

Having Fun Playing the Game

One of the most frequent comments I hear from the athletes of today is they just want to have fun. It always creates a very good teaching moment for the entitled athlete of today to define exactly what makes the game fun. I have had the pleasure of being a part of many great experiences in my coaching career that I consider fun and why? The most obvious is winning! I have never known many great players that would consider losing fun. Learning to execute the game at the lower levels always should take precedence to winning at all cost. But in reality, we play the game to play it the right way and ultimately result in successful performances. As my coaching career has grown in years and opportunities to work with young ladies in the game, my definition of fun is the direct result of traits that go way beyond the execution of the game. We play a team sport that depends on individual performances that result in team success. Without these simple traits that we try to instill in our athletes, as you participate in the higher levels of the game, it becomes obvious that when we do not control and develop these characteristics, our chances for success and being involved in an environment that is fun to coach and participate in is greatly diminished.

What are some of these traits that I have seen over the years to be essential in developing success and create a positive and fun atmosphere to execute the skills of the game. Foremost, I have found that players must truly care about the game and about each other. Whether they like to hang around each other outside of the game or not, there is a common bond when they walk on the field that is obvious and never compromised. Players that respect the game and appreciate the opportunity they have to play the game at a high level. Players that would not purposely disappoint the program due to selfish acts and then are unable to take full responsibility for their failures. In today's world, there is always someone else to blame instead of taking full responsibility for our actions and reactions. I was always surrounded with athletes that earned opportunities to perform by their performance by hard work vs. an entitlement. These athletes were always willing to

go the extra mile to improve their performance and earn opportunities to compete. Speaking of compete, that was a household word when growing up in my childhood years. We would learn to play the game by competing against our friends in stickball, whiffle ball, four square – you name it and we always declared a winner!

This instilled the willingness to fight for the prize and never take their eyes off the prize until the prize was theirs – through both the good and bad times. Players that truly appreciated the work “commitment” and would never give me reason to doubt their total commitment to the team and program. Playing the game was very important to them and considered fun!

It is hard sometimes to understand the challenges that lie ahead in coaching in today's world. The game really has not changed but finding athletes that truly understand and get it are getting harder to find. What do I mean by getting it?

Make good choices and take advantage of them. You choose to play the game and life will be full of choices to make. Be a good person and teammate – simple statement but often needs to be defined and taught. Success is up to you! Hard work and determination has to be important to the person. Another very important part of our game to understand is that failure is a part of success. I have never known a successful person that has not learned the importance of handling failure in a positive way. Playing the game the right way takes thought, preparation, energy, and the will to win and compete. When you learn to prepare and trust your preparation, competing becomes fun and exciting. Is it wrong to expect excellence and good choices from people? My answer to them is to explain that to their kids someday – they are the ones that I will feel sorry for if they approach life the same way many young kids approach the daily demands of the game. Execution and awareness of these simple traits of success can provide great moments of fun and success both on and off the field.