

Sometimes You Have to Let the Kitten Win

I grew up always having a cat/cats and I remember one time when I was not even in my teens, I was playing with my kitten with a piece of paper tied on a string when my Mom said “Sometimes you need to let the kitten win”. She explained that I could always keep the makeshift toy away from the cat if I wanted to but the cat eventually would get bored and walk away. Sometimes the cat needed to feel the thrill of victory along with the agony of defeat.

One of my ex-players put on Facebook with a photo that she and her step daughter who is under six, were playing Candyland and my ex-player kept beating her. So she was asking everyone if she should keep beating her. Of course, a lot of other ex-players said yes, it teaches her how to lose, don’t baby her. True competitors.

I was watching one day a couple of years ago, an area HS team warm up before a game and watched the assistant coach just smacking the ball at his infielders doing line. The only ball they got a glove were the ones that were smacked on a line drive right at them and that was a self-defense move. No attempt by the coach to tell them to turn their toes in so they were not flat footed. Nor did he tell them to take their throwing hand off their glove hand in their stance. Nor tell them to have a little movement before he hit the ball, he just let them be flat-footed.

Here’s the point, it would be easy for the coach, parent or an animal owner to win against their opponents in these cases. When I coached, I could have hit the ball farther away than the player could get to every time if I wanted to do that. But what would that teach them except frustration since they could never succeed or feel that thrill of victory. In this instance, that feeling of victory is the thrill of tracking down the long fly ball for an outfielder or snagging a hot shot as an infielder.

First of all, you need to know the ability of each of your players and that could range from a potential All-Star to a player who is on the other end of that line.

Analyze the player and then hit to their ability plus a little more. Just a little at a time, on the infield take it inch by inch and hit the ball a little harder or a little farther away from them. They will adjust to that a lot easier than the ball being smacked as hard as the coach can hit it to them. There were drills that we had where we would hit the ball as hard as possible to them and try to get it past them. That comes after a lot of practice and when we knew they would ready to take it to the next level.

In the outfield, it was fun to watch them run. Start out hitting the ball just a little out of their reach and keep progressing farther and farther away from them. Little by little you will see the progress and the improvement in them. Of course, it starts with a good fundamental stance and movement before the ball is hit to get a good jump on the ball. Then have progression from there. If they are having trouble catching up to it, bring it back in a little and “let the cat win sometimes”. Praise from the coach and other players will go a long way when teaching to catch or stop a hot shot. Get excited for them when they make a good play and even when they try their best and just miss it. That will pump them up and also the rest of the team.

I cannot say enough about being positive and see the good in their efforts. You can still be a tough coach striving to win a championship while being positive. Don’t sugar coat everything or hit balls to them that a 60 year old could get (I can say that because I am in that age group). But being negative all of the time won’t make for a happy and prosperous team only one the kids won’t to quit. I saw that with the area HS team. That coach lost the team and job a year later.

Sometimes to boost the egos and have fun with them you have to let the kitten win.