

Professional Extreme Fastpitch Softball Tours

A couple of weeks ago, the *Professional Extreme Fastpitch* (PXF) came to St. Louis for a tournament, clinics, and games. Forty fastpitch teams age 8-18 competed in their respective age groups throughout the weekend while the coaches and players from the PXF conducted a player's and a coaches' clinic, as well as playing two exhibition games.

I think the concept of the PXF is a good one. They are bringing the game to the young players and involving them throughout the weekend in the activities along with the pro players. The PXF wants the young players to know the history of the game and the past players who shaped the game to where it is now. They want the young players to know who Joan Joyce is and what she did for the game. Have you ever heard of Donna Lopiano, Carol Spanks, Shirley Topley, Ralph Raymond, Judi Garman, Barb Renaldi, Mickey Davis, Lorene Ramsey, Vicki Schneider, or Nancy Ito? **If you are involved in softball or you are teaching/coaching softball to any age group, you should!!!** These former players, as well as their teammates, are the pioneers of our game. When these players started, they did not have the opportunities that players do now. It was common for the pioneers to buy their own uniform, equipment and pay for all of their expenses to play. There were no college scholarships. The PXF wants players to know these people and the price they paid to further the sport of softball and provide an avenue for what players have today. They, also, want the young players to know that they matter to the older players that they may idolize and for them to know that they can aspire to be an Olympian or a pro player. You should have seen the excitement on the faces of the youngsters as they talked to the pro players. The pro players were very hands on with the young players and they all thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

One example of the good will that the tour is taking across the country is that of an eight year old girl who plays for the Cheetahs in St. Louis. The girl is from a small town and this was her first tournament with the city kids. She could hardly contain her excitement just being in this type of tournament. Dot Richardson was signing autographs for the players and I took this little girl up to Dot and told her that it was her very first tournament. Dot could not have been better with this youngster. She was so enthusiastic, as we know Dot can be, with this girl congratulating her on her first tournament, introducing her to everyone around and making this little girl feel so important and such a part of everything going on that weekend. This is something that the little Cheetah will never forget.

Another example that happened that same weekend did not involve the PXF group but one of the 18 and under teams playing in the tournament. I happen to know the player involved and how she plays and thinks about the game. This player is a throw back to the old days where the players could play all day, everyday and still enjoy the game. She works harder practicing then 95% of the players I see each year and this girl also has the talent. Her fundamentals are solid which is a rarity among young players now days.

Well, the coach she has this year has taken a different approach to educating the players than we saw from the PXF. He thinks that yelling and belittling the player will make them a better player. He takes certain players out of the game after one mistake in front of everyone else including college coaches who are there recruiting them, he picks on one player when others are making the same mistakes and then just says "I'm trying to make her a better player." What he has done is take a kid who loves the game and was a very confident young player and has turned her into a player who doesn't want to play much and who mentally, is doubting herself and the game. She felt during the games that she was being singled out because she hustled too much. She sprinted out to the field and in to the bench. The other players walked and that was pointed out to her, that she hustles too much.

Come on coaches!! How would you like it if we questioned everything you did during the game? What if we stood right by you and ripped you off of third base during the game just because you made one bad decision and then put you on the bench for the remainder of the game without explaining how to do it correctly. Are you going to learn to be a better coach by us doing that? I don't think so. **I forgot to tell you that this guy gets mad at the players for making mistakes but does not practice at all, the team just plays games.**

The Pros made all of the players feel like they mattered to them, that the kids were important to softball and the future of the game. **Isn't that a true statement!!** The kids are important to softball and the future of the game. Not the coaches, the game is for the kids and we as coaches need to teach the game and make sure it continues through the years. **Has anyone else noticed that young players are quitting the game that we love?** Maybe coaches need to rethink what they are doing as the head of a team. Are you practicing and actually teaching the

game to the kids? Are you teaching them during the game? You should! Do you belittle the kids thinking that will help them learn better? Are you a positive coach who can teach without yelling or belittling them? Does a coach need to run a disciplined program-of course? Does a coach need to be serious/tough at times with the players-of course. But it can be done in a positive way. Quality practices, teaching the fundamentals, explaining why you want things done a certain way and organization of those practices is the key. The players will respect you a lot more than if you wing it or don't practice at all.

Support the PXF Tours, contact them and ask them to bring the tour to your city. The concept of their tours is to promote softball, keep it strong through the years, teach kids to play the game correctly and to have fun doing it.

I support their efforts and hope that you will also.

Good Luck!

Look for Celeste's article next month.