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Do You Have a "Fun-at-all-Costs" Mentality?



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I was recently forwarded a video clip from a friend featuring Don Lucia, University of Minnesota Ice Hockey Head Coach, giving a lecture on the state of the game. As I watched and listened, one sound bite resonated with me and kept replaying over and over again in my head – “Fun-at-all-costs”.

It grabbed my attention immediately. Having grown up surrounded by and participating in almost every sport offered, and now spending my career organizing opportunities for “recreational” hockey players, it was refreshing (and somewhat embarrassing) to hear someone summarize it all in such a simple phrase of which so many of us often lose sight.

Certainly there is a need and a place for healthy competition. It has so many invaluable lessons to teach and part of the reason athletics plays such a large role in all our lives. It is hard to duplicate the environment that sport provides. It affords us immediate measurable feedback on commitment, teamwork, hard work, preparation, communication, and goal setting. All are important to personal growth and success.

The thought that “winning” has become the single most important measuring system for these life skills is a tough pill to swallow. Sure it’s fun to win. Everyone enjoys winning over losing. But certainly we wouldn’t put such an emphasis on winning that it would detract from or diminish the most valuable part of athletics – having fun and learning life skills – would we?

Besides, it’s a proven fact that people perform better when they enjoy and have a passion for what they do. If winning becomes the primary focus, then half the participants in any given event are receiving the message that they failed. Failure has such a negative connotation that it inherently creates an unpleasant atmosphere and takes away from an experience that should be a positive one.

When we’re having fun, we are more focused and put in more effort. Naturally the result is improvement and the end result is achieved just the same.

One of the buzz phrases we hear often is “burnout”. I cringe each time it passes my ears. “John is not going to play hockey this season because he’s burnt out.”

One of my new passions is playing golf. If I didn’t have to work for a living, I could easily play golf every day – 36 holes a day if given the opportunity. I love spending time on the course with friends and colleagues. It never grows old despite the amount of time I spend in the woods finding every ball but mine. It’s something I enjoy tremendously and can’t imagine having to stop. Burnt out on golf – never.

Replace the word “burnout” with “not having fun”. “John is not going to play hockey this season because he’s not having fun.” Now it makes more sense.

It's important that we don't overemphasize the achievement of "winning", but rather the rewards earned from physical fitness, social skills, commitment, teamwork, hard work, preparation, communication, and goal setting. When everyone on the ice has the opportunity to be rewarded and accomplishments in those areas highlighted and celebrated, then everyone skates away a winner and enjoys the experience. It becomes fun for all the participants because they are all achieving.

"Fun-at-all-costs" is a phrase that can guide us all to creating a greater game.