

HUGHES

“To Compete or Not Compete?...That is the Question”

Competitive sports can be detrimental to children because of possible injuries; early dismissal of potentially good players later on, and damage to relationships and one's self-esteem. After reviewing Jessica Statsky's article, "Children Need to Play, Not Compete", and Dr. Bolter's sport psychology interview, we clearly see that there are many different views about whether or not young children should be involved in competitive sports. If children are being coached properly and not being pushed too hard by their parents, then sports can be a wonderful way for children to learn the true definition of teamwork and can be a great source of exercise for them as well.

Dr. Bolter, professor at the University of Central Arkansas, went into sports psychology because he has always been interested in sports. He grew up playing football, basketball, and even competitive tennis. He later decided that since he wasn't great at any of the sports he was involved in, that he should major in a field where he could study his love for sports. He said that when children are in between the ages of five and thirteen, they are considered to be in the "juvenile age." Studies have shown that there are three key "C's" to competing during this age level: competition, compromise, and cooperation. Dr. Bolter said that not only do these three skills help you with competitive sports, but they are also keys to a good relationship and a successful life.

Parents can sometimes be too overbearing in their child's sport activities. Studies have shown that if children have very competitive parents, that it can affect their relationship in a negative way. According to Dr. Bolter, four ways to be a bad parent are to neglect your child,

reject your child, dominate in your child's life, and to be too indulgent. Sometimes parents get too carried away with living out their dreams through their children that they forget it's their children's life, not theirs. Of course parents want their children to succeed by being good at the sport they play, but according to Dr. Bolter being good at what you do and winning is not the key to success. The key to success is to compete.

We asked Dr. Bolter what the "best sport" was to play and he said there's no right answer. The best sport is different for everyone because it's what he/she enjoys doing the most. Though, he did say one the most dangerous sports you can be competitive in is gymnastics. It's difficult to become world class in this sport because there are so many possible injuries. It's also a weight conscience sport. Studies have proven that in the past girls have resulted in becoming anorexic and bulimic just so they can pass their weight tests for competition. He also said that one of the most dangerous sports for boys to play is football. This is a contact sport that can cause many dangerous injuries. If a child gets hit hard enough in certain areas then it can cause a lack of muscle growth.

In order to become a professional athlete it takes a lot of time and dedication. It can also be very stressful, because it can be very straining on your body and even cause self-esteem issues. Recent studies have shown that less than one percent of people playing a sport actually go pro. Children between the ages of six and fifteen need to practice their sport three hours a day over a ten-year time period in order to become a professional (Bolter). Clearly, this is very time consuming. If parents decide to make this a goal for their children then it can be very easy for it to overwhelm the child and consume their whole life. The child may even lose their love for the sport if their parents push them too hard.

Children don't need to be forced to play a sport if they don't want to. According to Statsky's article, the fear of injury detracts from some children's enjoyment of sports. The Little league Web Site ranks fear of injury seventh of seven reasons why children quit ("What about my child?"). One mother of an eight-year-old Pee Wee Football player explained, "The kids get so scared. They get hit once and don't want anything to do with football anymore. They'll sit on the bench and pretend that their leg is hurting..." (Statsky). Some children have even done more dramatic actions. At a Pee Wee football game a reporter watched a little boy take himself out of the game. He told his coach that his stomach was hurting and the coach told him, "Get back on the field. There's nothing wrong with your stomach." When the coach turned his head the seven-year-old stuck his finger down his throat and made himself vomit. When the coach turned back around the little boy said, "Yes there is, Coach. See?" (Statsky)

After reviewing Statsky's previous article and Dr. Bolter's interview, we can clearly see the differences people have in children playing competitive sports. We know that if parents have children involved in these sports, that they don't need to get too wrapped up forcing their child to continue with the sport if the child's not enjoying it. Yes, encouraging parents are beneficial but only to a certain degree. They need to realize that they need to let the child decide whether or not they're passionate about a certain sport and that sometimes it's okay to lose.

Just as Dr. Bolter said, "The key to success is not winning, it is simply competing." Competing teaches children compromise, cooperation, and most importantly, self-esteem. When children practice a sport and improve at a certain skill it makes them feel good about themselves,

and like they've accomplished something. No matter if they win a game or not, if a child knows that he/she is getting better at something then that automatically boosts their confidence level, which is one of the main reasons why parents encourage their children to participate in competitive sports.