

The Best Job You'll Never Get Paid For

Youth sports coaches are lauded for all of the time and effort they put into making young athletes better, both on and off the field—as they should be. But, I am here to tell you a little secret: coaching youth sports is actually more rewarding than you think. While it's not all post-game snacks and championship celebrations, it is often the best part of my day.

Is it frustrating when every player on your team forgets that the object of the game is to PREVENT the other team from scoring? Absolutely. Are there times when I want to pull my hair out because the most perfectly planned practice turns into pure chaos? Well, you've seen my hair, so... Regardless of what happens, I always walk away from practice with a smile on my face, because kids have a funny way of reminding us that they are just that, kids.

One minute they are clumsily playing catch with a teammate, the next they are crushing a ball over the fence for a home run. They go from listening intently to the coaches to randomly breaking out their newest dance move. And no, we aren't in dance class, we are on a soccer field.

For me, one of the best things about being a coach happens long after the season is over when a former player comes up to me with a big smile and says "Hey, coach!" In my book, it doesn't get any better than that. For any coach, interactions like that always reaffirm the positive influence they had on that young person.

It's often assumed that the coaches who don't win must not be having any fun. Quite the contrary, some of the most satisfying times on a field or court happen when your team is clearly outmatched in size, skill, and talent. Your team may play hard, work together, and do so with class, but still come up short on the scoreboard. It's here that we should take note from the players themselves, because the kids don't get down on themselves for long. As soon as the post-game snacks come out they are laughing, giving each other a hard time, or talking about their plans for the rest of the day. You can't tell which team won or lost. It's during these moments the kids remind me—and all of us—that it's just a game. It also reminds me that I get as much out of coaching as the kids do; how to be resilient, keep things in perspective, and have fun, because otherwise, what's the point of playing games.

Now that my own children are getting into sports, coaching gives me guaranteed quality time with them. I might sound a bit selfish, but like most working parents, I don't get to spend as much time with my kids as I would like. When I'm coaching them, I know there is built-in time for us to be together. I get a kick out of watching my boys interact with teammates, create friendships, overcome adversity, and just enjoy being active.

So, why don't more parents want to coach? It's scary. I get it. My job puts me in front of your kids almost every day, so coaching is just something that makes sense for me. But my wife is another story. She was a first-time coach a few years ago when our youngest played t-ball, and she was terrified—of 5-year-olds. I'll tell you what I told her. "You will be a better coach than you think because you care about the kids. Besides I guarantee your players would rather have a coach who is learning as she goes than no coach at all." And remember, whether you're a seasoned coach looking for new drills to mix up practice or brand new and needing help getting that first practice started, we're here to help. So, go on, give coaching a try—basketball, soccer and volleyball are just around the corner and we'll need you.

Justin Mashburn
Youth Recreation Coordinator
Montrose Recreation District