



Coaches, we have all been there.

We have laid out our philosophy and values, our policies regarding playing time, positions, and more, and all of a sudden, a few results do not go our way. A few parents start to grumble. They wonder why we play the "bad" kids so much. They wonder if we could just cut a few kids and add some more "good" ones. And as a coach, we face a dilemma. **Do I compromise what I stand for, my coaching WHY, in order to appease a few parents who are in a sprint and not a marathon?**

How Do I Balance My WHY with the Demands of the Youth Sports Culture?

"This season was a disaster." A former colleague of mine said to me recently.

"We had a ton of fun, the kids learned a lot of new skills and gelled as a team, but we didn't win as many games as last season."

"Fun and learning are the two primary things we always wanted out of the experience." I reminded him.

"Yes but tell that to my parents. The parents of my best players basically staged a revolt. They came to me at the end of the season and demanded I do away with the equal playing time rule, let a few of my weaker kids go for more experienced players, and do whatever it takes to win more games."

"That is not our club," he continued. "This flies against our mission and values, but if I don't make some kind of change, those kids will leave. I need those kids for the numbers and to help the team win. Without them, we won't win anything."

"Since when did trophies become your purpose? Your mission has always been about giving kids a place to have fun, a place to develop, and a place to fall in love with the game," I asked him.

"Agreed. But let's be honest, if we don't do something, we lose those kids to the clubs who do focus on winning. Then what do I do? There has to be a way to keep a competitive team by serving those kids and parents driven by the current youth sports 'win at all costs' culture while still serving the kids who are here to have fun and learn. How do I balance my mission with the demands to win more?"

The answer I gave the coach was this: "You do not balance anything. If you cater to those few who only want to win, it isn't a balance. It is abandoning your principles. Instead, you get really clear on who you are and what you do. **You write down your WHY!** You educate yourself on best principles of training, leadership, and of positive team dynamics. And then you let everyone know what you stand for, and you coach to the best of your ability!"

We coach for a reason. We have a mission. We do what we do, day in day out, bad weather and good, early in the morning and late at night for a very good reason. We don't sacrifice all our values and mission, so a few people can get their trophies. **We stick to our guns and follow our "WHY".**

Sticking to our "WHY" is not always popular, but we have to play the long game. This is not a sprint. It's a marathon and **sticking to our why means what we do now will change a life later.** That matters more than winning games, so a few kids don't leave for a different club.

We should be adaptable as a coach. We can change our tactics. We can change our strategy. We can alter our coaching and balance our methods to better serve everyone. That is a good balance. But we have to be clear, consistent and committed to our principles. We have to know our WHY and never compromise our principles!

Balancing our why with another's is compromising. It is abandoning our core values to adhere to someone else's. We should ask ourselves, "would they be willing to balance their position to help me continue to serve my WHY"? If the answer is no, we are not balancing, we are compromising. We cannot stick to our WHY and serve someone else who is not in alignment with us. The moment we choose to bend our stance, we break our promise to the athletes and parents who counted on us to change their lives beyond the game. When we alter our beliefs or abandon our values, we cheat those who signed up for something else. **The majority of our players are with us because of our WHY and they rely on us to serve them based on that why.**



We also miss the opportunity to model the values we want to see in our athletes. By compromising to outside pressure, we don't teach them grit, or integrity, or perseverance. We teach them "be tough and stand your ground unless the pressure is too much. Then give in to the few squeaky wheels that make the most noise." What message does that send kids? Let's stand our ground so they stand their ground in those moments of pressure.

Balancing our why is also never-ending. If we do not take a stand for what matters most to us, not only will we lose those who were there for the right reasons, we'll also lose those there for the wrong reasons. Those who believed in our "why" will become disillusioned and leave. Worse, those who we thought we were keeping, will leave too. We gave in to them. They will push for more and more. They will find something new to complain about and we will be forced to "balance" more. The moment we don't compromise, they'll jump ship. We never compromise the mission of the entire team, and obliterate our own values for someone who doesn't want to be a part of what we all believe in. When we stand our ground like this we send a clear message: "I live daily that which I believe most. I will not waver. I'll fight to serve those I care about. You'll get my very best and I won't let you down." Those who stay will trust us, work hard for us, and believe in us. A few things happen when we are clear with our why and stand strong.

Principled coaches attract good families: When we are clear on our WHY and defend it, people notice. Those who believe what we believe will want to join us. People want to belong to like-minded groups and people who want their children to have these values will bring them to us. A team or club size will ebb and flow, but the more outspoken we are about our why and the more clarity we show regarding it, the easier it will be for them to find our teams. We had a club that once spent an entire season talking about, living out, and clarifying its mission. Our numbers grew by over 30% the next year. People kept saying they wanted to be a part of whatever we had. Those who didn't want to be there left.

Principled coaching creates loyalty and player retention: We want to follow and fight alongside a strong leader with a clear vision. How do I know this? When I stopped playing, I still followed those who had strong values and stood up for what they believed in. Also, I no longer coach, and yet I still have players and their parents who regularly check in for advice or to share their successes. I may not be their coach, but the willingness to choose my WHY over "balance" created a bond that has transcended the game.

Principled coaching creates clarity: People know what they are signing up for. Families tell other families with confidence what our team or club is like. We can be demanding, we can be competitive, and we can go out and win games, the right way. We get the benefit of the doubt when we deliver exactly what people signed up for. We wouldn't go to McDonald's for pizza, right?

Principled coaching is transformational. Those who stay with us will benefit from something greater than sport. They will succeed in life. They will benefit for many years to come. Trophies and rankings and stats will be forgotten, but the memories and the lessons and the character traits will live in perpetuity. "If I do not believe as you believe, it proves that you do not believe as I believe, and that is all that it proves."

Thomas Paine, one of our Founding Fathers, said this. He knew a thing or two about taking a stand, an unwillingness to compromise and fighting for what he believed in. We are all entitled to our own beliefs. And have inalienable right to stand up for our principles.

Let others have their mission. We'll have ours. Let's not "balance" our mission to please them. We'll stick to our WHY, because in the end, all we have is what we believe in and fight for so we could leave our mark on the world. We compromise that and we risk leaving no imprint at all. Is "balance" worth missing the chance to make our mark?