

---

---

# *THE SPORTING NEEDS OF CHILDREN*

When children participate in sport it is important to provide them with experiences that are successful, fun and enjoyable. Success should be measured in terms of mastering a skill or doing something better than they have done before and not just by winning. Emphasising winning, especially when children are learning the game and the skills required, increases pressure and reduces the enjoyment gained from participating in sport.

The following should be used as **guidelines** for coaches and competition organisers when planning and conducting competitions for children. As children move through the developmental stages of sport into secondary school the emphasis on different aspects of sport and/or competition can gradually change.

## ***In the early developmental stages (and for all competitions where participation is the major focus):***

- All children who participate in sport deserve equal playing time.
- More skilled players should be rotated on and off the field or court with less skilled players. All players should have the opportunity to play every position. These rotations should be planned and take place in each game or over the season or part there of.
- Children want to play and not just watch. Ensure all players get a chance to play with 'bench - time' equally divided.
- The only way to develop skills in competition is to play the game. In this way the skills learnt in practice can be applied in the 'real' situation.
- Break up the skills of the respective game and teach them separately, then in a game context. Practise 'mini games' to maximise skill development.
- Set realistic goals, such as 'personal bests' in games and competitions for both the team and individual players. In this way appropriate challenges for all players are provided and players achieve success in the game/competition, whether they win or lose.
- The game is an environment which must be designed to ensure as many children as possible get to practise their skills as often as possible throughout the experience.
- Winning is the result of, either individually and/or as a team member, playing well and enjoying the game. Winning will occur if children are taught skills effectively in practice and apply them effectively in the game.
- Winning also depends heavily on factors outside the coaches' control. The quality of the opposition is a decisive factor that is independent of preparation.
- Expect mistakes to be made, encourage and praise the attempt rather than the result.

## ***The Value of Competition***

Competition in sport manifests itself in the personal challenge of achieving goals, improving on past performance and winning in formal and/or informal competitive situations.

To enhance the development of all players selected on the basis of talent, members of primary aged representative teams should receive equivalent playing time during competitions.

It is recognised that performance in games plays an increasing role in the selection process for secondary aged players. Coaches should be conscious of the financial contribution families make to sport, particularly representative teams, and not significantly reduce the involvement of players in events purely on the basis of non-performance.

## ***The values emphasised in competition need careful consideration.***

Various levels of competition have different games, rules and expectations, such as:

- Children taking their first steps into physical activity and sport; to
  - Juniors aspiring to representative levels; to
  - Competition appropriate for elite senior athletes; to
- 
-

- Competition for senior athletes of various ability; to
- Masters or veteran activities that are becoming a growing part of the sporting scene.

Competition should never be seen solely in terms of winning or losing. Using this as the measure restricts the ability of many people to compete successfully and defines sport in a very narrow sense.

### **Modified Competitions to develop skills**

Studies on the modified versus the adult game, have shown that some children in adult game competitions have very few opportunities to be directly involved. Consequently there are few opportunities to execute in the game skills learnt in practice. This means that these children do not gain opportunities to improve or develop skills that enable them to succeed in further competitions. Modified sport makes the game safer and provides more opportunities to practise skills in competition. The chances of every child achieving or experiencing success are therefore increased.

### **Meeting Individual Needs\***

\* Adapted from NCAS Coaching Notes, SPORTS COACH, Australian Coaching Council Inc, July - September 1993:24 - 25.

Coaches must understand what motivates children to participate. This may differ between children, but studies have ranked improvement and participation as the major influences on a child's level of enjoyment. Table 1, provides an introduction to how coaches could achieve these goals when planning sessions.

It is important to keep children whose skills are relatively 'well developed' equally challenged. Teachers and coaches must be aware of individual differences in skill development and work with all children to encourage participation and maintain interest. Refer to the paper: Identification & Development of the 'Talented' Child included in this section.

**Table 1\*: Meeting Individual Needs**

<b>Child's Characteristics:</b>	<b>Coaches should:</b>
• Very active:	Provide a variety of activities.
• During growth spurts:	Realise it is a stage of rapid physical development - concentrate on skill.
• Sensitive to criticism and failure:	Be positive under all circumstances by praising effort and skills performance.
• Short attention span:	Maintain interest with a variety of activities and limited talk.
• Unable to process much information:	Introduce one item at a time.
• Well developed skills compared with other students of similar age:	Provide equally challenging activities with suitable equipment.

### **Trophies as Rewards?**

Extrinsic rewards such as trophies or emphasis on winning may often distract children from developing skills because of the negative consequences involved with failure. Use trophies carefully and fairly to all involved. Reinforce constructively good skills and keep players involved in well organised competitions.

When trophies are used they should reinforce a wide range of facets that can be appreciated in sport, not used simply as 'carrots' to induce higher levels of performance. All players, not just a few, should receive some form of recognition.

960108jhpr

Schools, sporting organisations and other organisations involved in junior sport are encouraged to reproduce this paper for the purpose of sharing the information with parents, coaches and other officials. If reproduced in part, acknowledgment of the source should be made.