

## **Holistic Coaching for the Benefit of All Players**

**By Adam Sarancik**

*“Never confuse winning with succeeding. A successful league and team is one that inspires its players to want to come back again tomorrow.”*

Too often, leagues and teams define their success by their won-loss records. And yet, if evaluated objectively, those wins and championships were more a consequence of a few elite players and mediocre competition than general player development. The individual skills of the overwhelming majority of players on every team did not significantly improve at all during the season or, if they did, they were a result of private coaching outside of the league.

Here are some concrete steps leagues and teams need to take so that every player on every team along the entire ability spectrum improves and develops every season:

- 1) Leagues should redefine success and distinguish it from winning. Success is having systems and a process to develop better people and better athletes, not just better players. Success is when the players use the life skills they learned on their team to be better sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, students and friends. Success is also when the players learned athletic and self-care skills that will benefit them in all sports and later in life.
- 2) In practices and games, coaches and leagues should prioritize rewarding intangibles such as leadership, kindness, forgiveness, tenacity, perseverance, etc. Educational talks and role plays using quotations, acronyms, role plays, and guest speakers should be proactively programmed into every practice and training session so that life lessons are taught within the game for beyond the game.
- 3) The philosophy and systems must be required for all teams and coaches in the league. The system should also be monitored and progressed year-to-year so more is expected from the players as people and as athletes every year.
- 4) Leagues should do much more than administer practice and game schedules and adjudicating coach-parent-player disputes. Coaches should be trained and should prioritize being master teachers of individual athletic and sport skills not just playing the game with better tactics and strategy. Leagues and coaches must regularly assess and monitor whether the athletic and sports skills of every player on every team is improving. This may require re-thinking how practices are structured. Instead of receiving “instruction” from the same set of coaches for all aspects of the game, players may need to attend mini-clinics 2-3 times per week from league coaches or instructors who specialize in teaching different individual skills of the game. Coaches must teach using

all of the learning modalities, auditory, visual and kinesthetic, appropriate for each player.

5) The players in the league should be divided into different development levels and the “games” they play may need to have different formats. Only when the pitchers can throw 70% strikes, catchers can regularly throw out runners attempting to steal, hitters can regularly put the ball in play, and fielders rarely make an error should teams play traditional baseball games. Lower development level teams, maybe even the entire league, should play games where a) every batter puts a ball in play, i.e., no strikeouts, no walks, b) making baseball/softball plays are prioritized, i.e., no stolen bases, and c) every player hits and plays defense, i.e., no outs, every inning so that maximum engagement is achieved.

If these criteria were used and steps were taken, leagues and their teams could honestly state that they are working for the benefit of all players and not just a select few.

**Adam Sarancik** is the author of four Amazon Top 100 Best Selling books, *Coaching Champions for Life – The Process of Mentoring the Person, Athlete and Player*; *Takeaway Quotes for Coaching Champions for Life*; *A Ground Ball to Shortstop – How and Why Coaches See Their Game Differently Than Anyone Else*; and *Teacher, Role Model, Mentor: Lessons Learned From a Lifetime in Coaching*.