

## Playing vs. Competing

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Have we developed a system that has created an unintended consequence in player development? I can honestly say that kids are playing many more games over a 12 month period than ever before yet we find fewer competitors in today's culture. What do I mean by this statement? Pound for pound, you will find more kids that are more technically sound than ever before but we are confusing ability for talent. As Allen Fox, author of *The Winners Mind* suggest, "Most people mistake speed and skill for talent. Real talent starts with energy, drive, work ethic and the will to win. Without these attributes, a player can never be great."

In this country, we have focused so much on playing, that we have not taught our players to compete -to fight- to work hard or to have the will to win. We emphasize playing, technical ability and skills. Our youth players play a lot of softball, but few compete.

It is not always the fault of the players. Our "system" or our "softball culture" is dysfunctional. When a player is not playing, she simply changes teams. There is no thought about competing for a spot on the team, fighting for a spot, getting better to earn a spot – we simply change teams. The message to the players is that striving to get better is not important; it is simply how you play and how you look.

High School age players don't care much about the outcome of most games they play. They do care about "showing" – about playing to showcase their skills and abilities for college coaches. How many times have you heard a parent tell their daughter that you played well or you showed well despite losing the game?

Add to this the large number of meaningless games and we have a deadly combination. The emphasis slowly changes from the game to the individual. The emphasis has changed to playing and showing and competing is lost. By the time our players move to the next level, they have not learned how to compete.

In fact, research is very clear that constant praising of children's innate (softball skills or intellectual) ability can prevent young athletes/students from living up to their potential. On the other hand, studies show that teaching young people to focus on effort rather than ability helps make them high achievers and competitors in school, on the field and in life! As coaches, we must do our part to emphasize attitude and effort – two elements that we have control over each and every day and will largely influence our success in life.

Until next month,

Coach Candrea

***From Coach Nicholson - Not only does this pertain to softball, but baseball as well!***