

Greetings!

We hope that the following excerpts will offer a flavor of our newly published book on youth track and field. All contents are copyright protected. However, we give you permission to forward this document to others who you believe may be interested in purchasing this absolutely up to date, no-nonsense guide to youth track and field. We believe that coaches and parents can equally benefit from this guide.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH TRACK AND FIELD

RUNNERS TAKE YOUR MARK

THE PARENTS GUIDE TO YOUTH TRACK AND FIELD

We guarantee you'll learn something new about track and field and motivating young athletes!

*Please contact us directly for more information on how this book can help you with club fund raising!

Contact: Lorraine Williams – trackmom1@gmail.com

562-335-6727 <http://www.trackmom.com>

Contact: Coach Dean – coach@rxrunning.com

480-600-3506 <http://www.rxrunning.com>

Order Books Direct: www.authorhouse.com ISBN: 9781438962535 (\$20 online -\$5 discount off retail price)

COACH DEAN & DR. LORRAINE WILLIAMS

What should youth learn from athletics?

Sportsmanship

A lot of lip service is given to sportsmanship and being a “good” sport. Unfortunately we do not witness it often enough in what predominates on television these days. Making the big play, scoring the big points seems to give license to show-boat and rub it in the opponent’s faces. It’s also easy to tell kids to be good sports, but they will echo and emulate what they see and hear from their parents and other adults.

So, the place to start is with us. Everyone likes to win. Few people ever go into some sport activity actually wanting to fail, wanting to perform poorly, or wanting to lose! However, if we define winning as coming in first – there will inevitably be only one winner and the rest are losers at some level.

The Mental Game Coach says: From day one set the stage by helping define “success” with your son or daughter. List all the possible ways they can come out of a competition (regardless of level) as successful. For instance, getting to practice on time is a success (builds discipline). Completing workouts without quitting is a success (builds discipline and mental toughness). Running an event and doing your best, not quitting or giving in regardless of place is a success (builds mental toughness and a sense of mastery). Of course, running a personal record in an event – even if you come in last is a success. You get the idea... success is not reserved for first place.

Parents must lead by example. Resist becoming the bane of everyone’s existence out there – the “little league parent syndrome.” This is not the Olympics. This is not for millions of dollars a year. This is a simple sporting competition for children. Keep it in perspective. Mistakes will be made by athletes, coaches and officials. Part of life and what we must teach our children is how to deal constructively with these things. Pouting, yelling, screaming obscenities, storming off in a huff, throwing things or just sulking are not mature actions – and I’m just talking about the adult behaviors the authors have seen personally!

Here are some simple things that show good sportsmanship:

Teach children to shake hands with their competitors before, after or perhaps on the award stand – whichever is most appropriate for the meet.

Have children thank officials and volunteers for conducting the meet. And parents should do this too!

Compliment a competitor on a good throw or jump, even if means the competitor will get an award and your child won't.

Cheer on teammates even if you haven't had a good day. It's no time to go pout. Demonstrate your character and resiliency.

Never argue with an official or authority at the meet. (When was the last time you saw a heated interaction with an official of any sport any time result in a reversal of the decision – even in the professional sports? It will only serve to make a bad name for you and your child.)

Cheer for your team, your son, your daughter, but never say disparaging words about the other competitors or coaches or parents or officials.

Team Work

Though a track team is very diverse – jumpers, sprinters, throwers, distance runners and all train quite differently, it can be hard to view a track team as a “team.” But it is. So, supporting others throughout a track meet is an important element. It teaches kids that it is not just about them and their event. It also teaches them to give support – not just expect support.

Getting along is one of the critical lessons that can be learned. It is not learned passively however. Part of learning is intent. That means the intent to “get along” – cooperate – not have things always go your way – is an important lesson to impart. Sometimes a child will not get to run an event that they want or they may end up on a relay team that they don't want to run. Children must learn that sometimes you do things to help the team.

As diverse as track and field is and with the number of athletes in each event it is fair to say, not everyone will have a great day. Not everyone will win. Some will simply have a very disappointing day. Learn to share victories and defeats as a team. The balance is not to rub a victory in someone else's face nor drag someone else down with your loss.

The Mental Game Coach says: Disappointment is real. It would be shortsighted to think that a poor performance wouldn't matter to a child. An adult's role is to help them process the disappointment. Do not tell a child – “don't feel bad” or “you shouldn't be sad” – over such a situation. Validate those feelings! Even as adults we know disappointment and it is real. The key is to rebound and get back at it and not to quit.

Self-Mastery

Self-mastery is a term we use to mean the ability achieve and develop under one's own direction and will. The beauty of track and field is how it so perfectly lends itself to self-mastery. In football, a bigger guy can impede your performance. In basketball a taller guy could impede your performance. In track and field each event allows you to improve yourself. The training for each event allows you to exercise your own will on how much and how hard you practice. And there is a direct correlation between your efforts in training and your results in competition. Times do get faster. Throws do go longer. Jumps go higher and further for the athletes who put the effort in.

Of course there is variability in talent but everyone can improve and when compared to oneself can continue to improve and master events. Mastery does not mean winning necessarily. It means perfecting the moves or the segments of the event. Continuous progress is the goal... perfection is a target which can never be achieved but we can always pursue.

Emotion Expression and Control

One measure of maturity is impulse control or emotional control. Learning appropriate expressions of emotions is an important lesson for children. It is not to eliminate emotions, far from it. Emotions play an important role in sports. That is what the proverbial “getting psyched”

is all about. Learning how to display excitement, disappointment and exultation appropriately is the thing. Taunting an opponent during celebrating a victory is inappropriate. Throwing a tantrum at the finish-line after a loss is inappropriate. These are teaching moments. Parents, take that opportunity to use to illustrate the effects on others. (Well, ok, you may have to remove the tantrum from the track and allow a cooling off period. Timing is everything.)

Improved self-image and self-esteem come with accomplishments as well as fighting through difficult circumstances. It may not always be apparent to a child what they have accomplished. Youth are very often wrapped up in peer comparisons and may completely overlook what they have done. So, to facilitate a positive self-image it is often up to parents and coaches to reinforce all that they are doing well. If outcomes (i.e. great times or places) are good it's ok to reinforce those. If not, then highlight things they're doing now that they couldn't do before, including in workouts. Put their focus on progress as opposed to outcomes.

Discipline

Coaches and successful athletes will all agree that without the discipline to do workouts – even when they are boring or especially tough – are critical to development and ultimately success. Learn that by doing simple and sometimes boring training activities lead to improvements and they must have the discipline to carry out these drills or workouts with the same effort, energy and concentration as the more desired workouts. You can also build in the expectation that a child commits to a season and will make practices. Teach them to get out of the excuse game and just get it done.

Another aspect of discipline is learning and following rules. Those can come by way of team rules (i.e. attendance, wearing uniforms). Of course there are rules in track and field. Your child needs to know those rules. It will help them understand the event better and decrease disagreements or debates with officials and coaches. For instance, youth have to know what constitutes a false start and practice how to comply with starters' commands.

Obeying authority figures goes hand in hand with following rules. Of course they need to listen to their coach. Another aspect is listening to officials. In any event, if there is a disagreement or an issue, only a coach (never a parent) can address an official. Formal appeals in track meets can only be submitted by the coach as well. So for the child it is important to have the discipline not to argue and instead bring it to their coach (not the parent) to address.

g
u
t
t
e
r

Finally, do come prepared for long days at the track. Age-group track meets can move slowly due to the number of events being offered and the large number of participants. Parents should expect to spend the good part of the day, up to 4-7 hours, in the stands.

The Mental Game Coach says: Complaining about the long day does not make it go any faster and those around you already know how long a day it has been. Remember, they may still be waiting for their child to compete. On the same vein, be careful about comments you make about any participants – their parent may be sitting right behind you!

Are there any special tips for watching track meets?

Track meets are like three-ringed circuses. There will often be jumping, throwing and running events going on all at the same time. If a track facility is small then some of the throwing events may be in a nearby field and not in the immediate track area.

Tip #1 - In large meets, follow event performances by watching small scoreboards near each event. The distance or height will be posted on large numbers near the event for the performer who just completed their attempt.

Tip #2 – If you are trying to time an event, especially a sprint event, do this: Start your watch upon seeing the smoke from the starter's pistol, not the sound of the gun; stop your watch when the torso (upper body) not the head, hand or foot crosses the finish line. Be sure you are in direct line with the finish line or your perspective is skewed and your time will be inaccurate.

Tip #3 – If you time races with your own watch expect that your times will almost invariably be faster than the FAT times recorded. So, don't be disappointed when official times do not match your hand timing... they almost never will.

Tip #4 – All short sprints (100, hurdles) are run in lanes the entire race on a straightaway. Everyone has their own favorite location in the stands. Find the one that you are most comfortable with.

Tip #5 – Longer sprints (200, 400) are run in lanes and require a staggered start. This means that outside lanes are moved ahead to equalize the distance run. Outside lanes run further than inside lanes otherwise. The fastest or “seeded” lanes are typically your middle lanes (3, 4, 5). The inside lanes (1, 2) have the benefit of being able to see all their competitors however, their turns are more acute and usually (but NOT always) are more difficult to run faster times. Likewise, the outside lanes have a more gradual turn but have the disadvantage of not being able to see their competitors. It is often difficult to know who is really in the lead until the runners hit the final straightaway and are running for the finish.

Tip #6 – You can follow how many laps left in races by observing a lap counter stationed at the start/finish line. The number showing indicates the number of laps left in the race.

Tip #7 – Most distance races are started on the same line. That line is a curved line to give everyone an equal distance to run. This line is called a “waterfall” start line.

Tip #8 – Be sure to stay quiet especially if you are near the starting line during starts of any races. It is distracting to runners and can cause a false start. False starts can disqualify a runner.

Tip #9 – Listen closely for the event calls. The first call is typically 20 minutes or so before the actual event. The second call is about 5-10 minutes before the event. The final call means that the competitors should be at the start location of the event; the event is about to begin.

Tip #10 – If you are timing a relay, remember that it is the baton that is being timed not the individual. So, if you take split times for each person it is not when the baton leave their hand and goes to the next runner, it is when the baton goes past the start/finish line for the long relays. The short relays (4x100) are very difficult to get accurate splits for each runner for this very reason.

What are some specific recommendations to help my child be the best possible and create a healthy atmosphere?

Parents are well-meaning in their attempts to encourage their children to participate and perform well. Every parent wants to be proud of their child's efforts. However, there are things we as parents do and say that are truly dispiriting if not damaging to a child's sports experience. How you interact with your child, the questions you ask, the pressure you place on your child to perform create an environment. That environment may in fact hurt performances more than help; and hurt a child's development not help. Based in sport psychology and child development here are some recommendations.

Do not try to relive your athletic career through your child. And please, refrain from regaling your child with stories of your athletic prowess or failures. This is about them not you.

Do not discuss issues with the coach on meet day. Save it for another time. Leave coaching to the coach. The more input your child has, especially on competition day; the more likely it is going to have a negative effect on performance. Coaching should be done by coaches and take place during practices. During competitions it is ill-advised to make changes in form or technique. Competitions are for competing not refining techniques. Save it for practice.

Do not contradict your coach. If you do not like what they are doing you should be looking for another coach. You demonstrate disrespect by doing so and this will not be overlooked by your child.

Avoid setting outcome goals for your child going into a competition. Saying things like "I know you can beat that girl today" or "you have to throw a qualifying distance today" is not helpful. Instead it raises expectations with which pressure and negative consequences come along. The child more often will think - "what if" I don't do it? This raises stress levels, frustration and that leads to a loss of confidence. The exact opposite of what was intended.

Supportive and Unsupportive Comments

Make supportive comments. If you want to reinforce a single simple key for the competition, keep it brief and to the point. Here are some examples of supportive comments

| | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| “have fun in that race” | “think light and fast” | “one jump at a time” |
| “pop on those throws” | “think <i>tough</i> ” | “one throw at a time” |
| “just have fun” | “one step at a time” | “go enjoy yourself” |
| “run hard that last lap” | “one lap at a time” | “go get ‘em” |

Avoid comments relating to failures such as “don’t choke” or “don’t lose it in the last lap” or “don’t foul on your jumps like last time.” Your comments provide a focal point. Performances are enhanced by focusing on what to do as opposed to what to avoid. Too many instructions create a mental overload for a child competitor. Even at the highest levels with elite adult athletes, the best coaches practice simple targeted specific comments.

If your comments focus solely on a time or distance or a win or loss then you demonstrate that those things are most important to you. If you ask if they had fun today, did their best today, tried their hardest today, learned something today, or met someone interesting today; then you place an emphasis on process goals and other more global values instead of just “wins and losses.”

Be sure that you demonstrate that you love your child regardless of how they perform. Do not withhold affection or hugs. Even remaining silent after a poor performance will convey that you do not accept them - win or lose. Your body language as well as your verbal interactions will demonstrate clearly how you feel. Children often attach their self-esteem to how they perform.

Your post competition discussions are important. Your post competition questions and discussions shape what you value. You have to start with tempering your own reactions to the performance. After a competition allow for some time before analyzing the performance. Find a couple things that you observed that were done well. Ask your child what they think they did well in that race, jump or throw. This is a time to have a

two-way open discussion. Picking apart a performance on the ride home is not a good idea. Leave coaching observations for practice.

Failure in sports is normal. Making mistakes is a part of sports. In baseball getting a hit 30% of the time makes you an All-star. That means they failed to get a hit 70% of the time. Athletes will not set records or even get faster or jump longer in each successive competition. You will not see that at Olympic levels and it most certainly won't happen at the youth level. Perfectionistic qualities are a double-edged sword. They can help focus practices to improve. They also make athletes too obsessed with stats, places, scores while losing perspective of competition.

Get back to being a parent. Your lives should not revolve around discussing competition successes and failures or performance improvement. Focus on a balanced life.

Can I take pictures at the meet?

Though we do not intend to make this a photography how-to manual; there are some important pointers for the average parent-photographer to help make the most of your picture taking.

First and foremost, ask an official before ever getting on the track or in the field to take any pictures at all. To get any pictures worthwhile you'll need to get close to the action with most cameras. Otherwise, you'll end up with some unidentifiable athlete in the middle of the track or field. Even if you are getting close to the action – get permission. There is a lot of action going on and it's not just your son or daughter's event. Do not obscure other spectator's views. Field events have zones you cannot enter and throwing events can be quite dangerous to just hang out if you are not fully aware of flying implements. If your focus is on the camera focus and not the 12 pound piece of metal hurtling through air, you could end up really out of focus... for good! One way to keep your position for picture taking in perspective is to think what would happen if every parent in the stands decided to take the same picture from where you are! The competition comes first. Spectators come second. Your picture is in third place.