

BasketCases: How Youth Basketball Parents Can Lower Their Blood Pressure and Keep Their Sanity

Chapter 5:

The experience: More Important than the Final Score

Think about the last time you dined at a restaurant. Was the experience positive or negative? To answer the question properly, you need to recall more than the food. Was there a long wait or were you seated promptly? Was the service friendly and professional or slow and subpar? Was the atmosphere cozy and comfortable or loud and smoky?

You could eat the best filet mignon of your life, but if the service was shoddy, you probably won't return. Like eating at a restaurant, youth basketball is all about the experience. In other words, your son's or daughter's team may win the game, but the experience could be far from memorable.

Parents and coaches need to constantly evaluate whether youth basketball is a positive or negative experience for their children. We all know it's more fun to win than to lose, but parents and coaches who believe winning is more important than the experience are often shortsighted.

To properly evaluate your kids' experience, you should consider the following questions:

- Do they enjoy playing basketball or are they playing the sport because you want them to?
- Are they getting enough playing time to feel like a contributor or rotting on the bench?
- Do they enjoy their teammates or fight with them?
- Are they resentful of how much parents and coaches push them?
- Are parents or coaches yelling so much that players cry?
- Are they embarrassed by what their parents say during games?
- Is basketball preventing them from participating in other sports or activities they like?
- Are their skills improving?

- Are they receiving enough individual attention?
- Are they developing ancillary benefits such as sportsmanship, teamwork, confidence, and perseverance?
- Are they getting burned out?
- Are they having fun?

The last question is more important than the others. If the answer is yes, many of the other questions won't matter, because basketball will be a positive experience.

Parents should ask themselves this simple question: Are my actions on and off the court contributing to a positive or a negative experience for my child? One of the worst things parents can do is turn basketball into a negative experience. If the experience is negative, your child will quit playing. It's not a question of if; it's a question of when. I don't know many kids who quit basketball because their team had a bad won-loss record. But I have heard plenty of stories of kids who quit playing basketball because they no longer had fun.

There could be plenty of reasons. Are you one of them?

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