HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CHILD'S TEAM?

The first question really should be, "Why should I help the team?" The answer for many people is not clear, although it seems like it should be. The simplest reason is also the most powerful. You should help because your child benefits greatly from the program. The second reason is that most clubs cannot function without substantial volunteer help. The economics are not there for a full professional staff to do all the things that need doing.

Look at the finances of youth sports for a moment. Nobody likes to pay bills. Now count up the hours that are available for your child to participate in your program. Divide your monthly fee by those hours, and you will come out with substantially less than you pay your baby sitter. And the baby sitter doesn't provide much in the way of a learning situation, values education, physical exercise and development or role model. (Or at least, not many baby sitters do!)

Now imagine if you had to pay for all you get from your team. Teams can't do it without your help. Add to that the fact that few clubs have full time coaches, and even fewer have more than one full time coach, and you can begin to recognize the need for parental involvement. Those clubs that do enjoy full time coaches are usually those of sufficient size that coaching duties alone take up the whole day.

The club needs your help. Now let's get along to how you can provide that help. People have strange attitudes toward working with organizations. In most, a very few people do a tremendous amount of work that benefits everyone. There are parents who develop workaholic behavior towards teams. This is a bad deal for everyone. That person sooner or later burns out, leaving a big hole to fill. Meanwhile, that individual holds a great deal of power in the club, according to the rule that says, "he that does, decides." (That unwritten rule operates in all volunteer organizations, doesn't it?)

The club needs a little bit of time from everyone, a little more from some, and on occasion, a great deal from a few. Note that when you find your lawn uncut, the dishes three days deep in the sink, your cat starving on the porch, and you have just driven home from the team leaving forgetting half of the carpool, you are over committed. This may also result in your children thinking that your club job is more important than they are.

The simple goal of most organizations should be to devise a system where the coach is left free to do what he does best....to coach. This means that parents take responsibility for fund raising, administration, club communication and similar items. Over the past five years there has been a trend to look at coaches more as a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) model, where they are involved in those things to the extent of making sure they are successful, but essentially the tasks are accomplished by parents. Having coach involvement in those tasks is great, if the coach has the time. If not, the idea is to use the volunteer talent available, in the areas where it can be most effectively deployed.

Many clubs have a Board of Directors that helps operate the club. The best boards are long range planning boards that leave the daily work to committees. New parents are often asked to work on one of these committees. If you are not asked, volunteer. Many times people simply forget to ask...they are not slighting you, they are just so busy, they don't notice. This is also where you will begin to make new friends in the organization.

What kinds of jobs are available?

- Fund raising...bring in the dollars to make up the difference between operating budget and club fees. There has never been an organization with enough operating funds. Most of us are experts at spending and less expert at "raising" money, so if you have any ability here, you'll be extremely popular at the club. (Of course, if you have that ability, you are already extremely popular...)
- Publicity...letting people know about the club, its goals, aims, results and personal stories. A journalism background is helpful, but even more important is a willingness to organize results, type, and run them around town to local papers, TV and radio stations. It takes persistence, and the results are not automatically on display immediately.
- Membership...allied to publicity, helping the club attract and retain members. This can be really rewarding for new parents, as they learn much more quickly about the good things in the sport while working on this type of assignment. You'll be a source of information to prospective new families.
- Administration...a general subheading for a vast array of jobs that include things like newsletters, competition entries, operating phone trees, etc. The amount of work required to operate a team is amazing, and most clubs like to have a system where one person performs a task while another learns it as an apprentice...and then takes it over later on. So, many jobs are "doubles".
- Competitions…There are those who run competitions as part of fund raising, and there are clubs who run competitions strictly as opportunities for kids to compete, and there are some who do both. It takes a lot of volunteers to run a quality competition. You'll be called on plenty, and your help is vital. This is one time that money will not substitute for your physical presence.

Lastly, remember that a parent organization is a watchdog of philosophy...that same philosophy that attracted you to the team. Stability is what builds the organization and your support for that stability is the key thing you can contribute. I like the thought of "bloom where you are planted." As your child progresses in sports, stay with your club and help it progress. Involve yourself in helping to set goals and objectives and make it great! And remember, it is all for FUN, and all for your youngster.

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