

A Letter to My Kids Future Coaches

Dear Future Coach of My Kids:

I've been coaching for over 15 years and have been involved in sports all my life. To say sports are important to me is an understatement. I believe, when done well, sports have the power to transform lives. I'm not sure to what extent our children will be involved with sports. However, I know that they will need coaching in whatever co-curricular activity they choose: dance, music, theatre, forensics or the arts.

I'm writing today because I want you to hear from me before I become completely irrational. Our oldest child is seven, but I can already feel the "craziness" coming on. Love is like a drug and can make us say and do things we normally wouldn't. Over the years of playing and coaching I have witnessed pillars of the community: lawyers, doctors, pastors, and teachers completely out of character when it comes to their children. Even more eye-opening to me has been my discussion with other coaches about their kids. It's ironic, the same coaches that complain about over involved parents are the same ones criticizing and being over involved in their kids' activities.

With that being said, I want you to read these words as you work with our children in the future. This is the real me speaking, not the love induced, wild man who isn't thinking clearly.

1. Honor the Game (or Discipline)- Sports have been around for a long-time, we, as individuals, need the game way more than it needs us. My hope is you honor the game and make our children accountable for treating it with respect. In baseball, that means running on and off the field, backing up bases, celebrating teammates success and many other small things. It will be easy to look the other way and ignore it, you won't want to constantly discipline our kids, but please hold them accountable. As a parent, I won't like seeing my child be reprimanded. It will hurt my ego. It's quite possible I will think you are picking on them. Rational me knows this isn't the case. You are honoring the sanctity of the game and teaching them that life isn't all about them.

2. Make Them Earn It: Entitlement can be defined as wanting something without earning it. In co-curricular activities this could be playing time, role in a musical, or chair in a recital. Chances are you will care about all of the kids you have in your organization. You'll want them all to be happy and enjoy their experience. This isn't possible. Also, the beauty of sports is developing the work ethic and habits of success. You develop these habits with no guarantees of success; or, better put, no guarantee of success as you presently define it. In advance, I want you to know that I will question your decisions at times. I won't agree and I may even share with you or others my displeasure. Tune me out. I'm not thinking straight. Making my kids earn their role is teaching them a great life lesson.

3. Pursue Excellence: Activities serve a purpose; however, the pursuit of excellence is where the major rewards exist. There will be pressure for me and others to, "take it easy." Or to, "Relax, it's just a game." It is uncomfortable for kids and parents to be outside of their comfort zone. However, outside of the comfort zone is where growth takes place. Myself and others won't see it at the time, but by not allowing average effort, you are teaching a life skill. Please provide an uncommon commitment to excellence. We'll all thank you later.

4. Play a Role in Their Development: One of the great things about being a coach is helping shape the values and characters of those you lead. Please do not take that responsibility lightly. With that being said, don't feel the pressure to impact every person, every day. You see, myself and others read a lot. We hear about the likes of mentor coaches like John Wooden. Here's the catch, the books and stories about these great leaders are typically written after their retirement when there has been time for reflection. Don't be fooled, these mentor coaches we read about made mistakes, had players that didn't

like them, and had issues along the way. Even your mistakes and shortcomings are making an impact; life is tough and no one is perfect. Myself and others are likely to point out your imperfections. We are projecting on you. Stay strong.

5. Enjoy the Journey: If you get the opportunity to coach appreciate the beauty. People admire what you do. There will be times, many times, where you will question if it is all worth it. People like me will interfere and make your journey challenging. Try to look at these people and other negative situations as a necessary evil. It's not you personally. Whoever resides in your seat will feel the heat. Learn to not take yourself too seriously. Laugh often. Enjoy those you lead. Outside forces, like me, will make that tough. Don't allow us to break your spirit. If it were easy, everyone would do it. You are the leader of this expedition. Enjoy it!

Coach, I wanted to thank you in advance for working with our children. I'm going to work hard on myself to be a great model for the other parents. After witnessing so many awesome people lose their way, I just cannot guarantee I will be successful. So, take this letter, stuff it away, and reread it when you are working with our kids. Just know that you are making a difference and we appreciate all that you do.

Sincerely,

Mike Deegan

About Mike

As a baseball coach, Mike Deegan has won three NCAA National Championships and has mentored numerous all-conference and All-American athletes. As a student-athlete, Mike helped lead his team to two NCAA National Championship appearances and graduated as his college's top scholar-athlete.

A father of four, Mike and his wife Lowrie reside in Granville, Ohio, where Mike leads the Denison University Big Red baseball program. In addition, Mike is a speaker on Culture, Leadership and Sports.

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