

Youth Sports Done Right

The Playbook for Parents of a Youth Athlete



RYAN TREMBLAY

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This book is dedicated to a man who has created a sports legacy in his hometown by priding himself on sportsmanship, work ethic, and fairness. He is a father that coached his kids and taught them not only how to be athletes, but what it takes to improve. When opposing coaches shunned players and denied them access to their teams, he gave those players a chance and ultimately, changed their lives. He is a coach that stayed positive when his team faced adversity and instilled confidence in his players; they would run through a wall for him. He is a man that leads by example—humble when he wins and positive when he loses.

To Coach Gene Tremblay, my Dad.

Ryan Tremblay

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PREFACE

I am Ryan Tremblay, the owner of STACK Sports in Mahwah, New Jersey, which is a 15,000-square-foot basketball training facility with over 35 AAU basketball teams. After being told by many coaches that I would never play college basketball when I was younger, I earned an athletic scholarship to play college basketball and landed in the Caldwell University Athletics Hall of Fame. I credit all of my success as an athlete to what you will read in this book and it is also why I subsequently became a coach of youth athletics. My family and I have been involved in youth sports for the past 60 years and 35 years, respectively. During that time, we have experienced great success including five of my family members becoming Wall of Fame members at our hometown's high school. Because we are usually one of the smallest, if not the smallest, players on the team, our success extends beyond physical prowess. We believe in a mental approach to youth sports that has been passed down through generations, starting with my parents.

I was lucky to be raised by parents who 100% understood the proper approach to youth sports. They understood it so well that after 35 years, I have yet to come across parents with a better approach. My parents taught us the importance of sportsmanship by always acting with respect towards coaches, teammates, referees, and opponents. The focus was on learning the lessons

that came from sports like responding to adversity, not placing blame when things go bad, good old-fashioned hard work in order to improve at something you enjoy doing, earning your success, and trusting that the process of doing the right things, will ultimately get rewarded.

Together, we can change the way we perceive a child's opportunity to play sports during his/her childhood. Throughout these pages, I point out important considerations to help us think of the SOLUTION when it comes to OUR issues with our child's youth sports experience and STOP THE COMPLAINING!

Youth Sports Done Right is packed with integral lessons I took away from sports. My upbringing as an athlete and consistent effort as a coach to always make sports a better experience, make me a leader and expert in the field. I also attribute my success as a player and a coach to what I am about to share with all of you. If that sounds good, let's jump right in! My 25-pillar approach to youth sports will help you and your child/children **be positive when you lose and be humble when you win!**

INTRODUCTION

I wrote ***Youth Sports Done Right*** because I want to make a difference in youth sports and ultimately, make it better for future young athletes. I believe in being part of the solution and felt compelled to write this playbook for parents since I know not everyone has the family background I was so lucky to have growing up. I have noticed several issues in the world of youth sports. This is my best effort to address and fix them. However, it will take our combined effort to effect real change. We have to start recognizing the issues with a mindset shift and then follow with altering our actions.

Youth Sports Done Right is a manual on how to reduce your issues and increase your satisfaction in your child's youth sports journey. From beginning to end, it is packed with years of lessons learned. Each chapter gives an overview of my model along with an example of personal experience and practical application. This playbook gives you the tools to ensure that your son/daughter has a memorable and enjoyable sports experience. In the end, that is the ultimate goal for our young athletes.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: COMPLAINTS

Turns out, going to a youth sport's game these days is not very enjoyable and surprisingly, is a very negative environment. Even when the team is winning and playing well, there always seems to be a bunch of parents unhappy about their son's/daughter's playing time or the amount of shots they have taken. They fill the stands with negative comments and criticisms rather than encouragement. This negativity is not isolated to a few situations either. It is pervasive and over time, will impact the athlete's experience as well as everyone involved.

To further demonstrate this point, I have compiled a list of top youth sports complaints below.

Top Youth Sports Complaints by Parents:

- My child did not get the uniform number of choice.
- The players on my child's team are not good enough.
- There is not enough individual skill work being done in practice for my child.
- The team does not run enough plays and lacks organization.

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- One player on the team hogs the ball.
- There are too many players on the team.
- Scheduling and communication are terrible and I do not know when events are being held.
- The competition is either too good or not good enough.
- The other team displayed poor sportsmanship by winning by a large margin.
- The other team was comprised of older children not within the age limit.
- There is not enough playing time for my son/daughter.
- My child was not given enough touches of the ball or shots in the game.
- I do not want my son/daughter to lose interest in the sport because the team is not good.
- I am concerned about my son's/daughter's development because of the skill level of his/her teammates.
- The coach's son/daughter is being favored.

- The referee was terrible and favored the other team.
- My child's coach stinks and does not know what he/she is doing.

After looking at the list, can you honestly say you haven't committed any of these youth sports no-no's? I typically hear the most complaints when attending youth travel/club and high school games. While sitting in the crowd, as a fan, watching my niece, nephew or a player I have coached, I suddenly realize I am sitting in the middle of misery. Surrounded by parents who cannot bear to watch the game due to frustrations, stress, and complaints. Sometimes before I can catch myself, I join in because the negativity is contagious. Second-guessing the coach, blaming the referee, and throwing other children on their team under the bus are regular parts of this misery. It is almost like everyone likes the pain so they keep going back for more and that is not the way it should be. When I notice it though, I get back in the right spirit, cheer, and focus on what's in front of me while reminding myself to enjoy the game. This is why I wrote ***Youth Sports Done Right*** and this is what I aim to fix.

As a coach, I hear these complaints all the time. Thankfully, I do not hear them as much in my own program because we work our tails off to minimize them. In the program, we have been extremely lucky to have incredible parents who have bought into the philosophies and beliefs in this book, ultimately leading to a more

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enjoyable sports experience for them and their kids. We have forged healthy friendships, and together we deal with the good and bad. Our daily goal is to do what is best for the kids. No one is perfect but by consistently focusing on the good, our program collect praises.

THE APPROACH

#1: MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Expectations for what your child should get out of youth sports is a key factor in how much both you and your child will enjoy the sport. Problems await if the only expectation is to *be the best*. But if the expectation is to *do your best*, the experience is likely to be more enjoyable.

The only expectations that should be put on our children when playing sports are:

Sportsmanship – Have respect for all coaches, players and referees.

Be a student of the game – Listen and learn from coaches & players.

Enthusiasm – Encourage teammates at all times.

Work ethic – Learn how to improve through hard work.

Give 100% – Giving your best effort assures you never have regrets.

Personal Experience

Simply stated, my parents never expected anything more from me than the five characteristics listed above. In sports, the only times I was ever reprimanded by them was when I broke one of these rules, such as not conducting myself with respect for others on the court or not listening to a coach. Instead of chastising me for missing a basket or making a mistake based on my

skills, they focused on teaching me the most important characteristics. They knew I would learn how to advance my skills and learn from my mistakes over time.

#2: LET THE ATHLETE SET THE GOALS

A young athlete should have goals that he or she is trying to attain by playing sports. These goals should be set by the athlete, not the parent. It is our job as adults to encourage their investment of hard work in order for them to achieve their goals. Do this by encouraging them, NOT forcing them.

Often, I am told that it is unrealistic for athletes to aspire to play professionally or even in college. However, if that is the goal of the young athlete, you should support it as long as he or she is willing to put in the necessary work. If your daughter or son says she/he wants to play sports professionally but never practices, it is a red flag and will likely result in a major life lesson. However, if your child wants to play professionally and consistently practices 2-3 hours a day working towards their dream, several positive outcomes can come from this, even if they do not make it to the pros. Who knows where this route will take them. When you see a child voluntarily working towards a goal, no matter what it is, always encourage them. It is not about the goal as much as it is

about the actions that are helping materialize the goal. The goal can be whatever he or she wants as long as the actions match.

Personal Experience

When I was in 6th or 7th grade, I started a notebook called, “My Ticket to a Division I Scholarship.” Daily, I wrote the steps I needed to take to achieve my goal and the specific things I was doing to make sure I was on the right path. By the time I was a high school senior, I realized that I may not get a Division I Scholarship; so I crossed out the title of the book and made it, “My Ticket to a Division II Scholarship.” Ultimately, I accomplished my goal and received a Division II Scholarship. I played for four years of college basketball at Caldwell University where I was on teams that won three conference championships and was inducted into the Caldwell University Athletics Hall of Fame. I played for a great coach, Mark Corino, who is a New Jersey legend. The ironic thing about how he coaches is that it is based on the fundamentals, just like this book. Although you would think the focus at the collegiate level would be more complex, it is still about the basics. These are the basics our youth need to be learning.

Moral of the story: Sometimes you do not reach your exact goal but you get a whole bunch of other great benefits you did not expect by working hard and striving to accomplish it. The outcome will always be in your

favor when your actions and work ethic match your goals.

#3: YOUTH ATHLETES SHOULD FEEL NO PRESSURE

Trying to force your child to play or practice more does not work. In fact, it is often counterproductive for the young athlete in the long-term, as she/he will build resentment and eventually rebel against your wishes. If your child is playing every day because you are getting him/her training or bringing him/her to the gym, try not going for a week or two. See if your child seeks the workout on their own. You will find out if are they playing because they want to or because they feel required. The first way to get a young athlete to play more is to make sure they are enjoying the sport. Ask questions and probe their answers. Next, encourage them to set goals. This gives them better focus and something to work towards.

Another way to relieve the pressure is by making sports about learning instead of winning and losing. Attend local high school, college, and professional sporting events to help build the passion and excitement to play sports. Going to these games allows the child to be a fan and enjoy the game from a relaxed and fun perspective. During the game, children also have a tendency to start to dream a little and envision a potential future playing in sports. This plants the seed “naturally”

for a child to set some long-term goals about wanting to play in high school, college, or professionally. This is also a great way to teach the sport and for your child to learn. Ask questions about what he or she would do in certain predicaments to help build your child's IQ for that sport. Encouraging him/her to be a fan is a great way to help develop passion for the sport.

#4: PLAY FOR THE LONG HAUL AND AVOID BURNOUT

Do you know what watering grass and playing sports have in common? If you water grass nonstop, it will burn. If you water the grass and give it breaks to get sunlight, it grows. Playing sports without a break leads to wear and tear on the body and a high probability of burnout. Having players understand that they will not "miss out" by taking a one or two-week break, breeds maturity and develops patience. It also gives the young athlete time to grow physically and mentally and come back refreshed. This approach ensures your son/daughter does not burn out and renews his/her love for the sport(s) they are playing.

When was the last break your son or daughter took from sports?

#5: BE SOMEONE OTHERS WANT TO PLAY WITH

How often do you hear about some great player that excels in the game but no one likes playing with him or her? If you are a good player but no one likes playing with you, it makes you a bad player.

My family always placed a heavy focus on relationship-building and making sure I had a good rapport with my teammates. Youth athletes should be able to have solid relationships and positive interactions with team members. That means going out of their way to be encouraging and supportive. This behavior builds a connection between teammates and allows for a support system when things are not going well for that athlete, which we all know happens in sports. Lifting other players up when they are down is one of the most important things in sports and will help make his or her sport's experience MUCH more enjoyable.

It is important for youth athletes to not only have respectful interactions with their team members, but also with opponents, coaches, and referees. Parents that focus on being an advocate for sportsmanship and sports etiquette know how to handle all adverse situations when it comes to sports. Also, they are the ones that step up and tell the group how to act in the stands. How your son/daughter conducts himself/herself on the court or

field is how they will be remembered—regardless of their statistics.

Personal Experience

During my days as a point guard, I shot a lot and scored many points. However, no one likes playing with someone who shoots too much. Because I understood the dynamic of my role, I balanced keeping my teammates happy while scoring enough to make sure we had a good chance to win. I consistently encouraged my teammates and assisted in getting them easy baskets by drawing attention from our opponents. The key element is communication and encouragement. Youth athletes need to be vocal on the bench and let their teammates know they have their backs.

Reflecting on all the lessons I learned as an athlete, the most important one was the 1st thing I ever learned—Good Sportsmanship. How do you conduct yourself on the court when people are watching you and/or when things do not go your way? Do you blame and complain or do you suck it up and deal with it? There was only one answer in my household and that was to suck it up and deal with it until the next opportunity to play, in which things may go in a different direction.

#6: DON'T COACH IN THE CAR OR AT THE DINNER TABLE

With the amount of sports youth athletes play, it is easy to allow them to not only consume your child's life but yours as well. It is essential for youth athletes to not receive constant coaching. When they are being coached all the time, it breeds stress, pressure, and unnecessary expectations. If your child is heavily involved in sports, they are already receiving plenty of instruction. Conversations on topics outside of sports is like allowing sunlight on that watered grass and giving your child a necessary break to grow.

#7: BE AROUND INSPIRING AND PASSIONATE COACHES

It is very important for youth players to be around coaches who inspire, have passion, and care for his/her players. They should have role models outside of their parents and there is no one better than their inspiring, passionate, and caring coach. It sets the child on a path to success and often develops into a lasting bond. A great coach is not all about winning and instead cares about your child. A real youth coach is trying to prepare athletes for life by developing respectful and hardworking individuals. I recommend committing to a coach once you have found

a good fit for your child.

Personal Experience

I was very lucky to have a few great coaches growing up and one was my dad. He taught me the most important things about sports and that was sportsmanship, work ethic, and the proper way to conduct myself as an athlete. From grades 6 - 10, I had my AAU Coach, Steve Kingslow, who died suddenly of an aneurysm at the young age of 27. However, the time I had with him was incredible. I will never forget the amazing things we were able to accomplish on the basketball court. I also had my high school Coach Jim Taranto and college Coach Mark Corino. Each coach taught me different things and is special to me for different reasons. But the bottom line is that I stuck with my coaches and built a relationship with them that remains special to me today.

#8: COMMIT TO A YOUTH SPORTS PROGRAM

An epidemic exists in youth sports. Too many athletes bounce from program to program looking for something better. There is an old adage, “the grass isn’t always greener on the other side of the fence.” Sometimes young athletes in 5th or 6th grade have already played for three or four programs yet they see no improvement

in their skill level. Moving around and learning different philosophies or techniques must be quite confusing.

Do your research before selecting a program for your child. Talk to other parents and choose a program that has principles beyond just winning games. If you find a youth sports program that is doing its best to teach the important things about sports which are discussed in this book, stick with it through the good and the bad. Athletes that commit to a program long-term not only get more out of sports, they have a more enjoyable experience due to the lifelong relationships that are being developed between coaches and players. Youth athletes that commit to a program usually get unexpected rewards from it down the road. They learn the importance of being a part of something that is bigger than themselves. This lesson is also useful for when they join the workforce, as an employee or an owner.

#9: BECOME THE BEST AT MAKING OTHERS BETTER

Youth athletes rarely understand that the better they make others, the better they will become. Most sports are team sports. The youth athlete that makes his/her teammates better not only becomes a better player but other players will love playing with him/her.

Over the years, I have heard players and parents

communicate concern about the skill level of other players on a team. They fear their child's development being stunted due to a perception of lower-caliber team members. Thinking in this way sets your child up to think s/he is better than other players. How can players connect with one another, forge friendships, and help each other grow if some players are discounting their team members? Every person adds value and plays a role. Encourage your child to focus on making his/her teammates better through encouragement and positive interactions. Having the mindset to try to make your teammates better is a mature way for a young athlete to approach sports and it will breed confidence, empathy, and leadership.

Personal Experience

In my early years as a basketball player, I thought I had to do everything for my team to win. Fortunately, my dad and AAU coach drilled into my head the importance of helping my teammates get better. They also taught me how to become a good passer. Becoming a good passer not only helped my teammates get easy baskets but it eventually helped free me up as well. More importantly, my teammates enjoyed playing with me despite how many shots I took in my career because I still looked for opportunities to pass them the ball.

#10: DON'T BE A CRITIC, BE A FAN

There is nothing worse than a constant critic, especially when you spend a great deal of time with the person. By nature, most children are trying to make their parent(s) happy so for them to hear constant criticism about what they are doing wrong, is damaging. Over time, the child may build up massive resentment which leads to him/her quitting the sport altogether.

Instead, be your son's/daughter's biggest fan. Attend as many games as possible, cheer them on, and encourage them every chance you get. Think about it, if you went to a professional game to see your favorite player, would you tell him or her, "you need to use your left hand more" or "you need to get lower on defense"? No way! You would compliment them with comments like, "great game today" and "way to hustle." You would definitely be focused on the positive. If you would do it for a stranger, you can and should definitely do it for your own son/daughter. What you should say to your son/daughter most of the time is, *"I love to watch you play."*

Personal Experience

My family's tradition is attending games. We are a large, athletic family with five children and twelve nieces and nephews that all play sports. If I want to see my family, the best place to do so is at a game as that is how we have come to spend quality time together. When I was a player,

I loved looking into the stands and seeing so many of my family members. Their support gave me an extra boost. After the game ended, none of them ever criticized me or told me what I needed to do on the court. They were there to show support and give words of encouragement. My grandfather was actually honored by being named to the Wall of Fame in my hometown for being the biggest fan and attending so many high school games.

#11: HAVE A BLUE-COLLAR MENTALITY

Humility goes a long way in youth sports. An athlete that acts or thinks as though they are better than other players, or even the coaches, causes unwanted discord on the team. A cocky attitude makes the youth athlete a target for hardworking, blue-collar players. The hardworking, blue-collar mentality type of player will outwork and outperform the cocky player any day of the week. Coaches will recognize the hardworking individuals because they are humble and speak with their actions. They do not like to draw attention to themselves unless it is with action on the court or playing field. Youth athletes should always carry themselves as hardworking, disciplined, listeners who have respect for the sport they play. Players that carry themselves in this way not only have a more enjoyable sports experience, but are able to bounce back from adversity much faster.

Personal Experience

When I was young, my parents had a rule and it was simple. I could not leave the house to go play until my chores were done. This rule helped me understand the importance of responsibility and prioritization. I had to finish the necessary tasks before I could do the things I enjoyed, like play sports. It also mentally categorized sports as a privilege or luxury. As I got older, this hardworking, blue-collar mentality translated into a relentless work ethic while playing and practicing as much as I could to improve.

#12: TEACH THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IN THE FRONT OF THE LINE

This is one of the oldest rules in the book and it couldn't be any more important than right now. I am finding youth athletes don't want to come to practice compared to when I was growing up. They only want to play games as opposed to working hard in practice on the things they need to improve. We must not only teach the importance of going to practice but to be in the front of the line in drills. This, without question, helps the youth athlete learn and get the most out of sports. It will also help the athlete let the coach know that he/she is serious about learning and takes practice very seriously, which almost always leads to more playing time.

Personal Experience

Once I became a coach, I understood the importance and impact of being in front of the line. Alex is a young basketball player that has been with us since kindergarten. Even as a 3rd grader, I can already see that he has the intangibles that are way more important to an athlete than talent. Alex is a tremendous listener and team player. While others notice his talent, or point out his crossover dribble and picture-perfect jump shot, I notice something different. When asked what sets Alex apart, the first thing I mention is that he is always first in line for drills. Even after hearing me say the same drills hundreds of times, he never gets sick of it and instead races to be first so he can show the team that he can execute my instructions perfectly. This incredible habit has helped develop his mind well beyond the years of his peers. That level of discipline and mental toughness becomes an invaluable asset when handling intense game situations.

#13: THERE IS ONLY ONE ELITE TEAM AND IT'S FREE!

Elite.

Coaches and sports programs use this word to not only charge parents more money, but distort a child's perception of sports. It gives children a false sense of how good they are and makes athletes focus on the wrong aspect of the

game. Elite also encourages children to bounce from program to program searching for a perfect team that will magically make them better without having to do the work necessary to improve.

I have asked players what they think “elite” means and they tell me: highly skilled, play in special tournaments, part of the best players, great teams. I then ask my players, “How many teams out there claim to be elite?” They all agree that there are thousands of them. I then ask, “How many players do you know that are playing and/or practicing every day on their own?” All of them usually say not many. I tell them that, to me, elite means a collective group of special people who separate themselves from the rest. They can do this by developing great habits that they have the discipline to practice every day. The only elite players I know are the ones who play and work hard EVERY day. Not just two days a week in some elite team practice but working hard on their own day in and day out, when no one is watching. That is elite.

Personal Experience

Once I was scheduling a game with a nearby coach of a very well-known AAU basketball program in the area and he said he would send over his 6th grade “elite” team. I immediately responded that my 6th grade team probably couldn’t play his “elite” team. He then said that his elite team sucks and he calls it “elite” to get parents to

pay an extra \$200. That pretty much sums up what goes on in youth sports.

While growing up, I played on some great teams and some not-so-great teams. For the great teams, every player either practiced or played seven days a week. We were committed to hard work and improving our skills. There was no paying extra to be on a team called “elite.” In my program, we have teams for kids who want more. The teams do not cost and they are considered rewards for players that want something more serious. So, it goes back to the old saying that the best things in life are free because playing seven days a week only cost sacrifice and sweat.

One of the best players I have ever coached was Michael. When he started with me, he was in the 5th grade and I have been fortunate to watch him develop into a hardworking, disciplined listener and thinker on the basketball court. When Michael got to high school, he decided to join a traveling “Elite Team.” When things did not work out, I spoke with Michael to understand what had happened.

“Why didn’t things work out?”

“The team wasn’t elite,” replied Michael.

“What does elite mean to you anyway?”

“It means a select few or the best of the best.”

“How many teams out there say they are elite?” I asked.

“A lot.”

“So that means that playing on an elite team is not so hard to do since it seems all you have to do is pay money and you can say you are elite. That doesn’t sound elite to me.”

“You’re right. What does elite mean to you?” He asked.

“There is only one elite team. That’s the team of athletes that play every day. Athletes that do all the right things all the time from a sportsmanship, work ethic, and listening standpoint.”

That conversation lit a fire under Michael and he has been playing every day and some days even going to double sessions. He is no longer chasing the magic potion of joining an elite team and instead, is rolling up his sleeves and chasing his goal to play college basketball with good old-fashioned hard work. He is now earning his spot on the elite team of players who play every day versus paying money for it.

#14: I AM NOT ONE OF THOSE CRAZY COMPLAINING PARENTS BUT...

At some point in the past twenty years it became acceptable for parents to contact coaches and directors for every little thing that happens to their son or daughter during their sports career. A parent approaching, questioning, undermining, and second-guessing the coach’s decisions

is a recipe for a very miserable sports experience for your son/daughter and for you. Sports are not perfect so there will always be something the coach could have done better or differently. Players make mistakes, games get cancelled, referees miss calls. It is all part of sports and learning to deal with these mishaps properly is what helps the athlete build character. Sports have a tendency to constantly test your will. Great athletes are made by the adversity they encounter. If you want your child to respond to adversity the correct way, lead by example. Show him/her how to pull the positive out of situations that do not go in their favor.

#15: BE ONE OF THE COACH'S FAVORITES

Most people believe coaches should not play favorites but I disagree. First, let me define what I mean by favorites. Players that exhibit commitment, great listening skills, and the ability to execute instructions and carry out the program's philosophy should be favored over players that do not come to practice, do not listen or are outright disruptive to the team.

If athletes realize that coaches gravitate towards and favor players that follow the rules and give him/her their undivided attention, why not be one of those players? In a youth sports world where commitment is scarce, athletes

that demonstrate it have a real opportunity to move ahead. They will get more attention from the coaches in practice and more opportunities during games.

#16: DON'T PLAY FOR COACHES THAT TAKE CREDIT OR SELL A PLAYER'S SUCCESS

Youth sports has exploded as a business and coaches are going to great lengths to promote their programs through winning records and talented players. Program websites and social media are filled with coaches taking credit for a player's success.

A coach with integrity and strong principles would NEVER take the credit for a player's success. Instead, a great coach will use his/her maturity and composure to allow the player to enjoy the success and get all the attention he or she deserves without stealing any of the spotlight. Coaches have a responsibility to their players. They should want the focus on their players, not themselves. If you find a coach stating that a player is great because "he/she is coached by me" or "in my program," run in the opposite direction. It is a marketing scheme for their business.

The success of a player is due to the countless hours of hard work that he/she puts in. Don't mistake me, a great coach can motivate and teach a player everything

he/she needs to do to be great. But there is no way around the hours and hours of hard work it takes to get there. A coach should never take that away from a player who has earned his/her success.

Personal Experience

I have been lucky enough to turn my passion for basketball into a 15,000-square foot training facility that boasts teams and training for hundreds of players. I am proud to say that I have never sold my players' success to help boost my business. Although I post pictures of our championship teams, I always make it about the players, team, and program. Never do I say anything about how I made a player better or that I was the reason for his/her success. Recently, competitive companies in the area have become predatory in these practices. They tell young athletes that if they train with them, they will play Division I basketball and even get into the pros. They are selling dreams and making false promises. Remember, there is no magic potion. Instead, look to play for a program that is teaching the fundamental principles that all athletes need, such as: sportsmanship, work ethic, teamwork, proper approach to sports, positive mental attitude, and how to respond to adversity.

#17: UTILIZE THE 24-HOUR RULE

Often, a night's rest and the start of a new day can really alter perspective and settle one's emotions. Because of this, I think programs should implement the 24-Hour Rule. It states that parents must wait at least twenty-four hours before contacting the coach or athletic director regarding a criticism or complaint. Do you know why we give a minimum of twenty-four hours? Because a majority of the time, once the next day comes, the issue is no longer a problem. Emotions have settled and reaching out to the coach or athletic director feels unnecessary.

Overall, parents should do everything in their power not to contact coaches and directors unless it is a serious issue. The 24-hour rule usually weeds out the minor issues like playing time or disagreements with a call.

Personal Experience

I have been coaching youth basketball for a long time. Over the years, I have witnessed all kinds of antics by parents, players, coaches, and referees. More recently, parents tend to communicate their concerns during a game by texting or walking into my office. If I receive a complaint while the game is still active, it tends to be emotion-driven. Once the parent has had a chance to cool down (usually 24 hours later), they contact me to apologize. They realize that they not only acted emotional but outright juvenile. Parents must understand

the highs and lows that come with sports. It is packed with adversity! But remaining positive and allowing your emotions to settle before acting out is the only way to enjoy the experience.

#18: ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO PRACTICE ON HIS/HER OWN

While there is enormous benefit to being part of a youth sports program that has structure and organized schedules, children should also spend time practicing and improving their skills on their own. It takes mental toughness to go out in the driveway or ride a bike to the park to work out when no one is there to watch or organize it. I help parents and players understand that just because a coach or opponent is not there does not mean that the game of basketball (or any sport a child plays) is not watching and ready to give you a reward for the hard work you are putting in. Children sacrificing their time to practice sports on their own is rare. However, this type of habit will not only help them improve their skills but also raise their level of athletic maturity.

#19: YOUTH ATHLETES SHOULD NOT SPECIALIZE IN ONE SPORT

The day of the 3-sport high school athlete is almost extinct because all sports are played year-round. Sports have become so competitive that parents of athletes think their children are missing out if they do not play a sport for the entire year. I have seen children as young as ten commit to one sport because of this phenomenon. Instead, encourage your son or daughter to play a few different sports as it will be better in the long-term. They will feel less regret and have the benefit of finding out what suits them best. They will learn about different sports and possibly discover a hidden talent.

I played three sports leading up to 8th grade then moved to just two sports in high school once I decided I wanted to play basketball in college. But I did not give up on soccer because I truly enjoyed playing it. Soccer served as a great break from basketball and allowed me to be fresh for the season each year. I am also very happy I played soccer because I turned out to be a 4-year varsity starter, a 1st team all-state, and an all-county while still being committed to my goal to play college basketball. I would have never expected to have the high school experience I had in soccer because I was so focused on basketball. If I had quit, I would have never gotten those accolades.

#20: DON'T FALL FOR THE WORD “NATIONAL(S)”

Youth sport clubs, tournaments, and leagues are always looking for ways to separate themselves from the competition, usually through gimmicks and sales tactics. Sometimes, it is meaningful and factual. Often, they are selling a dream. Much like the word “Elite,” “National(s)” is being used by tournaments and even worse, teams. Most tournaments now have its Nationals and that is not so bad because they do work very hard to provide a playing experience for young athletes. However, the teams that use the word National at the end of their team name may be a gimmick to get you to sign up. Look into it. Ask questions. Do your research! Personally, it feels similar to lottery tactics and no parent should commit their child to a program that only wants to take your money and sell you a dream.

P.S. I have never bought a lottery ticket and never plan to.

#21: WHO CARES ABOUT A & B TEAMS

I see many travel and club sports teams creating multiple teams for kids who want to play. These teams are usually put together based on skill and or to make sure that as

many kids get a chance to play as possible. Sometimes your child may not make the team you think or in this case the A team. In the grand scheme of things, if your son/daughter really wants to improve, the team they are on will not hinder it. If he/she is practicing all the time and has a goal in mind, eventually they will get their chance. I have seen dozens and dozens of young players not make the A team and wind up on the B team. So, they would have sat the bench and fought for time on the A team or be one of the top players on the B team. It makes me wonder if the parent wants the son/daughter to be on the A team for social status reasons or for what is really best for their child. It is almost 100% of the time that the parent, who was very unhappy her son/daughter did not make the A team, winds up having a great experience on the B team because the child got more playing time and opportunity. That is what it is all about. I call it, “being in the fire.” You want your son/daughter to play. Be in a situation where he/she will have the best chance to have the ball in her/his hands so they can be in the fire. That is the best way for him/her to learn about competition and dealing with the pressure of a sports game.

Personal Experience

I made all my decisions as a basketball player based on where I was going to play the most. AAU teams, high school, and college, I had one thought in mind, “Where am I going to play the most?” A similar question was

asked by Mitch, one of our players for four to five years now. In his town, Mitch had never made a travel team all the way through 8th grade. I got him to believe that he could work his tail off and make the freshman team. Coming in around number fifteen, he barely made the team. Mitch kept working and also rode the bench a lot as a sophomore on junior varsity. Slowly, his improvements were starting to kick in as every once in a while, I got text messages from other parents that Mitch had scored fourteen points in a single quarter. While they were shocked, I was never surprised. He soon earned the nickname “MK3” due to his incredible 3-point shooting. Mitch was investing time and energy into practicing and getting better.

As a junior, he was still on junior varsity but now the premier scorer on the team. I used to say not to tell Mitch he was playing junior varsity because in his mind, he was playing for Duke and having a blast doing it. Mitch was not concerned with what team he was on, only that he wanted to be where he could play. As Mitch prepares to enter his senior year, he is scoring in the 20's here and there and has games in summer league with varsity. Without question, he has become the best shooter at his high school and has transformed his life. Evolving from a kid with very little athletic ability, Mitch now has a story due to the journey he decided to take. Because he focused on going into the fire, he created countless memories, a whole lot of friends, and he learned what it takes to

improve a skill. He can now use that sports experience in whatever he chooses to do in life and it gives him an incredible chance to be great at it.

#22: DON'T PLAY DOWN

Another tactic youth sports clubs use to gain an edge on their competitors is flat-out cheating. I estimate that in 75% of the games we play, several players on the other team are older than the age requirement. Although this practice has become so commonplace that it feels accepted by both parents and the entire youth sports industry, it is one of the worst things a program can do. It teaches our youth athletes that it is okay to break the rules in order to win a game. If you are in a program or at a game where you suspect coaches are playing older kids to get an unfair advantage, you are probably right.

Because our program does not believe in this tactic, I created National Sports ID (www.nationalsportsid.com), a website that verifies the age/grade of youth athletes. Fortunately, an increasing number of tournaments are requiring their participants to have a Sports ID issued from our website. We should never teach athletes that it is acceptable to cheat and National Sports ID is my effort to clean up some of the negative influence within the industry.

#23: YOUTH SPORTS ARE NEVER PERFECT

Parents, it is impossible for you to create a perfect youth sports experience for your child. Sometimes, it is that other players on the team are not good enough for your son/daughter and at other times, the competition is too good or not good enough. After years of trying to make people happy and meet requests that led to a lose-lose situation, I finally realized it was not my program. Instead, some parents are chasing a perfect sports experience which unfortunately, does not exist. Sports has as many, if not more, downs than ups. That's often the thrill and fun of it. The imperfections create lasting memories and pull the team members closer together. As soon as parents embrace the uncertainty within youth athletics, the more enjoyable everyone's experience will be.

In sports, sometimes you play great and sometimes you have an off day. Sometimes you catch the breaks from the referee, while at other times you don't get the preferred call. The key is to learn from the tough times, the times when things do not go our way. Young athletes need to experience all of the different scenarios. If how they conduct themselves as athletes is the goal, which it should be, they must act the right way when they lose a game by thirty points or win a game by 1 point in overtime. How you respond to the tough times is what is important. When you are winning by a large margin

against another team, act with respect and never rub it in. You are graceful when you are a lot better than your opponent. When you get beaten by a large margin, focus on the good things and encourage your teammates to keep their heads up. Always understand that the sun will rise the next day and before you know it, you will be back on the court playing again.

The proper approach to youth sports is preparing the child for the path, not preparing the path for the child.

#24: PERSISTENCE BEATS QUITTING EVERY TIME

Although quitting is one of the worst actions a young athlete can take, the ability to change teams because of unmet expectations (number of wins) or a coach not doing exactly what one parent or athlete wants, has resulted in less commitment and higher turnover. Today's environment has introduced more options with fewer risks. Of course, this excludes extreme situations where a parent and athlete have no other choice but to quit. Instead, I am referring to the minor issues that cause dissatisfaction for a player or parent. There are so many club and travel teams so when a player does not get his/her way, she/he can simply leave the current team

and join a new one. Remember, there is no magic potion or perfect sports experience. Sometimes the experience is great and sometimes it is not. It may take a bit of time for things to go the way you would like. That is why our program focuses on learning and not merely winning.

Personal Experience

The players that stick with a program play with purpose and with a greater sense of self than the ones that move around often. Through the program, they develop lasting relationships and deep-rooted beliefs that will stick with them for a lifetime. In our program, they are known as “Program Players or Veterans.” Program Players are veteran players that have been with us over a long period of time. Honestly, I want to make things happen for them because their dedication to the program is obvious. They have earned the right to come to my facility whenever they want to use it. During the summer, they work at our camps. Our Program Players bought into our philosophy and decided to stick with it, making themselves into committed, mature, hardworking individuals. These kids are not only ready for high school and college sports, but are learning what it takes to succeed in the real world.

If you invest in the program over time, someday down the road it will give back to you. It always works that way in a good sports program.

#25: ATHLETES CONDUCT THEMSELVES LIKE ATHLETES

The old adage is that you will become what you think about most or act like consistently. Well, athletes behave like athletes. They always have sportsmanship on their minds and conduct themselves with respect for opponents, teammates, coaches, referees, and the sports they play. I often tell my players that if they are a 25-point scorer in basketball but are a jerk on the court toward teammates, coaches, referees and opponents, they will not be remembered as the 25-point scorer. She/he will be remembered as a jerk that lacked sportsmanship. Athletes do not want their talent overlooked.

Athletes also attend practices, stand in the front of lines, listen to coaches, and always do their best. Because they are proud of these descriptions, parents must focus on teaching athletes how to conduct themselves and the rest will fall into place.

Ryan Tremblay

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Did you notice that the solutions provided and my overall approach to youth sports does not focus on any of the top complaints we discussed in the beginning of this book? My approach is at the opposite end of the spectrum of how the opportunity to play sports is perceived. These twenty-five guiding principles are not new-to-the-world but instead are practical, intentional, and reasonable actions you can take to create the best sports experience for your young athlete.

Recently, I went to my niece's 2nd grade basketball game. Not one person in the crowd had a negative thing to say about the players, coaches, or referee. In fact, fans and coaches were even saying "nice shot" to the opposing players. It reminded me of what youth sports are all about. The players were learning how to play, competing to win, and doing their best but they were also smiling and having fun. The game was a hard-fought battle with a final score of 10 to 5 and probably one of the most pleasurable sports experiences I have witnessed in some time.

Through our words and actions, we teach our youth to complain and blame. That means, we can also teach them not to complain and blame but it starts with changing our own behavior. That 2nd grade basketball game had me asking myself. At what point do youth athletes start to think it is okay to blame coaches, other

players, or referees when things don't go their way? At what point do we as adults think it is okay to blame or complain in front of them?

The conclusion I came to was simple. Blaming and complaining are the default responses when things do not go right in a game or on a team because of the negative environment we (adults) have created in youth sports. Although it may seem easier to react this way, it has a negative effect on one's mind, body, and spirit. Instead, leverage these twenty-five principles. Find ways to learn from negative situations. Say positive things to opponents, coaches, and referees. Be a good influence on your young athlete and for the rest of the team.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF YOUTH SPORTS

- Learning how to lose is just as important as learning how to win. Youth sports should teach children competitiveness and how to win graciously and lose gracefully. When you lose, be positive and when you win, be humble.
- Not keeping score or giving trophies to all players establishes unrealistic expectations. It creates a false sense of entitlement and builds confidence in children that is based on incorrect and misleading ideas.
- Sports are a fun way to teach values like sportsmanship, teamwork, accountability, work ethic, respect, discipline, selflessness, character, loyalty, commitment, character, how to deal with adversity, and how to earn success.
- Praise the athlete's effort throughout the game regardless of the game's outcome. While the scoreboard may show a loss, there are often times where the effort and attitude displayed can still be considered a win.
- Youth sports should not focus on winning. Instead, it

is about having fun, becoming a good listener, being a good teammate, learning how to play the sport the right way, and conducting yourself as an athlete.

- What is done to increase the chances of winning decreases the chances of the young athlete's enjoyment of the game. When the focus is on winning, players are worried about making mistakes, which are what they need to do in order to learn and grow.
- The proper approach to youth sports is preparing the child for the path, not preparing the path for the child.
- Teach young athletes the importance of the journey and process to achieve a goal to avoid a win-at-all-cost mindset.
- Parents that yell instructions from the sideline (shoot, go all the way, etc.) take away the ability for the child to make decisions. All decisions an athlete makes in the game should be an action based on their own judgement and not merely a reaction to a parent yelling instructions from the sideline. Also, this behavior undermines the voice of the coach and results in athletes listening to their parents instead of their coach.

- Two Great Focuses for Coaches and Parents
 1. You get what you emphasize – Parents and coaches should emphasize fun, learning and development.
 2. What gets praised, gets repeated – We should praise great attitudes, work ethic, actions of great teamwork and examples of great sportsmanship.
- Say this one simple sentence to your child whether she/he wins, loses, plays great or plays badly: *“I love to watch you play.”*

Before practices and games, remember to tell your child the following four requirements:

- Have Fun
- Work Hard
- Listen to Your Coach
- Be a Good Teammate

If they can do these four things, it will help the athlete get as much out of sports as possible and more importantly, make sure you both enjoy it to the fullest.

Youth Sports Done Right has provided you with the tools, insight, and examples to be successful as the parent of a youth athlete. On the last page is the final step,

Ryan Tremblay

The Parent's Pledge. Recite it and honor it. Make a commitment to your child and his/her coach that you will follow the principles detailed in this book.

THE PARENT'S PLEDGE

I will do my best NOT to complain or blame coaches, referees, teammates, or opponents when things do not go my way in a youth sports game, practice or a program because I understand the sportsmanship I demonstrate will be an example to my child.