

CLUB LIFE

Empower, Engage, Sustain

Boring coaching is a sure-fire way to make sure players leave your club

As a father of two children, one five and the other nearly two, the value I place on physical activity and being outdoors is huge. However the importance I place on my children making decisions for themselves and decision making in all walks of life goes hand in hand with this or even supersede it. Like I said I am a father of two, two boys in fact which I'm extremely proud of, and glad in a way they are not two girls! For many reasons which I won't go into but I'm sure girls are lovely too!

So my five year old has been asking me for months daddy daddy please can I play A sport which I won't mention, but let's just say it's a traditional sport, popular sport and one in which I have no problem at all with him playing. So my wife being the more efficient one out of us goes about trying to find our son a local club where he can go and try it out. I think it's worth adding at this point that both myself and my wife work in the sports industry so we kinda get it, which works as an advantage and disadvantage sometimes!

So back to the story!

Our first experience is great, both the National Governing Body of the sport and a local club get back to us relatively sharpish with some good options for our little boy, the club even take the time to recommend other clubs in the area which also have suitable age categories and which are quite local. Excellent, it seems we are making good progress. The next thing to do was to tell our son that we have found him a club and he'll be going along in a week or so to see if he likes it. Well to say that he was excited was not the word, in the week leading up to 'the big day' there were loads of questions, lots of practising and of course some compulsory purchases to make him look the part!

So any parent will know that logistics are one of the main things that are discussed post bed time! First off who is actually looking after our children tomorrow, what time do we finish work, what kit does he need, where is it, where will he get changed, who's picking up, shall I meet you there, what time are you leaving work..... ok ok you get the picture!
Right logistics nailed and the day had arrived.
As ever I had the easy job, leave work, turn up at the club, relax and watch!

I arrived a little earlier than the rest of the gang so I thought, with my mystery shopper hat on and my background in sport and sports development I would give the place a once over! My first impressions were, clean surroundings, easy to park, kids and parents arriving, happy daddy so far!

So the rest of the gang arrived and after getting my son changed in the car we headed across the first field to where we thought the action was happening. After loitering around for a few minutes we were greeted warmly by a chap who turned out to be the vice chair of the junior section of the club, meanwhile our son ran over to the other children to join in with the warm up part of the session. The vice chair was great he explained the ethos of the club, costs, times what to expect at different ages and even asked us our occupations and told us that he could get us involved with the club if we were keen!

For more information, visit:

www.hockeywales.org.uk/play/club-life



After we had finished chatting to thingy magig we sat and watched our son. We immediately noticed that he was stood at the back of one of two lines (12 children in each one) waiting for his go to run in a straight line over a series of small hurdles.

As he neared the front of the queue I yanked on the Mrs shoulder, "Here we go, here we go it's his turn". Well ten seconds went past and he was at the back of the queue again, I must say though that he did his sprint very well!

So, I think you're getting the gist of the session. Thirty minutes passed and the activity had not changed and each of the kids had done four sprints each, limited engagement by the four coaches and group of disinterested five to eight year olds. On the bright side, the sun was shining, he was outside in the fresh air and interacting with some of the other children.

The 'half time' drinks break came and went and I found myself lying on the grass wishing, wishing that the session gets better, after all the club was five minutes from the house, just off the M4 on the way from home, and a perfect 5.30 start, it even had a great choice of beers on tap and the social membership was only twenty quid for the year! **Hang on hang on this is not about me!**

Once our son re-joined the rest of the children the group was split into two groups based on age (not ability). They then started to play a small sided modified version of the real game, at last some action, fun, fast and furious - kids playing, playing the game and learning on their own.

However this all soon came to an end and after about ten minutes the children were sat down to be talked at, and from great height I might add! I'm not too sure what the children were taking about but what I did notice was how good my son was at making daisy chains and then throwing them at some of the other children who were equally as disinterested in the tactics, techniques or whatever the coach was banging on about - I felt like shouting over "let those kids just play!"

After the coaches 'briefing session' the children went back to the same game for the remainder of the session. As we made our way off home my summary of the session was that my son did four sprints and played the game for about fifteen minutes. However, as I stated at the start I'm all about our children making their own decisions (within reason obviously) and ultimately if he enjoyed it crack on, after all, what damage can it do?

We both decided to leave it for a while before any further discussion, plus anyone who has witnessed bath time for two under fives will appreciate that's stressful enough in itself! After my sons bed time story we decided to ask him what he thought of his experience at the club. The response, "Boring"

So would you want to go back,

"No thanks"

The search goes on.

In summary I think that the sports industry and clubs perhaps more specifically forget two main things, firstly how important it is to get that first experience right, right for the parent and more importantly right for the individual. Secondly, how impressionable, mature and honest children can be. Like it states in the story above, the club was right for me, however it was not right for my son.

I have shared this story with about five people so far, and one person out of that five said they have experienced something very similar for his grandson.

If, as a nation, we want to keep our children fit and healthy, enjoying sport and the values that sport bring we **MUST** get this first experience right by creating warm and welcoming environments for the whole family that are driven by the needs of the individual. If we want to get children hooked on sport, as Sport Wales and the wider sector promote we need them to come back at least for a second go!

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