennis racquet and PacMan Jones's repeated

involvement in "scuffles" prove that sometimes people get so wrapped up in the competition and stress of sports and their unique lifestyle that they forget what the point of the game really is.

Parents are another major problem when it comes to sports. Everyone has heard of the term "soccer mom" or been to some kind of sporting event and seen the angry dad in the stands yelling at his five year-old to "get his head in the game." Parents can put so much pressure of their young children that it can lead to not only numerous physical injuries and mental and psychological strain on a developing young brain. According to Statsky, "The drive to win brings out the worst in adults who are most absorbed in living out their own fantasies than enhancing the quality of the experience for children." (Statsky 278) Dr. Bolter says that there are four ways to be a bad parent: neglect, reject, dominate, and indulge. Children with dominating parents don't feel safe at home. When parents make threatening comments the child is always scared of the negative consequences that will happen if they mess up. The bond that parents have with their children is so fragile and precious and parents that dominate their child's life damage that relationship not only while they are young but as they grow up and mature. Those forced into sports at an early age might also struggle with discouragement, depression, and getting caught up on winning and losing. Participating in sports no matter what age means that there will be competition. And when people compete, someone has to lose and someone will get left out. Children get their feelings hurt and sometimes even get physically injured as well.

On the other hand, there are more than enough good reasons for young children to enter into the world of competitive sports. Dr. Bolter says that during the juvenile age, usually between ages five and thirteen, it is critical that children learn the three c's or intimacy skills that are critical to any type of relationship: competition, compromise, and cooperation. Through sports children can learn these skills and they are able to develop them as well as use them throughout every aspect of their life.

Competition has also been proven to build self-esteem and self-worth. Statistics even show that over a

ten year period, girls who played on a team were less likely to become pregnant compared to girls across the country that had never been involved in a team sport. (Bolter) With both childhood diabetes and obesity on the rise, sports are a wonderful way for children to get the physical activity that they need to avoid these threatening diseases that are making a big statement in the United States.

As far as all of the options that children have when it comes to which sport they want to play, parents should caution and steer their children from certain ones. For example, gymnastics can be considered one of the most dangerous sports today. Two reasons make gymnastics the most dangerous sports: Difficult to become world class and it is a weight-conscious sport. During the ages of six and sixteen a child must have ten thousand hours of practice for the sport they participate in to become world class. Because of this high demand of hours, gymnasts suffer from some of the worst possible injuries. (Bolter) Also, weight-conscious sports like gymnastics lead to problems such as anorexia and bulimia. Boxing is another sport that could be considered one of the "worst" sports to play. It is the only sport that has the main intention to injure your competitor. As far as best sports go, experts like Dr. Bolter say it's best to let a child choose and participate a sport that they enjoy the most. Pushing a child into a sport that they simply don't enjoy will eventually lead to resentment of that sport.

Whether children should or should not participate in competitive sports is a growing controversial debate that heats up even more as time changes and sports become even more competitive and more involved. Although the idea of a five year-old playing a potentially-damaging physical contact sport might not appeal to some, maybe even most parents, research and studies show that the good outweighs the bad. The positive skills that children develop are skills that are necessary and essential to the maturation of a child. The three c's are intimacy skills that children need to develop for success not only in sports but in every aspect of their life. Parents that are worried about their child getting hurt might should worry even more about themselves and how they handle the competition and

raising the child. Despite Statsky and many other arguments, with proper parenting, the right coaches, and even the right sport children will learn these essential skills to be successful not only on the field but in school, work, and life.

Work Cited

Bolter, Brian. Personal Interview. 30 September 2009.

Statsky, Jessica. "Children Need to Play, Not Compete." The St. Martin's Guide to Writing. Ed. Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper. 7th ed. Boston: Bedford, 2004. 276-279