

10 Reasons for Equal Playing Time

by Jeff Farris, CEO, Sports Esteem, Inc.

At some point, youth sports become more about the team than about the players, and spectators start including more than just team family members. As kids reach adulthood, an increased focus on team performance separates recreational players from the truly motivated ones. These players then feed the needs of competitive high school, college and professional programs. Until then, youth sports are more about developing motivation and talent than judging them. Parents facilitate their child's participation to help make their child better in life and to provide a chance at sports participation past puberty.

On most youth teams, there are players who are physically two or three years ahead of their teammates in size, speed or strength. These players often form a core of talent that coaches can use to their advantage to win games. Especially in youth travel and select teams, the temptation for many coaches is to use this talent more during a game to go for the win. While this method is appropriate at the highest level of athletic competition, it seldom has any place in youth sports.

Here are ten reasons why equal playing time is a better strategy:

1. Avoids contention between coaches and parents.

Parents will not objectively judge their own child's abilities. No coach should expect objectivity from parents.

2. Avoids contention among parents.

The resentments that can build between coaches and parents can often build among parents for the same reasons. More than a few youth teams have had successful seasons poisoned by hard feelings arising out of a coach's game decisions.

3. Avoids contention among players.

If players feel that coaches have favorites, they may stop trying their hardest.

4. Minimizes player fatigue.

In tough physical games, coaches will lack skilled players if the top players are exhausted and lesser players have had limited game experience.

5. Maximizes player development.

Without access to playing time and special situations, players cannot learn.



6. Simplifies coaching decisions.

Coaches won't have to guess which players are most likely to play well in a given situation.

7. Recognizes equal investments.

Players and parents often make equal contributions away from the game in time and dollars and thus expect equal access to game situations.

8. Improves team chemistry.

When players feel everyone is treated fairly, they are more likely to focus on working together. When players feel they can succeed by making someone else look bad or themselves look better, they are learning the wrong lessons about team play.

9. Wins mean more to everyone.

When everyone contributes to a win, there are no lingering resentments that will interfere with the celebration.

10. Better reflects coaching abilities.

Winning games with kids who are physically more mature is more a success of drafting than coaching. Winning games by developing all the kids on a team is a better test of a coach's abilities.

In professional sports, players do not get equal playing time. So, when is it appropriate for youth sports to mimic this behavior? One test is when a team is not committed to individual players and rosters may be changed at anytime during a season. When teams exist for the team's sake and not the players', as is the case in professional and collegiate sports, then coaches are left with no other choice than to give more time to their best players. When a child reaches the advanced levels of athletic play, parents will stop being able to demand equal playing time. However, isn't reaching these levels one of the goals and a key reason why parents should demand it while they can?

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359 Bank Street, Suite 201
Ottawa, Ontario, K2P1X9
Tel: (613) 569-6600 Fax: (613) 569-6601
info@cpca-acep.ca
www.cPCA-acep.ca

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