



Now more than ever with sports and life gripped with many restrictions and guidelines, amateur sports is also ready for a slight makeover.

We have all witnessed the good, the bad and the bizarre in youth sports. From the tyrannical coach to the parent that never made it past little league that now obsesses in getting their child to the big leagues, the events in youth baseball and softball could be plucked from a reality television series.

Below are my suggestions on how to restore a bit more normalcy to travel ball and develop better players and high-character young adults.

Ban Stats And Game Changer

The concern with stats, both traditional and new-age categories, is it doesn't help in allowing players to enjoy their experience and to focus on their "controllables;" mindset, preparation, pre-actions and enjoyment. If parents who aren't at games need to get the play-by-play they are missing, they can have a conversation with their child when they see them and ask how the game went. Keep score and record QAB's (quality at bats). That's it. Save the stats and broadcast for the less than 1% who one day might make a living playing the sport.

Muzzles Over Puzzles

Prohibit base coaches from talking and watch how quickly you will develop better baserunners and weed out the generation of players that have relied on their ears to play, rather than their eyes. Baseball IQ, instincts and good anticipation skills are a function of players trusting their eyes during the game, not waiting for the next audio command from well-intended coaches. Try leaving the coaches on the bench or carry muzzles to prevent the verbal commands that may win a game today but cripple a player's ability to make their own judgments in real time.

Please, no more wrist puzzles that provide players and coaches with signals. Save the number puzzles for math class and allow players to make their own choices. Applaud aggressive baserunning and spend time teaching the players what to watch for, not what to listen to on the base paths and on defense.

Limit Post-Game Monologues

They want to eat, they are tired and their attention span is in overtime by the end of the game. Save the lengthy inning-by-inning recap and clichés for individual chats with players at the next practice. Keep notes during the game so you can present team issues calmly and when the players are in retention mode. 90 second max post game recap and you will have better focus levels from your tired audience.

Ban Most Bunts

Outlaw it except for special occasions. You can't develop confidence in young hitters when the coach wants you to lay down a bunt so the other team panics and throws the ball into the outfield for a bunt triple. Let the children swing the bat early and often. Reward walks and taking pitches as much as getting a hit. Strikeouts with swings in the strike zone are a good thing. Preach timing and seeing the ball longer as your only in-game hitting advice.

Limit Parents Taking Control

If you can't keep the loud and animated ones in the car, locate them deep in the outfield so their children don't hear them and can't see their animated gestures when things are ugly. Remind all parents that pitch calling or giving instruction will result in a lifetime ban of attending games.

Slow Down On Rankings

Be mindful of the messaging and over-glorification of stats and trophies at the younger level. Yes, we want to win every game and have all your hitters hit .500 but keep effort, energy and enjoyment the central points with your team's messaging.

Let Pitchers Think

Talk strategy before games and have updated chats between innings on pitching strategies but at the end of the day suggest your pitcher throws more first-pitch strikes than the other team and let them learn about the beauty of expanding the strike zone with two strikes. There's nothing worse than killing the tempo of a game with bench pitch calling for those 12-year-old pitchers who need to just take a deep breath and let it fly.

The Power Of ME.

Have a team mantra or mission statement that sends the right message to players and parents. For example, encourage your players to follow the simple power of the ME rule:

- Max Effort in all you do during a game and practice
- My Enjoyment shows when I play this game
- Manage my Emotions during the game

Master The Fastball And The Fange (Changeup)

Locating both a four-seam and two-seam fastball within different parts of the strike zone is the key to pitching at every level. The "Fange" (formerly known as the changeup) should be every pitcher's second-best pitch. Throwing "The Fange" (combine the word fastball and changeup) is the pitch that wins at every level, especially when thrown in offensive counts. Keep pitching strategies simple for the young ones; throw more strikes than balls and don't be afraid to throw up in the strike zone with all the young launch-angle hitters you face!

Let Players Teach Players

Back in the day, this is how a different generation learned the game. Watch the really good hitter on your team or imitate the stud pitcher on the opposing squad and how he uses his body to thrown hard. Encourage your players to share their knowledge with each other and use practice time as a forum to let them teach each other. Remind both players and parents that just because a drill, teaching strategy or training trick is on Twitter or Instagram doesn't make it right for all players.