

# IT PAYS

*(Pamphlet for Coaches)*

## So You're Going to Coach My Grandchild?

*A message to coaches from Jay M. Bylsma*

I'm so grateful that you've volunteered to be the coach of my grandchild's ice hockey team. I'm getting a bit too old to be out on the ice with these young kids and without you volunteering, it's possible my Bryan wouldn't have an opportunity to play this wonderful game that's meant so much to his father and uncles and myself.

My Bryan made it through tryouts. You might have thought that the tryouts were to see whether or not Bryan was good enough to make your team. That wasn't it at all. It was to see if you were good enough to be entrusted with my grandchild. You see, I don't really care if you know much about hockey, or whether you have a winning record. I don't know or care if you've ever coached a kid that made it the NHL, or Division I college hockey, or even high school. But I know that every one of the kids you coach will have a life to lead after hockey. You will coach far more doctors and lawyers than professional hockey players. So I'm more interested in what kind of a role model you are and your ability to teach Bryan life lessons than whether you can teach him the left wing lock or backwards crossovers.

Let me explain why I don't care if you have a winning record. Think back over all the games you played in organized sports as a kid - any and all the sports. Can you remember any of the scores of any of those games or even if you won or lost? If you're like me you can't remember many - if even one. But I can remember every coach I ever had. Mr. Sterkenberg, Mr. Naerebout, Mr. VanderMey, and others. I can even picture them in my mind. Images of good men who taught me (whether they knew it or not) sportsmanship, integrity, to play by the rules, and to have fun. They made a lasting impression on me, just as you will have a lasting impression on my little Bryan. But apparently winning wasn't important enough for me to remember. Bryan hasn't been enrolled in the youth hockey program to win. He's been enrolled to have fun, to increase his athleticism, and to learn life lessons.

What kind of a lasting impression will you have? You are his coach, a position just bit lower than the angels. He will hang on your every word. He will skate into the boards for you. He will never forget you as you've never forgotten your coaches. And he will learn from you, perhaps as much by what you do as what you say. You are the potter and Bryan is the clay.

- \* For example, if you pick your team based on talent and ability you will show Bryan that talent and ability are the criteria that a person needs to be successful. If you pick your team based on the associations you have – that is, your GM's kid gets to play, your brother-in-law's kid is on the power play - each regardless of ability – you will show Bryan that you get ahead in life by who you know, accomplishment and achievement don't count for as much as connections.
- \* If you tell the kids, "Every one pays equally, everyone plays equally" and then only some kids get on the power play and play in the third period, you influence kids about the meaning of honesty and deception.

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- \* If you say disparaging remarks about the other team, the other coach, or the officials, you demean the game and incidentally yourself and you teach Bryan that it's okay - perhaps even manly - to be disrespectful and pejorative.
- \* If you need to put ringers on your team to be competitive in an out-of-town tournament, you are influencing your players about your standard of honesty and the importance of winning at the cost of your integrity.
- \* If you say a disparaging remark about education, you may depreciate the value of education – this in a sport where if you aspire to play at a higher level, good grades may be as - or more important than - your hockey skill.

Your demeanor, your language, your deportment, your values, your aspirations, your character becomes the role model. You are the potter, Bryan is the clay.

You see, I don't even think this is about hockey at all. It's about teaching Bryan life lessons. It's about re-enforcing the lessons he learns at home. Hockey is just the blossom we use to attract the bees. And we attract the bees to teach them to respect the game, to respect their opponents as worthy competitors, to respect the officials and their decisions, to teach them fairness, and how to main self-control.

If he's a good player, I hope you won't aggrandize him or over use him but help him be a team player. If he's a poor player, I hope you won't demean him but give him his fair share of ice time and help him become a better player. I hope you will remember he's just a child and your career as a coach isn't riding on his back. I hope you will remember that a word of encouragement after a mistake is worth more than a pile of praise after a success.

My son Dan and I started the IT PAYS initiative because for all its inherent good, changes in youth sports are very disturbing to us. There are the well publicized instances of cheating, abuse, assaults, and even murder. But these are only the tip of the iceberg. The sport is having ever increasing difficulty attracting and keeping officials because of verbal abuse and assaults by coaches and parents. Skilled players are leaving the game because of violent play by bigger less skilled players who are instructed "take them out" instead of improving their own level of play to compete successfully. A win-at-a-cost mentality demeans less skilled players who may rarely see ice time in the third periods of close games – which ironically impacts their ability to improve.

Sadly, some coaches have taken the fun out of the game for the children by exerting too much pressure, being too critical, being demeaning, and being too vocal in an inappropriate way. The consequences of losing sight of the purpose of youth sports – that is as a game of childhood, a wonderful pastime – is that the life lessons that are being taught are less than wholesome and sometimes destructive.

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Dan and I hope that you will wholeheartedly continue to support goals of IT PAYS – for the good of this great game, for its reputation, and for the positive influence we hope you'll have on the child we entrusted to you.

Jay M. Bylsma

*Note: Jay M. Bylsma is the father of three sons who played college hockey including Dan who has played in over 320 games in the NHL and is currently the Assistant Captain of the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim. He has also coached youth hockey teams from Mites to Juniors. He has co-authored three books with Dan, So Your Son Wants to Play in the NHL, Sleeping Bear Press, 1998, So You Want to Play In the NHL, Contemporary/McGraw-Hill, 2000, and Pitcher's Hands is OUT!, River Road Publications, 2001. He has made many TV, radio, and personal appearances on the subject of the proper role of youth athletics, with Dan maintains an extensive web site ([www.DanBylsma.com](http://www.DanBylsma.com)), and publishes a monthly newsletter for young hockey players, their coaches and their parents. Bryan is Dan's little son.*

*Go to [www.danbylsma.com/itpays/itpaystest.htm](http://www.danbylsma.com/itpays/itpaystest.htm) and go to sections entitled Coaches' Contract and the Letter to Coaches. These two references are what Dan and his father think coaching youth hockey is all about and may give you some ideas (ammunition) in your approach.*