Battle of the bats

The debate over wood vs. metal bats rages on, with everyone from coaches and parents to politicians and scientists weighing in on what is safest for children to use.

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The National Alliance for Youth Sports has been America’s leading advocate for positive and safe sports for children since 1981. It serves volunteer coaches, parents with children involved in organized sports, game officials, youth sports administrators, league directors and the youngsters who participate in organized sports. The Alliance’s programs are utilized in more than 3,000 communities nationwide by parks and recreation departments, Boys & Girls Clubs, Police Athletic Leagues, YMCAs/YWCAs and various independent youth service groups, as well as on military installations worldwide.

### Education Division

**National Youth Sports Coaches Association**
More than 2 million volunteer coaches have been trained through NYSCA, which provides training, support and continuing education.
E-mail: nysca@nays.org

**Parents Association for Youth Sports**
Parents gain a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in youth sports through this sportsmanship training program, which is utilized in more than 500 communities nationwide.
E-mail: pays@nays.org

**Academy for Youth Sports Administrators**
More than 1,600 administrators worldwide have gone through the Academy, which is a 20-hour certification program that raises the professionalism of those delivering youth sport services. A skilled faculty presents the information and participants earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs).
E-mail: academy@nays.org

**National Youth Sports Administrators Association**
The program provides training, information and resources for volunteer administrators responsible for the planning and implementation of out-of-school sports programs.
E-mail: nysaa@nays.org

**National Youth Sports Officials Association**
Officials who go through this certification program gain valuable knowledge on skills, fundamentals and the characteristics that every good official must possess.
E-mail: nysoa@nays.org

### Youth Sports Development Division

**Start Smart Sports Development Program**
This proven instructional program prepares children for the world of organized sports without the threat of competition or the fear of getting hurt through an innovative approach that promotes parent-child bonding.
E-mail: startsmart@nays.org

**Hook A Kid On Golf**
Thousands of children of all ages and skill levels tee up every year in the nation’s most comprehensive junior golf development program, which features an array of instructional clinics and tournaments to choose from.
E-mail: hookakidongolf@nays.org

**Game On! Youth Sports**
This worldwide effort introduces children to actual game experience by giving them the freedom to create and play on their own.
E-mail: international@nays.org
Welcome

The National Alliance for Youth Sports is focused on ensuring that every child who participates in sports has a safe and rewarding experience.

NYSCA program upgrades

Ever since I created the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA) way back in 1981, it has been my personal goal to help ensure that the moms and dads – and anyone else who commits the time and energy to coach children’s sports – has the best and most useful information at their disposal.

Through the years we’ve made pretty significant strides, and introduced a lot of different resources, to enable volunteer coaches to be the most prepared they can be to meet the ever-changing needs of their young athletes.

As we’ve flipped the calendar on another year, I couldn't be more enthused about the major changes we’ve made to the NYSCA program – all done with the single goal to help you and your team have the most rewarding season possible. And I’m anxious to see what you think.

For starters, we’ve unveiled a new Coaching Youth Baseball videotape that will be used at all of NYSCA’s training clinics. Thanks to the help of the wonderful instructors at Ripken Baseball – the video was filmed at their highly acclaimed baseball camp in Baltimore, Md. – it covers everything that a volunteer baseball coach needs to know. From proper throwing and hitting mechanics to detailed drills and activities for practice, it’s all there.

But that’s just one of many significant upgrades to the NYSCA program. If you haven’t checked out our new web site – still found at www.nays.org – I encourage you to do so.

There are all sorts of new tools for members to utilize. You can head to the Coaching Forum to post a question or problem you’ve encountered and get feedback from other member coaches who have dealt with the exact or similar issue themselves in the past. Or, you can scan the postings and share your expertise on issues you are quite familiar with.

Anyone who has ever coached knows how much time goes into planning practices and determining drills, so I’m confident our Skills and Drills section will come in pretty handy. There are hundreds of drills – both animated and those that you can print out and take with you – to help you run a really good practice that the kids enjoying taking part in while gaining skills in the process.

Plus, there is the NYSCA Coach Rating Tool, which allows you to get an accurate gauge of how well of a job you are doing. The system rates you in 14 different categories, and the feedback is provided anonymously by the parents of your players. You can utilize the system to find out what, if any, areas you need to work on improving; or your recreation agency may use the system to find out which of its coaches are performing well and which ones need a little extra guidance.

Sure, it may be a bit nerve-racking having others evaluate you, but you know what? It can really be a great tool for deepening your impact on the kids. Plus, for those of you who get high marks in every category it’ll be a great piece of positive reinforcement to know that you really are making a difference in your players’ lives.

When you have a moment check out all these new member benefits and let me know what you think.

Fred Engh is the founder, president and CEO of NAYS. He has been involved in youth sports for more than 35 years as a coach, athletic director, sports educator and parent of seven children. He is also the author of Why Johnny Hates Sports, a book that examines the state of youth sports in America. You can reach him at fengh@nays.org
What our readers think about each issue of SportingKid is important to us. E-mail your thoughts to sportingkid@nays.org or fax them to 561-712-0119.

Thwarting embezzlers
I read with great interest Wanted: Trustworthy Volunteers (Fall, 2008). My husband and I coached Little League for almost 20 years and were also on the board of directors. We were finally voted out of the league by a board that was, in reality, not led by the president but by the league treasurer.

This man has been the treasurer for years. During this time, he might have produced a Treasurer’s Report at the annual banquet for the first two or three years. However, once people on the board began questioning some of his accounting entries, no more reports were produced, even though it is written in the league bylaws that he is to do so.

During what was to become our last season of coaching, parents began asking us why they never received any information regarding how much money was raised from a raffle, registration, etc., and how it was being spent. We told them to ask the treasurer for a report. Once he realized that we were not the only ones questioning the lack of information received regarding league funds, he began a campaign to have us removed from the board and the league, eventually resorting to fabricating stories about us. What is even worse is that, when we approached the regional director for help, the director’s response was “I’m not here to baby sit adults.”

After we were voted out of the league, we were told by parents whose children still played in the league that the treasurer, president and equipment director were allegedly coming into the snack bar to “skim” the cash register of excess cash and putting it into their pockets—where it apparently stayed.

The article suggests having more than one person sign checks or review bank statements in an attempt to thwart would-be embezzlers. However, when those volunteers who are supposed to be in charge and be trusted are all embezzling money together, that method simply does not work. The suggestion of having an audit committee is a great one. Parents who do not hold any position in their league should be on this type of committee, and need to be more vigilant about asking questions with regard to where their children’s money is going—and demanding answers. Of course, those parents also need to be assured that if they ask questions or demand answers that their child will not be a target for retribution from those same dishonest people.

Name withheld upon request

Zoning problems
I would like to offer a dissenting opinion on your Ask the Expert’s view (Making defensive decisions; Winter 2008) regarding zone defense in youth basketball. Michael Bradley felt that zone defense was okay for grades K-3, while older kids should play man-to-man. My county (Montgomery, Md.) recreational league actually requires the opposite—man-to-man only (with no double teams) is permitted before fifth grade, with zone permitted in older grades, and I agree with this approach.

There are two problems with zone defense with very young players. First, my experience has been that zones can actually be more confusing for very young players. What is a zone? Where does my zone end? What do I do when the ball is not in my zone?

Man-to-man is simpler in practice. I just tell my player to follow No. 10 on the other team wherever he goes. Simple! Of course, the details of actually guarding are more complicated. But even in a zone, defenders must guard their opponents. Second, if a zone defense is effective, it by design takes away the inside game. Breaking a zone usually needs either a very good penetrating point guard, or good perimeter shooting. In my experience, most K-2 players cannot even reach the basket from the perimeter, and very good point guards are hard to find at any age. A decent zone can literally shut down a young offense. In fact, I’ve seen it shut down older teams without good outside shooting, as well. Very low scoring does not make for an exciting or fun game.

As for older kids, a zone defense should not mean “standing around.” When I introduced zone defense to my fifth graders, I immediately introduced the concept of rotation, as well. They took to it very well, and did not just stand around on defense. Using the zone also emphasized team defense, and all my players, including the weaker athletes, were proud to be an active part of a very good defensive team.

Finally, exclusively playing man-to-man does not necessarily better prepare older players for the high school level. All high school teams I’ve observed play both man-to-man and zone (usually a 2-3). The best way to prepare older kids for the next level would be to get them used to a mix of zone and man-to-man.

Jerry Kickenson
Silver Spring, Md.
Spend locally to earn support

I take strong exception to your Fundraising Frontier article (Winter 2008). I specifically address the charity poker tournament and selling advertising. To clarify, I own a sports store, am a father of children involved in sports, serve as an umpire, have been a team sponsor of baseball and football teams for years, a past board of directors member and a coach of baseball.

Regarding the charity poker tournament, suggesting a league develop and hold Monte Carlo nights or poker tournaments to raise funds, means in a child’s eye you have legitimized gambling for the league. It does not take a great leap to form the opinion if mom or dad can gamble in my sports league, and actually encourage it to make money, perhaps I can make some money by gambling on my game. Gambling is an addiction, with many families and careers ruined by this horrible disease. This idea should not be encouraged by any league or organization.

You also outline to sell advertising, visit a restaurant or sports store and tell them you’re in business. If a league solicited a bid or purchased items from me, I am aware of their existence. Leagues that choose to use online stores because they assume a better price should ask the online store for sponsorship. Remember, the more you spend, the larger the request.

I offer to match online prices. Last year my local baseball league awarded me exactly one order for a dozen umpire indicators. This is a 600-plus player league, one which I have sponsored teams in for more than five years. No request for equipment or uniforms was solicited. In 2006, I didn’t even get an order for the indicators, but my sponsorship fee was paid.

I have repeatedly called and emailed another league for the opportunity to bid on equipment. The calls I received from the league were for sponsorship, but nothing for the bid process. I find local leagues and their boards shortsighted. Never is thought given to long-term relationships or league packages that could save the parents money. And if I have crossed a manager and called his son out while umpiring, look out, the store and I are dirt.

Perhaps I sound bitter, but actually disappointed in league politics and personalities are closer to the mark. My store’s success is dependent on the local economy, so if you want my sponsorship dollars, support my store. Also, remember that state sales tax is used for parks and recreation. If for no other reason, leagues should tell their parents to shop local. On-line stores have no vested interest in your community or sports park, and they don’t sponsor teams. Finally, please do not come into my store and spend $10 and expect a $500 sponsorship, or ask for a discount, when you haven’t purchased anything. Support my store and I’ll bend over backward to support the league.

Name withheld upon request

Children who play sports linked to healthier – and happier – families

There are all sorts of benefits associated with participating in organized sports and, according to a new study, one of those is that it promotes family wellness.

This finding comes from the Women’s Sports Foundation’s “Go out and Play: Youth Sports in America,” study.

Through a partnership with Harris Interactive, the Foundation surveyed 2,185 youngsters from third through 12th grade. The report found that children who play sports were linked to healthier and happier families.

The study is another indication of the importance of sports participation or exercise for youngsters, specifically in regard to family life.

The survey also found that a majority of parents, specifically African-Americans and Hispanics, perceived their schools as lacking in sports and exercise programming for their daughters.

A large portion of parents of children with disabilities also reported a lack of sports or exercise programming.
Spectators brawl at youth football game
A chaotic brawl broke out among spectators at a Barstow, Calif., youth football game, which resulted in one man being knocked unconscious and four people being arrested.

The incident apparently began after one coach attempted to separate several players who were fighting. According to witnesses, a coach went to pull his son off an opposing player and then shoved the player to the ground. Opposing coaches and parents immediately approached the coach, and mass violence followed.

As a result of the brawl the league has already purchased construction fencing to set up between the field and spectators.

Many community members are now also pushing for cameras to be installed on the premises and for security to be present at all fields.

The league is also developing an evacuation plan so that players can ensure their safety in the event that another violent situation unfolds.

Youth soccer player punches referee
A 14-year-old soccer player in a Ventura County (Calif.) game was recently charged with alleged felony battery causing serious injury after punching a 54-year-old volunteer referee in the face.

According to investigators, the referee issued the youngster a yellow card for performing an illegal move. Upset with the call, the player then allegedly approached the official and assaulted him.

Football coach caught on tape shoving player
A St. Louis, Mo., youth football coach was recently asked to resign after being caught on video shoving an 11-year-old player during post-game team handshakes.

The coach in question claims that he shoved the player’s helmet after he heard him making unsportsmanlike comments during the handshakes. Video shows the boy being knocked back from the contact.

The father of the boy who was pushed claims that his son made no such inappropriate comments, and that he was mistakenly targeted.

Authorities were deciding whether or not the incident warrants a misdemeanor charge.

Pistol-packing soccer mom sues county sheriff
A Pennsylvania woman sued a sheriff who revoked her concealed-weapons permit after she upset fellow parents by wearing her holstered pistol to her 5-year-old daughter’s soccer game.

The woman alleges in the federal lawsuit that the sheriff violated her Second Amendment rights and prosecuted her maliciously when he took away her permit in September.

She successfully appealed the revocation, although the judge who restored her permit questioned her judgment and said she “scared the devil” out of others who attended the youth soccer game.
When it comes to top quality youth sports programming, the City of Clearwater (Fla.) Parks and Recreation is a model of excellence. In recognition of the superb job it does, it was one of five organizations to earn the coveted Excellence in Youth Sports Award in 2008.

Presented by the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) and Athletic Business magazine, the annual award recognizes special organizations that operate diverse youth sports programs that focus on providing positive and safe experiences for all participants.

The City of Clearwater provides sports programming for more than 3,000 youth athletes. The community co-sponsors 15 different youth sports organizations, which offer eight different sports activities for the local children to choose from.

“The experiences our youth have in participating in sports can be positive or negative and we want to focus on positive experiences,” said Kevin Dunbar, parks and recreation director for the City of Clearwater Parks and Recreation. “We want to cultivate the development of self worth, sense of team and good citizenship through these positive experiences.”

The City of Clearwater utilizes many programs offered by NAYS to help it fulfill its goals.

Its coaches are trained and certified through the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA). Adults involved in Clearwater’s programs are also trained in lightning safety, concussion awareness, American Red Cross Sports Safety, as well as how to administer CPR and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) treatment.

They also back up their commitment to positive sportsmanship through their Excellence in Youth Sportsmanship Award, which recognizes youth athletes who exhibit good sportsmanship.

Parents should address performance-enhancing drugs with their young athletes

Parents of young athletes – those that will likely participate in high school athletics sometime in the future – must be aware of the temptations for kids to turn to performance-enhancing drugs as they progress in sports.

So, now is the perfect time to help children just beginning their sports journey to understand the dangers of using these types of substances so they’ll be more likely to turn their back on them later on in their sports career.

A report released by the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital National Poll on Children’s Health found that nearly 1 in 10 parents of high school athletes is aware of the use of performance-enhancing drugs by an athlete in their community.

The poll also finds that most parents feel that schools – with minimal penalties to individual students – should be responsible for handling the problem.

“One in ten is a particularly high rate of use of performance-enhancing drugs by high school athletes,” says Dr. Matthew M. Davis, director of the National Poll on Children’s Health. “Risk of injury tends to be higher when athletes who engage in physical activity have greater muscle bulk due to the use of performance-enhancing drugs.”

Fifty-seven percent of parents have talked with their children about the dangers of performance-enhancing drug use, while 97 percent believe that high school coaches should be required to communicate the dangers of performance-enhancing drug use to students.

“Parents may feel that high school coaches will be more effective in teaching the dangers of performance-enhancing drugs to high school athletes,” Davis says. “Coaches lend a certain voice; the same person who is telling them to be competitive may also be compelling in getting them to understand the dangers they face if they choose to use performance-enhancing drugs.”
The battle with blisters

Young athletes deal with all sorts of aches and pains during the course of a season, though even the smallest blister can cause the biggest annoyance.

Blisters are usually formed by friction, such as the shoe rubbing on an area of the child’s foot. The friction causes the outer skin layers to separate and fluid accumulates between them.

Treatment is based on whether or not the skin is broken. If the outer skin is intact, the body will eventually absorb the fluid if the blister is treated properly. Puncturing this outer skin to drain the fluid will not aid in healing, but rather creates an open wound susceptible to infection, which is why a physician should drain the blister.

The following tips are offered by the National Center for Sports Safety on dealing with blisters:

If the outer skin is intact:
- Clean with antiseptic soap.
- Over the blister, place a foam pad with a hole cut in the center of the pad larger than the blister.
- A Band-Aid type bandage may be used if a pad is not available.
- Apply an antibiotic ointment on the surface of the blister.
- Cover with a sterile gauze pad.
- Secure in place with athletic tape.
- Change the bandage daily.

If the outer skin is not intact:
- Treat it like an open wound.
- If the skin covering the blister is intact, leave the skin in place for several days. This will act as a protective covering over the blister.
- Clean the area with antiseptic soap.
- Apply an antibiotic ointment to the blister under the skin.
- Apply a donut pad for protection.
- Cover the blister with a sterile gauze pad.
- Secure with athletic tape.
- Change the bandage daily.
- Monitor for signs of infection.

Aggressive screening methods can help young athletes win the fight against Staph infections

Athletes of all ages – from the pee wees to the pro ranks – can be carriers of the dangerous MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) germ without even realizing it. The germ doesn’t make them sick until it gets inside their body, usually via a cut or turf burn.

The screening test is a noninvasive and inexpensive skin or nasal swab, according to the not-for-profit Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths (RID), whose advisory board includes NFL-team physicians.

When a player tests positive, simple steps can be taken to remove the bacteria before it gets inside the player’s body and causes an infection.

In addition, players are at risk for a slightly different type of MRSA when they are hospitalized for any type of orthopedic surgery.

These precautions need to be started several days in advance of surgery.

Parents should choose surgeons with a low infection rate and get their child tested for the MRSA germ in advance.

Players who test positive should bathe with chlorhexidine soap for three to five days to remove the bacteria from the skin before the operation and, in some cases, use mupirocin ointment in the nose, where MRSA tends to live.

In a 2007-study at New England Baptist Medical Center, these precautions reduced the risk of post-surgical Staph infections after orthopedic surgery by more than 50 percent.

Screening for MRSA before orthopedic surgery is the standard care in the British national health service.

Parents should choose surgeons with a low infection rate and get their child tested for the MRSA germ in advance.

RID (www.hospitalinfection.org) has produced a 12-step brochure that highlights precautions to take to protect players from hospital-acquired MRSA.
Angry drivers more likely to get upset at their child’s athletic activities, study finds

Moms and dads who have a tendency to become upset while driving are more likely to be the type who also get upset at their children’s athletic activities, according to a study conducted by University of Maryland researcher Jay Goldstein.

The study, which appeared in the Journal of Applied Social Psychology, found that ego defensiveness, one of the triggers that leads to road rage, also kicks off parental “sideline rage,” and that a parent with a control-oriented personality is more likely to react to that trigger by becoming angry and aggressive.

Goldstein surveyed Washington-area parents at youth soccer games and found that parents became angry when their ego got in the way.

More than half of the 340 parents he interviewed admitted getting angry during a game; and of that number, more than one-third said their anger was directed toward the referee. Most parents who reported becoming upset said they were only slightly angry for less than two minutes, while about 40 percent reported responding to their anger with actions that ranged from muttering to themselves to yelling and walking toward the field.

“This comes as no great surprise to anyone who has witnessed a game,” Goldstein told The Washington Times. “But a more disturbing fact is that more than a quarter said their anger was directed at a child or the team. When they perceived something that happened during the game to be personally directed at them or their child, they got angry. That’s consistent with findings on road rage.”

A University of Connecticut Health Center study found the percentage of injuries due to overuse among young athletes rose from 10 percent in 1980 to 70 percent in 2005.

By the numbers

How do we know 912 people read our latest newsletter?

We use Emma.

With Emma, we’re not only sending the most stylish customer newsletters around - we’re also tracking the response in real time. So every time we hit send, we learn who’s opening our newsletter, visiting our website, forwarding our emails and more. It’s all part of the Web’s most user-friendly email marketing service, and it’s helping us grow our email list - and our business - in style. Thanks, Emma.
Tips for getting overweight kids back on the healthy track

Overweight children face a difficult challenge, but one that can be conquered by balancing nutrition and daily physical activity.

“Being physically active every day is especially crucial for children struggling with weight issues,” says David Kahan, a physical education professor at San Diego State University and author of Supersized P.E. “Overweight and obese youth carry social, psychological and emotional burdens that often lead to anger, despair and ultimately, a sedentary lifestyle.”

The following are some of the tips Kahan recommends:

• Emphasize the child’s strengths: If it’s something they enjoy or are good at, they are much more likely to do it.

• Avoid the spotlight: Overweight children should not be placed in situations in which their physical performance is on display for all to see and critique. It is better to offer physical activity settings in which the overweight child can blend in and work at his or her own pace or level.

• Foster a positive atmosphere: It must feel safe and inviting for the child, free of sarcasm, insults and harassment, and be a consistent source of comfort and encouragement.

• Get a doctor’s advice: Physical education programs that report a child’s body mass index (BMI) may inadvertently trigger parental overreaction and undue stress on an overweight child. Parents should consider having their overweight child assessed by his or her pediatrician before undertaking an intervention.

Parents should consider having their overweight child assessed by his or her pediatrician before undertaking an intervention.

The best age for a child to begin playing team sports, according to 31 percent of the respondents. Age 6 (25 percent), and age 7 (13 percent) were voted next best. Twelve percent of the respondents said age 8 was best; 10 percent said age 4; and 9 percent said age 3 was best.

Visit www.nays.org to view this poll, as well as cast your vote on others.
NYSCA releases new Coaching Youth Baseball instructional video

Ripken Baseball and the National Youth Sports Coaches Association team up for informative youth baseball coaching video

As part of the National Youth Sports Coaches Association’s (NYSCA) ongoing efforts to provide volunteers with the best coaching information available, it has released its new Coaching Youth Baseball instructional video.

The new 90-minute video was filmed with the help of several Ripken Baseball instructors, as well as participants from its highly acclaimed instructional youth baseball camps in Baltimore, Md.

The video covers everything that a volunteer baseball coach needs to know— from proper throwing and hitting mechanics to detailed drills and activities for practice. All NYSCA chapters who train their coaches in baseball will use the newly revised piece during their clinics, which is available in DVD and VHS format. Coaches who utilize NYSCA’s online program will have access to the new video as well.

“When it comes to teaching the great game of baseball to children no one does it any better than the Ripken Baseball staff,” said John Engh, chief operating officer of the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS), which oversees NYSCA. “Their expertise will benefit the thousands of moms and dads who volunteer to coach baseball who go through our training program.”

The baseball video is all part of NYSCA’s new and upgraded package of member benefits. Now, NYSCA coaches have access to an array of innovative tools— available at www.nays.org – to enhance their coaching skills. For example, the Coaching Forum allows volunteers to tap into the expertise of more than 100,000 coaches to gain advice on any topic, or solutions to a problem they are facing; and the Coach Rating Tool enables coaches to find out how well they are teaching their players everything from the skills of the sport to good sportsmanship.

Charleston, S.C. to host Academy for Youth Sports Administrators in April

A pair of Academy for Youth Sports Administrators will be held this year that will give professional youth sports administrators the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge, as well as earn the coveted Certified Youth Sports Administrator (CYSA) credential.

An Academy will be held in Charleston, S.C. on April 14-16, and in Orlando, Fla. on Dec. 1-2.

The Academy is a 20-hour professional certification program that offers cutting-edge information on critical issues in youth sports today. By attending the Academy, recreation professionals earn the CYSA credential and two Continuing Education Units (CEU). To date, more than 1,600 CYSAs have graduated from the Academy.

The Academy features a professional faculty who cover a wide range of important topics and issues pertaining to youth sports that significantly affect how administrators handle their job.

Some of the topics covered at the Academy are youth sports philosophy, professional development, volunteer management, child abuse prevention, parent management, conflict resolution, insurance and risk management, and program evaluation and marketing.

A program of the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS), the Academy is the leading advocate for higher education for youth sports administrators.

The Academy’s number one goal is to provide attendees with the tools they need to build the body of knowledge necessary to positively impact the youth sports experience for all children.

For more information on attending an Academy email academy@nays.org or call (800) 729-2057.
“It’s all about the kids”

Clarence McQueen, the 2008 NYSCA Coach of the Year, makes a positive difference in kids’ lives every day as a volunteer coach, church pastor and substitute teacher at the Fort Campbell Army Base in Kentucky.

The youth sports programs on America’s military bases are constantly challenged to fill coaching vacancies. With so many moms and dads regularly on deployment, available volunteers are considered a precious commodity – and Fort Campbell Army Base (Ky.) is no exception.

Luckily for the base, and the kids involved in the youth sports programs there, it is not unusual for Clarence McQueen to step forward and coach up to three teams in one season. That is just one of many reasons why McQueen is such a valuable member of the Fort Campbell community.

Both a spiritual and athletic mentor to the youngsters he coaches, McQueen coaches baseball, basketball and flag football teams for children ranging from 5 to 13 years old.

McQueen’s life is guided by one of his favorite sayings that is well-known throughout the Fort Campbell Army Base – “It’s all about the kids.”

These are words that he backs up every single day in everything that he does, so it’s only fitting that he was named the 2008 National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA) Coach of the Year.

The prestigious award was presented to McQueen during the annual International Youth Sports Congress, held in early December in San Antonio, Texas.

Since retiring from the military in 1999, McQueen has maintained an active role on base by serving as a local church pastor, substitute teacher and youth sports coach. Since Fort Campbell is currently on its third deployment to Iraq, many who would normally volunteer to coach in the youth leagues are unable to do so – and McQueen is there to gladly step in.

“Every child that I have had the opportunity of speaking with really enjoys being a member of his team,” said Fort Campbell resident Lamar Foster. “The parents have nothing but great things to say about him for the way he is able to connect with the youth. It is an honor to have him stationed here at Fort Campbell, and a privilege to have him as a friend.”

Adds Emmy Martinez, vice president of education and membership for National Alliance for Youth Sports: “Clarence is one of those truly special coaches who understands what the youth sports experience is all about and what it takes to connect with children and make a positive difference in their lives. The youth in his community are lucky to have such a great mentor.”

After becoming certified through NYSCA, McQueen decided to further upgrade his skills and earned Gold Level status in 2005.

Sideline veteran

A veteran of the youth sports coaching sidelines for more than 10 years, McQueen somehow manages to fill in wherever he is needed, and he always makes a positive impression on the kids, regardless of their age, level of experience, or the sport they are playing.

McQueen has endeared himself to both youth who play for him and the adults living at Fort Campbell. When community members were asked to nominate a local coach for this prestigious award, resounding responses poured in in favor of McQueen, a clear indication of how beloved he is in the community, and what a positive influence he is on the kids.

Whether in the classroom, at a church service, or on the playing field, McQueen exemplifies what a true role model is all about, and when practices and games are under way he exemplifies what coaching kids is really all about.

“His demeanor is one of superb character, owing to the fact that not only is he a coach, but also a minister, church youth director and a substitute educator,” said Carl Ransom, recreation assistant for Fort Campbell Youth Sports and Fitness. “He cares about the safety of all the children and teaching them life skills is a major focus for him.”

Do you know a special coach?

Each year the NYSCA Coach of the Year award is presented to one individual who embodies everything that a volunteer coach should be all about. It’s someone who places the emotional and physical well-being of players ahead of any personal desire to win; it’s someone who treats each player as an individual; it’s someone who is an enthusiastic team leader and a positive role model; it’s someone who has a thorough knowledge of the techniques and rules of the sport they’re coaching; and it’s someone who understands that they can use their role as a coach to influence so many other areas of a child’s life. To nominate a coach in your community for the 2009 NYSCA Coach of the Year award, visit www.nays.org and click the “Coaches” tab.
## Keeping up with the Kids

Tips for revising your practices to keep pace with your players’ progress; and taking advantage of your team’s insights during games

### Practice Planner

As your baseball and softball seasons move along your players will learn and develop skills – and you’ll need to respond accordingly by revising your practices and drills to account for their success.

You can’t rely on the same practice plan that you used the first week of the season, otherwise your players’ skills – and their enthusiasm for playing for you – will stagnate.

Here are a few other pointers to keep in mind as you take the field with your players this season:

**Tweak your drills to account for strengths and weaknesses:**
Your players may pleasantly surprise you with how quickly they pick up certain aspects of the game. However, that progress requires that you’re ready to modify your practice plans accordingly to fit their ever-changing needs. For example, say your players have become really proficient at fielding ground balls, but they’re lagging a little behind in the throwing department. In this case, you should spend a little more practice time on throwing, incorporating additional throwing drills, and scale back on the fielding drills.

**Judge your drills based on their difficulty:** You may have to overhaul your practice plan if your drills turn out to be so easy that you aren’t challenging your kids. Likewise, if the drills are so difficult that they’re frustrating the kids and not helping them improve, you need to lighten up and work on some new ways to challenge your players.

**Make changes based on the upcoming opponent:** At the more advanced levels of baseball, you may want to adjust a particular practice based on the team that you are playing in an upcoming game. For example, if you know that the opposing pitcher throws really hard, you may want to devote some more of your practice time to giving the kids extra repetitions batting in drills that emphasize hitting hard-thrown balls.

### Game Day
Plotting your game strategy ahead of time is a good idea, but once the first pitch has been thrown don’t be afraid to fine tune your plan based on what unfolds on the field. Use the following tips to help make those mid-game moves:

**Observe and adjust:** As a coach, it’s important that you remain flexible. For example, perhaps early in the game you told your team to take a pitch or two when it was their turn to bat because the opposing pitcher didn’t have great control. Midway through the game a new pitcher enters the game who throws lots of strikes. You now tell your kids to be more aggressive at the plate, because they’ll see many more good pitches to hit.

**Take advantage of the kids’ insights:** Your players can be great sources of information because they’re on the field in the middle of the action, so don’t be afraid to tap into that knowledge. For example, maybe your catcher has noticed that several of the opposing team’s hitters swing at the first pitch. If that’s the case, you can have your pitchers throw their first pitches outside of the strike zone so the hitters swing at bad balls. Plus, when kids know that you value their feedback and observations, chances are they will stay more focused on the action.

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**If the drills are so difficult that they’re frustrating the kids and not helping them improve, you need to lighten up and work on some new ways to challenge your players.**
Quick shots

The National Alliance for Youth Sports has authored a series of comprehensive coaching books in the popular For Dummies series to help you guide your teams to a fun-filled and rewarding season.

**BASEBALL – HIT THE TARGET**

The two most common throws a first baseman has to make during a game are to home plate and second base. The following drill gives first basemen the opportunity to field grounders and make quick adjustments to deliver the ball to home plate and second base.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Have your first and second baseman and catcher take their normal positions. The coach should take a position off to the left side of home plate. When everyone is set, the coach hits a grounder to the first baseman. As the ball nears the player, the coach yells out where he wants him to throw the ball. Much like during a game, the first baseman has to make split-second decisions and quick throws – two key abilities for handling the responsibilities of the position.

**COACHING POINTERS:** Make sure the youngster in the field watches the ground ball into his glove instead of lifting his head too early to peek at the base the coach has called out. You can turn the target drill into a competitive game for the kids by awarding points for cleanly fielded balls and on-target throws. You can also mix the drill up a bit by including a third baseman and having the first baseman field some bunts and deliver throws to third.

**BASKETBALL – MONITORING THE MOTION**

The best way to prevent a player from scoring is to keep him from getting his hands on the ball. Of course, that's much more difficult than it sounds! You can use this drill to help your players practice guarding closely and forcing opponents to work extra hard to receive the ball.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Position one offensive player with the ball at the top of the key. The other offensive player and one defender begin inside the baseline and underneath the basket. The offensive player stands in front of the defensive player, and both are facing the passer. On your whistle, the offensive player without the ball begins moving around the court, trying to get free of the defender to receive a pass. The player with the ball can't dribble; he must wait for an opening to deliver the pass.

**COACHING POINTERS:** Good defensive play originates with good footwork. Make sure the defender keeps his feet shuffling and his hands up so he's always in position to create chaos – by making a steal, cutting down on the passing angles, or deflecting an attempt. Also, keep a close eye on his hands so that he doesn't use them to grab at the player who's making cuts.

**SOCCER – MYSTERY SAVES**

Manning the goalie position is no easy task for youngsters, who are challenged to make stops on kicks coming at them from all sorts of angles and distances. This drill helps improve the reaction time of goalies.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Position two players in front of the net, about 10 yards away from each other. Give each player a ball. You stand out of the goalie's view and, without her knowledge, signal which player actually takes the shot on net. On your whistle, both players approach their balls at the same time, but only one player delivers a shot on net. This approach forces the goalie to really concentrate on each ball and react quickly to the incoming shot.

**COACHING POINTERS:** Make sure the goalie follows the shot all the way into her hands and doesn't allow the ball to bounce away for a dangerous rebound.

**LACROSSE – GROUND BALL SCOOPS**

Loose balls on the field represent golden opportunities for your team to go on the offensive – if they’re able to scoop up the balls quickly while on the move. This drill helps develop that skill so that your opponents don't claim all the loose balls on game day.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Position one player about 15 yards away, facing you. The other player stands a couple of yards away from you, facing the other player. You begin by rolling a ball to the first player's left or right. The player moves toward the ball, scoops it up,
and delivers a pass to the player standing next to you. As soon as the first player releases the pass, roll another ball that he must scoop up and pass to his teammate.

**COACHING POINTERS:** Be sure to mix up the ways you roll balls to the youngster to scoop up. Besides rolling balls to his left and right, mix in some that force him to charge forward and put some over his head so that he has to turn and chase them. Players need to execute all these moves during games when a ball is loose on the field.

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**FOOTBALL – BOMBS AWAY**

This is a good drill to use to help safeties read the quarterback and react to long passes downfield.

**HOW IT WORKS:** The drill begins with a wide receiver on each side of the quarterback. The safety lines up about 15 yards away from the quarterback. On your whistle, the receivers run downfield, and each breaks toward his nearest sideline. The quarterback sets and delivers a pass to one of them. The safety has to read the quarterback’s eyes and footwork, make a break on the pass, and attempt to knock the ball down, intercept it, or make the tackle if the receiver makes the catch.

**COACHING POINTERS:** To make the safety’s job more difficult, work with the quarterback to make sure he doesn’t give away where he’s throwing the ball.

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**HOCKEY – FACE THE CLOCK**

This drill lets players work on both forward and backward lateral movement to both the left and right as they skate the perimeter of the ice.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Players skate the perimeter of the ice, facing one end (such as toward the score clock) of the rink for the entire drill. Skaters move at an angle laterally three strides right and three strides left as they progress forward going down one side of the ice, and then three strides right and three strides left as they skate backward up the other side of the ice. Halfway through the drill, change directions. You can add pucks in this drill when skill execution allows.

**COACHING POINTERS:** Always check that players maintain good skating posture. Specifically, check that they keep a good bend at the knees so that their bodies aren’t moving up and down during the crossovers.

These excerpts are reprinted from Coaching Football For Dummies, Coaching Baseball For Dummies, Coaching Basketball For Dummies, Coaching Soccer For Dummies and Coaching Lacrosse For Dummies, written by the National Alliance for Youth Sports and Greg Bach; and Coaching Hockey For Dummies, written by Don MacAdam and Gail Reynolds.

To order visit [http://shop.nays.org](http://shop.nays.org)
The National Alliance for Youth Sports, as part of its ongoing efforts to best serve its highly valued members and chapters around the world, is pleased to introduce a comprehensive new Web site. The new site – still found at www.nays.org – provides coaches with instant access to everything they need to ensure a fun-filled and rewarding season for their players. Check out page 17 for a rundown on some of the many new and improved benefits of being an NYSCA coach.

Additionally, the site also meets the needs of busy NYSCA chapter directors and clinicians. Now, besides being able to easily submit and track NYSCA clinic rosters via innovative Web-based applications, they can evaluate their coaches and gain instant feedback through a special Coach Rating Tool, announce upcoming clinics to their coaches, utilize the Youth League Manager resource for assistance running their leagues and order their clinic materials online, among many other areas.

The easy-to-navigate site promises to make a big difference for you – regardless of your role.
Coaches: This is what the new www.nays.org means to you

- **Skills and Drills** – Before your next practice be sure to visit the NYSCA training zone to access more than 100 animated drills. The section also features a variety of drills that are set up for you to print out and take to your practices to use as a handy reference while working with your players.

- **Coaching Forum** – Are you having problems with over-involved parents? Are you struggling to help a youngster learn a specific skill? As a coach, you’ll deal with countless issues, and now you can tap into the expertise of more than 100,000 volunteer coaches around the world through the Coaching Forum.

- **Coach Rating Tool** – Want to know what your players and their parents really think of your coaching skills? Check in here to get your scores on everything from how well you teach skills to how important good sportsmanship is to you.

- **SportingKid** – View the magazine online and join NAYS by going green and avoiding more paper clutter in your home. You can also access past issues of the magazine to review feature stories on topics of interest, or to take a look at that issue’s featured tips for running practices and overseeing game days, among many other areas.

Chapter Directors and Clinicians: This is what the new www.nays.org means to you

- **Many new coach membership benefits** – As you can see from above, being an NYSCA Coach provides instant access to a variety of resources that will enable your volunteers to make an enormous impact on their players in so many key areas.

- **Hold Coaches Accountable** – Use the Coach Rating Tool, a state-of-the-art evaluation system, to ensure that all the kids in your program are receiving the quality coaching they deserve. You can provide a digital link – placed within an email or posted directly on your organization’s website – for parents to evaluate your coaches.

- **Online Convenience** – No more faxing or mailing rosters; no more envelopes and stamps; and no more hassles with paperwork. Now, you can quickly and easily submit your coach rosters online.

- **Youth League Manager** – Need some info on background checks? In search of a fund-raising program? Looking for a photographer to take team pictures? This one-stop area has you covered in all these areas, and many more!

- **Ordering Clinic Materials Easier Than Ever** – If you need materials for an upcoming clinic you can now order them directly from the site.
Wood vs.
Nearly three summers ago 12-year-old Steven Domalewski was on the mound pitching for his youth baseball team in New Jersey. With two runners on base, and a full count on the hitter gripping a metal bat, his next pitch was hit directly back at him. The ball struck him in the chest, just below his heart, and immediately sent him into cardiac arrest. Deprived of oxygen for more than 15 minutes, the youngster suffered irreversible brain damage that left him permanently and severely disabled.

By Adam Shilling

The debate over what type of bat is safest for children participating in organized baseball programs heats up, as coaches, parents, politicians, scientists and equipment manufacturers all are weighing in on the issue.

metal bats
The tragedy pushed into the national spotlight the issue of metal vs. wood bats and which is safer for children to use. The debate has stirred strong opinions on both sides, as coaches, parents, politicians, equipment manufacturers and scientists, among others, have all chimed in.

The crux of the bat debate revolves around safety – namely for those children on the pitcher’s mound and the infield who must react quickly to batted balls. Made of high-strength aluminum alloy, aluminum bats are often lighter weight and can be stronger and more durable than their wood counterparts. The hollow interior of aluminum bats create a trampoline effect, which some say increases the distance and speed at which the ball travels.

Wood bat advocates argue that this increase in speed and force dangerously reduces the amount of reaction time that a young pitcher has, consequently increasing the chance of injury. However, aluminum advocates often point to the lack of credible scientific data to support this claim.

“I think right now there’s not any real good data to say that one is any better than the other, everyone’s concern over metal bats is based on a handful of catastrophic injuries,” said Dr. Fred Mueller, a specialist in sport administration at the University of North Carolina’s Department of Exercise and Sport Science. “By the summer of 2009 I think there will be more information out there on this topic.”

SORTING THROUGH THE RESEARCH
Because it is so difficult to find youth baseball leagues that use wood bats, not many studies exist that adequately compare wood and aluminum at the youth level. Most research has been done at the collegiate or high school level.

“Current scientific studies do not support this conclusion as there is no increase in the trend of significant injuries that would cause the need for the banning of metal bats in favor of wood bats,” said John Sadler, a sports insurance specialist and USA Baseball Medical and Safety Committee member.

According to the Don’t Take My Bat Away Coalition, an organization opposed to the banning of aluminum and composite bats in amateur baseball, “Since 2003, metal bats used in high schools have been scientifically regulated so that the speed of batted balls off metal bats is comparable to the speed of a ball hit off the best major league wood bats. This standard has been adopted by the NCAA and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and ensures that aluminum bats do not hit the ball any harder than the best wood bats.”

However, those in favor of banning aluminum bats often question the validity of such regulations, which they claim are often based on studies whose data can be manipulated to support either claim.

“Common sense is the thing that seems to be lost throughout this entire discussion,” said Dan Clouser, founder of the Berkshire Baseball & Softball Club, a Pennsylvania youth baseball league that uses wood bats. “I mean, just go watch the same two teams play a double-header. One game with wood and the other with metal, and afterward tell me that the ball leaves the bat at the same speed.”

Mueller recently conducted a study with Dr. Stephen Marshall of the University of North Carolina’s Department of Epidemiology which compared the bat-ted ball injuries to pitchers in both aluminum and wood bat leagues. The study, which has yet to be released to the public, documented the injuries of both aluminum and wood bat collegiate level baseball teams during a three-year period.

During that time, a total of 27 line drive batted ball injuries were observed from an average of 48 aluminum bat teams, while just 20 injuries were observed from an average of 125 wood bat teams. The aluminum bat teams averaged 14.7 injuries per 100,000 balls hit in play while the wood bat teams averaged 5.0 injuries per 100,000 balls hit in play. Although aluminum bats resulted in a higher frequency of injuries, Mueller noted that for some reason the wood bat related injuries were of greater severity.

“All the metal bat injuries were contusions,” he said. “The more serious injuries were from the wood bats, but there were more injuries from metal bats.”

Although more studies are now being conducted at the high school and collegiate level, exactly how the results will translate to the youth level remain uncer-
tain, especially since bat standards and regulations set forth by youth leagues may vary.

**LAWMAKERS STEP UP**

Although invented many years earlier, aluminum baseball bats officially hit the amateur baseball scene in the 1970s. By 1974, every level of organized amateur baseball and softball had approved the use of aluminum baseball bats, with the NCAA eventually making the switch from wood as well.

Although widely accepted by the masses, there still remained many traditionalists and baseball purists on the fringes who longed for the days of wood bat baseball. Then, in 2006, the Domalewski incident took place that pulled the issue into the youth sports spotlight for good.

Convinced that their son’s tragic injury was the result of the unsafe speed in which the ball traveled off the aluminum bat that was being used, Domalewski’s parents filed lawsuits against the bat manufacturer, Little League Baseball and the sporting goods chain who sold the bat.

Unfortunately, this tragic incident was not the first of its kind. According to a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission study, from 1991 to 2001 there were 17 recorded deaths nationwide that resulted from batted balls. Eight were from metal bats, two were from wood bats, and the remaining seven were of unknown origin. But it was Domalewski’s case which drew enough national attention that eventually led to legislative action being taken.

Within weeks of the incident, New Jersey Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan introduced a bill to the New Jersey State Legislature that eventually became known as “Steve’s Law.” This bill, which is currently pending, would prohibit the use of non-wood bats in certain New Jersey youth baseball and softball games.

“My disdain for aluminum bats began while watching my daughters grow up playing softball, and cringing – along with other parents – at every metal-bat-propelled line drive hit back up the middle,” Diegnan said. “The near-death of Steven Domalewski was the straw that broke the camel’s back in terms of my introducing the wood-bat legislation.”

“The speed at which a ball comes off an aluminum bat can be so great that the reaction time for a pitcher to protect himself or herself is reduced to almost zero. We cannot protect every player against on-field injury, but we can correct a balance of power that has swung disproportionately in favor of hitters using increasingly lethal bats.”

More than three years ago the North Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors voted to ban the use aluminum bats. The switch was done with the hope of reducing baseball injuries, and although the verdict is still out on the effectiveness of their campaign, several other states are beginning to follow suit.

In 2007 New York City Councilman James Oddo spearheaded a campaign to ban the use of non-wood bats in New York City high schools. Despite initial protests from Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the legislation was eventually passed.

“I think right now there’s not any real good data to say that one is any better than the other, everyone’s concern over metal bats is based on a handful of catastrophic injuries.”

— Dr. Fred Mueller, University of North Carolina

In that same year, Illinois House Representative Robert S. Molaro introduced a similar bill in his state which is currently pending. Molaro’s bill aims to eliminate the use of aluminum bats in recreational youth sports leagues for children ages 13 and under.

Complicating the debate are allegations of questionable motives from those on both sides of the issue. Those in favor of banning aluminum bats are quick to point to the hundreds of thousands of dollars which bat manufacturers spend each year to lobby against proposed legislation to ban non-wood bats. The companies are accused of attempting to preserve what is a profitable industry, with little regard for the safety of their consumers.

Aluminum advocates regularly accuse the politicians behind these legislative proposals of being opportunistic publicity hounds who are merely seeking notoriety. They also point a finger at the personal injury attorneys involved who they claim are motivated by nothing more than the prospect of a large settlement.

**PRODUCTION COSTS**

Along with safety, price is also a highly contested aspect to this debate. When they first debuted, aluminum bats
were thought to be the more sensible financial option for leagues instead of having to continually replace broken wood bats. Aluminum bats appeared more durable, thus thought to be a better option for recreation departments and school athletic programs on a budget.

But as aluminum bats continually get thinner, lighter and more expensive, some say this argument is losing its luster. “As far as durability goes, with the metal bats being produced with such thin alloys, kids are getting a new metal bat every year, which is exactly what the manufacturers want,” said Clouser. “If they produced a metal bat like they did in the 1970s, when they first hit the market, those bats would literally last a player’s career. But they realized that they didn’t make nearly as much money that way, so they started making these models that we see today where the ball explodes off of the thin walls of the bat and it dents by the end the season, forcing mom and dad to go buy Johnny a new bat every year.”

Aluminum baseball bats can run anywhere from $60-$300, depending on size, quality and manufacturer. Wood bats can range from $15-$100. While the initial investment may be more expensive with aluminum, the tendency of wood bats to break, splinter or chip can cost leagues and players more money in the long run. However, there are many variables to this argument.

“There are a variety of price points for both wood and non-wood bats,” said Mike May, spokesman for the Don’t Take My Bat Away Coalition. “You can buy wood bats which are more expensive than non-wood bats and vice versa. To be honest, the longevity of the bat largely depends on how well you take care of it, how it is used, and how often it is used. If a bat is misused and not properly cared for, you lessen its lifespan and ability to function properly.”

PURITY OF THE GAME

Many self-described baseball purists aren’t concerned with either the price or safety argument, and instead advocate a return to wood bats in an attempt to promote a style of baseball known as small ball. This refers to an offensive style of baseball that emphasizes generating runs through deliberate acts such as taking walks, stealing bases, executing sacrifice bunts and sacrifice flies, and using hit and run plays, with less emphasis on relying on extra base hits.

It’s been argued that aluminum bats not only increase the speed and distance in which a ball is hit, but they also increase the rate at which hits occur. With teams able to hit with more power and frequency, “manufacturing” runs, defense and pitching become deemphasized.

“It’s pretty simple, aluminum bats can hide a lot of sins in a baseball swing,” said Clouser. “With a wood bat you have to learn to be disciplined enough to swing at good pitches, stay inside the ball and make contact on the sweet spot. A hitter can’t swing at a bad pitch and chink a base hit off of the handle like they can with metal. When a pitcher makes a good pitch, he is rewarded for it when the hitter is using wood. Pitchers don’t have to be afraid to throw inside either.”

In 2007, the School of Kinesiology and Recreation at Illinois State University conducted a study to see if aluminum bats do indeed increase the frequency of hits. By comparing Illinois high school baseball teams who used both wood and non-wood bats during the same season, researchers concluded that teams using non-wood bats did indeed produce more hits.

“Based on the results of this study, we have determined that using non-wood bats results in a greater number of hits per game and a longer duration of games when compared to wood bats among high school baseball players,” said Kevin Laudner, assistant professor in the School of Kinesiology and Recreation at Illinois State, who served as principal investigator for the Illinois bat study.

Whether or not the shift from the small ball style of baseball to a more offensive-centered style of play is a negative one is a topic that transcends the aluminum vs. wood bat debate. The debate over the transition of styles has even risen to the professional ranks. Some view the transition as a positive one, which can make the game more appealing to today’s youngsters
who are regularly characterized as having short attention spans.

“When using wood bats at the high school level, as they are now doing in the state of North Dakota, small ball is the norm, which can lead to a less exciting game of baseball,” May said.

Still, some wonder if altering the style of the game in order to increase its popularity is worth the price. Many argue that by getting away from the small ball style, an integral concept of teamwork is lost and key skills such as the sacrifice bunt are no longer taught.

“Some kids nowadays have no idea how to bunt anymore,” said Clouser. “The metal bat has turned baseball into a modified game of home run derby. Coaches don’t have to think, players don’t have to think, it’s now all about who can hit the long ball even at a very young age. The whole idea of the bunt has been lost with metal bats, along with sacrificing yourself for the betterment of the team. Metal bats promote a more selfish baseball player who can pad their stats.”

But May points out that this doesn’t necessarily have to be the case. Small ball can still be encouraged while using aluminum bats.

“Using the non-wood bat does not discourage the use of small ball,” he said. “A good bunter can bunt with wood or non-wood.”

The differing styles of baseball can also affect the length of games, as evidenced by the Illinois State University Study. According to the study, the increased amount of hits, at-bats and runs scored in games using non-wood bats increased the duration of games by an average of 12.35 minutes.

While some feel the time difference is negligible, those involved in tournaments where multiple games must be played in one day feel otherwise.

ALL ALUMINUM IS NOT CREATED EQUAL

While new studies may bring momentary clarity to the debate for some, arising innovations in the non-wood bat industry have the potential to further complicate it.

Much of the reason that it is difficult to arrive at a definitive scientific stance on many of these arguments is the fact that aluminum bats can vary dramatically in size, shape and composition. Some believe that manufacturers could better design composite bats to be as durable as aluminum, but perform more like wood.

Although the standards endorsed by the NCAA and the National Federation of State High Schools Association claim the difference in wood and aluminum bats are negligible, some still say that restrictions could be tighter and that the aluminum bats could be made more “wood-like.”

“The metal bat has turned baseball into a modified game of home run derby. Coaches don’t have to think, players don’t have to think, it’s now all about who can hit the long ball, even at a very young age.”

— Dan Clouser, Founder, Berkshire (Pa.) Baseball & Softball Club

While many wood advocates would be open to the idea of a more “wood-like” aluminum bat, some traditionalists will never settle for anything less than the crack of wood bat.

“Even if they do get to the point where they are manufacturing non-wood bats that perform like wood, I personally would still choose wood over non-wood, but that is strictly from my baseball purist point of view,” said Clouser. “A ball hit with a wood bat in the sweet spot, it just sounds better.”

And, as one 14-year-old shortstop told The Dallas Morning News: “With wood, the ball doesn’t go as far. I want to hit with metal and field against wood.” 🥎
Recreation departments around the country can now obtain comprehensive feedback on the quality of the coaching in their programs, thanks to the new Coach Rating Tool unveiled by the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS).

“I love the coach rating system,” said Dottie Phillips, recreation superintendent for the City of Wentzville (Mo.). “We actually do a manual evaluation of our coaches and it is sent to every single one of the 800 kids in our program, and then they all have to be tallied. This will be a huge cost savings to us in both time and postage.”

The system allows league administrators who are affiliated with NAYS to provide a digital link for parents to evaluate coaches anonymously. The link can either be placed within an email or posted directly on a league or organization’s website. The questions hit all the key coaching areas, such as safety, sportsmanship and how well they teach skills, among others.

“I think it is very user friendly to both the coach and the parent completing the evaluation,” Phillips said. “I like that it is made very clear that individual comments will not be known by the coach.”

Coaches can log on and see how parents rated them. While the parents’ answers are confidential, coaches can see their average scores in each category.

“Logged in as a clinician and it is pretty awesome,” said Bonnie Bentley, sports director for Hickam Air Force Base Youth Sports in Hawaii, a two-time Excellence in Youth Sports award winner. “The coaches rating system will be good and I will be sure to get it up and running here at Hickam with our spring and summer baseball seasons approaching.”

The system will also be particularly helpful for volunteers who often could go through an entire season without knowing what impact they were having on the kids. For example, through the new system coaches may find that they received high marks in every category except one, so armed with that information they can focus on improving their skills in that particular area. Or, receiving high marks in each category provides that valuable positive reinforcement that how they are handling their responsibilities is right on track.

“I think the site looks great,” said Mark Lowry, director of the Orchard Recreation Center in Kansas. “It’s a good idea to have parents have the ability to rate their child’s coaches, as well as have the ability for the coaches to log on and see their ratings.”

How do your coaching skills rate?

Coaches can now obtain valuable feedback on how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities through the state-of-the-art NYSCA Coach Rating Tool.
When Bernie Gill showed up to register his son for the City of Patterson (Calif.) Parks and Recreation’s flag football league last season, he was disappointed to learn that not enough children had signed up and that the league was in jeopardy of being cancelled.

Intent on making sure his son, as well as all the other kids in the community who had signed up, would get the chance to step on the field and run, pass and make defensive plays, he immediately began punching numbers on his phone. Within two hours he had recruited 10 additional children to sign up for the league, putting them above the minimum registration number and ensuring that the league would kick off right on schedule.

Such behavior is business as usual for Gill, the recipient of the Parents Association for Youth Sports (PAYS) Parent of the Year award. The prestigious award was presented to him during the annual International Youth Sports Congress, held in San Antonio, Texas in early December.

ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTER

The Parent of the Year award is presented annually by the National Alliance for Youth Sports to one special youth sports parent who consistently emphasizes fun, learning and safety, who treats every child with the same respect and patience as their own child, and who is an enthusiastic supporter of the coach and the team, among other qualities.

“What impresses me the most about Bernie is his commitment to the participants having a safe sports environment, and his positive and enthusiastic demeanor during the games,” said Jason Hayward, a recreation coordinator at the City of Patterson. “He has made a very positive impact on the youth here. He has coached, he is always a positive influence, and he is one of our most generous donors.”

That positive influence Gill exudes extends beyond his own kids’ sideline, as he cheers for all the kids. “It’s important for our kids to have fun and to be involved in sports,” Gill said. “It’s not so important that you always have to win or you always have to be on top. The priority of youth sports is to have fun.”

BEYOND THE SIDELINES

Beyond the positive sideline support he brings on game day, he is always eager to help out his kids’ teams in any way, whether it’s bringing snacks to games or stepping on the field during practice to help teach skills or assist with running drills.

“Since my time here Bernie has always made the children’s experience fun, whether it was as a coach, or most recently as a parent,” said Tino Martinez, a recreation specialist at the City of Patterson. “The most impressive quality he has is the ability to keep his emotions under control. He understands that youth sports are for the children.”

Gill’s reputation as a positive influence is recognized throughout the community in many other ways, too.

“It’s important for our kids to have fun and to be involved in sports.” — Bernie Gill

For example, when an otherwise reserved basketball coach lost his cool and began yelling at his players last season, Gill calmly approached the coach and reminded him that it was just a game and that the kids were out there to play and have fun. The coach simply needed a friendly reminder on the importance of maintaining proper perspective in youth sports – and thankfully for the kids on the court Gill stepped forward to resolve the problem.

Away from the fields and courts Gill’s presence is also strongly felt as his business is one of the league’s most reliable sponsors year after year. He has also been known to help recruit other local businesses to sponsor the league as well.

“I’m always willing to give my all to help any team or any coach in any sport,” he said. “Whatever is needed, I will do what needs to be done.”

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It was a familiar scene in the closing minutes of a very tight youth basketball game. Attempting to play tough defense, Mizhrua Bautista unintentionally committed a foul that left an opposing player on the floor with a minor injury. The referee called timeout and both teams went to the sidelines to talk to their coaches. As Bautista's coach looked around his huddle he noticed that she wasn't there. When he looked across the court and saw Bautista tending to the player she had just fouled he wasn't surprised – he expected nothing less from this exemplary athlete.

“I think this shows that Mizhrua understands that the safety of a player is more important than the game itself,” said Martin Rascon, recreation services supervisor for the Los Angeles (Calif.) County Department of Parks and Recreation. “Mizhrua will be the first to hold out her hand to help the opposing player up. If she feels that she was wrong, she is the first to apologize.”

With behavior like this being commonplace for Bautista, it’s appropriate that she was selected as this season’s SportingKid Sportsmanship Award winner. A basketball enthusiast with a love for biology, this 14-year-old is known throughout her community for her positive attitude on the court, which complements her knowledge and love for the game.

“She has learned to be a team player and be helpful to her family,” said Patricia Bautista, Mizhrua’s mother. “A life skill she has developed is to strive to be the best person she can be.”

Role model for others

Even as one of the smallest players in the league, Bautista is a star point guard who is one the league’s leading scorers. What she lacks in height she makes up for with heart and raw determination.

“Sometimes, she doesn’t realize that she is the smallest player on the court,” said Rascon. “But when she does have to play against a bigger player, which is all the time, she uses her speed and intellect to accomplish what has to be done on the court. She uses her leadership skills to inspire other players. So, although she is the smallest, she accomplishes a lot because of her big heart.”

Rascon nominated Bautista because she regularly stands out as an example of what he wants to see kids in his community strive to be. He looks at Bautista as a model to her peers who always leads by example. Although Bautista is a star on the court, she also shines in the classroom.

“I am most proud of the fact that Mizhrua is a straight ‘A’ student,” said Patricia. “She does not settle for anything less. She strives to be the best in the classroom and on the court.”

An honor roll student since the fourth grade, Mizhrua has always been serious about her schoolwork. Although always proud of her scholastic accomplishments, Mizhrua’s parents urged her to get involved with sports to build self-esteem and confidence. Six years later she still hasn’t put the basketball down.

“I play sports because it keeps me mentally healthy,” she said. “I get to meet new friends and compete. My
favorite sport is basketball because it’s fun and it brings me joy and lots of happiness. But I am most proud of my study habits and my grades.”

Rascon has high hopes for Bautista, who he says possesses all the characteristics of a future leader in their community: positive thinking, leadership skills and a high priority on education.

Although quite the leader herself, Bautista has several role models who she strives to emulate. Like many young female athletes, she looks up to Los Angeles Sparks forward Candace Parker when it comes to basketball. When it comes to life, she follows the lead of someone more close by.

“I consider my coach Hortencia ‘Horty’ Vasquez to be my role model because she has taught me so much about basketball and life in general,” said Bautista.

Despite her natural ability, Bautista remains humble about her abilities on the court.

“I can break through any obstacles put in front of me,” she said.

“I play sports because it keeps me mentally healthy.”

— Mizhrau Bautista

If you know of someone in your community - your son or daughter, your child’s teammate, a neighbor, opposing player, etc. - who deserves to be highlighted in a future issue for being a good sport and model athlete, we want to hear from you. In 500 words or less tell us why. Send your nominations via e-mail to sportingkid@nays.org or fax them to 561-712-0119.
Working behind the plate successfully

Using a comfortable stance and developing good timing crucial for calling balls and strikes in youth baseball and softball programs.

Rightly or wrongly, an umpire’s reputation is almost totally built on his work behind the plate. Great umpires want to work the plate, especially in the big games. Their confidence comes from finding a comfortable stance and developing great timing.

Here are some general basics involved in working the plate successfully:

- **Work from “the slot”** — Your head should be positioned so the bottom of your chin is even with the top of the catcher’s helmet. If you work with your head lower, your view of the knee-high pitch at or near the outside corner of the plate will be restricted.

- **Be still** — It is crucial to keep your head absolutely stable. Head movement will blur your view of the strike zone and your judgment will be inconsistent.

- **Follow the pitch to the catcher’s glove** — In order to judge a pitch, you have to watch it the entire way, from when it leaves the pitcher’s hand until it lands in the mitt. Follow the pitch with your eyes, not by moving your head. To practice that technique, put your mask on and lie down on the floor. Take a rolled up sock and toss it into the air. Without moving your head, follow it as it hits the ground or your mask. Learning to do that without blinking will enable you to see the entire pitch.

- **Stay in your stance until you determine whether it is a strike or ball** — Once you’ve seen the entire pitch, take a second to think about whether the pitch was a ball or strike. If the pitch is a ball, remain in your stance and call it. If the pitch is a strike, rise from your stance and give the proper signal and call.

- **Be convinced it was a ball** — Work using the philosophy that every pitch is a strike until you are convinced otherwise. That will assist you on getting the borderline pitches correct. It will also enable you to call more strikes, which is what players, coaches and fans all want.

- **Use a consistent stance** — There are four basic stances that most umpires will use. The box is the most common, but the scissors, knee and hands-on-knees stance are also acceptable stances. The box stance is the easiest for beginning umpires because it provides good balance and it distributes stress evenly between the legs. The hand that is protected by the catcher is used for balance, while the “exposed” hand is tucked in to avoid being hit. The scissors stance can be difficult because it places extreme stress on the left leg and exposes your shoulder and collarbone areas to potential injury. Its usage is becoming less and less common. The “hands-on-knees” stance that has become prevalent in Major League Baseball is not advisable for umpires of youth baseball. Very few pitches get past a professional catcher, but many go uncaught by a younger player. If the umpire is set up incorrectly, he can get injured, including a broken finger or two. Lastly, there is the knee stance. Although it provides good balance and excellent stability, the knee stance places heavy stress on the left leg and can hinder the umpire’s movement reacting to batted balls. It is definitely not recommended for games in which there is just one umpire.

The hand that is protected by the catcher is used for balance, while the “exposed” hand is tucked in to avoid being hit.

*Adapted from “Plate Work: Mechanics for the Two-Umpire System,” which is available by calling Referee magazine at (800) 733-6100.*
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Who’s on third?

Q Several parents on the youth softball team that I coach want to be the permanent third base coach. Should I let them all take turns, or just choose who I think is best suited for the job? If I chose just one, what is the most important thing to consider when evaluating a third base coach?

A First off, it is noteworthy that you have an abundance of parents who are willing to help. Often, the biggest problem facing a youth team is the lack of parental assistance. Conversely, the old expression regarding “too many cooks in the kitchen” also applies. In order to succeed, it must be understood that the team is not a democracy, but input is always welcome. In my opinion, the third base coach should be a permanent, reliable fixture and not changed out from game to game. The batters need the consistency and confidence projected by the third base coach.

An effective third base coach must relay instructions to the batter and/or the base runners in an attempt to exploit the current situation. That situation could be based on any combination of score, innings, number of outs, who is on base, who is at bat, who is on deck, where particular fielders are playing, etc. The third base coach should be familiar with each player’s strengths and weaknesses as an offensive player. It is up to the third base coach to assist the batter and the base runners in producing team results through the effective utilization of each player’s strengths to increase the odds of producing runs. That requires situation awareness, the ability to quickly make and convey a decision, as well as the ability to inspire confidence in each player.

That said, the single most important attribute in effective youth coaching, and the attribute that may be the hardest to learn is personal control. Few players will play well with an out-of-control coach shouting at them.

Ron Holt is owner and instructor for Wind Pitch Softball Solutions, an instructional youth softball program (www.windmillpitching.com), and is owner of the Texas Comets Select Softball Program (www.texascomets.org), a Texas-based girls fast-pitch softball organization.

Treacherous territory

Q I volunteered to coach a travel team. I held tryouts and my child wasn’t good enough to make the team. How do I break the news to him?

A To be turned down or criticized by a coach, friend or an acquaintance is one thing, but to receive this information from a parent is very powerful. For young children, parents are often their most significant other, and information such as “you are not good enough for the team” will have a dramatic impact on the child’s self confidence, self esteem and even their trust in the relationship.

Coaching your own child on a team is always a tricky situation, especially if the child is a marginal athlete compared to other players. You compromise your integrity if you give them too many minutes, always a starting spot, and treat them different from the rest. If you know your child is not good enough for the team you are coaching, do not have them try out. Why risk their love and trust?

A parent should always encourage their child to achieve. A parent should always encourage their child to achieve, however, be realistic in terms of their capabilities. This perspective will allow the child to maintain motivation and approach the competitive environment with confidence and the aspiration to succeed. Ultimately, this should be the goal.

Dr Steve Dawson is professor of health, fitness and sport at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. He is also coaching director for Team Ohio FC.
Fueling up with energy drinks

Q Is it okay for children to drink energy drinks before games or practices? I’ve heard that kids shouldn’t drink coffee, but I see plenty of children drinking these highly-caffeinated beverages.

A It’s probably not a good idea for children to drink energy drinks before games or practices, for three reasons. First, caffeine isn’t really good for kids. Although low doses improve alertness and reaction time, heavier doses can have negative health consequences, ranging from mild (jitteriness, headaches) to moderate (insomnia) to severe (heart palpitations). Because children are smaller and less physically developed than adults, they are more caffeine sensitive.

Second, kids, parents, and even some coaches, confuse energy drinks with sports drinks. This is a problem for young athletes because, where sports drinks (like Gatorade) provide hydration and replace electrolytes lost through physical exertion, caffeinated energy drinks actually contribute to dehydration. While these drinks may give you a short-term boost of energy, they are not recommended for use while exercising.

Third, energy drinks don’t contain just caffeine. Most include a combination of refined sugar, amino acids, B vitamins, and plant extracts (like ginkgo biloba or ginseng). Advertisers’ claims regarding the health benefits of these extra ingredients are not monitored by the FDA. It’s not yet clear what, if any, interactive effects these untested cocktails have on adults, let alone children.

An occasional energy drink is probably no more harmful than a cup of coffee, but parents and coaches should monitor for signs of excessive caffeine intake (flushed face, irritability, trouble sleeping); keep kids away from high-dose energy drinks (like Spike Shooter or Redline); and, where possible, encourage healthier alternatives, such as water, sports drinks, or juice.

Dr. Kate Miller is a research scientist for the Research Institute on Addictions at the University at Buffalo.

Protecting catchers

Q My 11-year-old daughter is a catcher for her softball team. The league issued her a traditional catcher’s mask, which she wears with a helmet. From both a safety and performance perspective, is she better off with one of those new, hockey-style helmets?

A Hockey-style catchers’ masks have caught on recently. Certainly, they offer more protection than traditional masks. Most catchers report better vision as well. The biggest complaint is they can tend to become a bit heavy and cumbersome, especially during later innings.

If safety is your number one goal, then certainly go with the hockey-style mask. As though the older players who have been using one style of mask for years are the ones who have difficulty switching. If you go with a traditional mask, be sure to have the extra neck guard for further protection.

Jon Doyle, a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist, is one of the world’s foremost authorities on baseball training. Visit www.BaseballTrainingSecrets.com for more information, and to subscribe to his free baseball training newsletter.
Real team player

Hank Paulson, CEO and chairman of Goldman Sachs, learned many key traits on the football field – teamwork and the value of working hard among them – that led to business success.

I had a fifth-grade teacher who did two things that changed my life: He took me to a Cubs baseball game, and as a result I became a lifelong Cubs fan; and he taught me how to play flag football. I also played Little League and played baseball and basketball in grade school through junior high. But my eye-hand coordination wasn’t good, so I knew I was never going to be a terrific baseball or basketball player. It was only when I got to high school that I played football and wrestled.

As a child I could beat most kids in sprints, but overall, wrestling was the most natural sport for me. In fact, I was a pretty good high school wrestler. I was unusually quick and strong. That translated over to football, where I was quick off the ball, stayed low, and was able to overpower bigger guys. It never occurred to me that I would be hurt, and I never missed a play because of injury.

When I was at Dartmouth, you couldn’t play varsity as a freshman, so I started on the freshman team. I was small and got buried on the depth chart. Fortunately for me, we had a challenge system. It was a nutcracker drill, where two linemen squared off with each other and if you won, you started and played, and I kept winning.

When it came to my sophomore year, I was devastated because the freshman line coach moved up to coach varsity. I didn’t think the coach liked me and, once again, I was buried in the depth chart, actually behind some of the teammates I beat out my freshman year. I was going to quit and I told my parents about it. They simply asked, “Would you be happier if you quit?” I thought about it and said no, and so I decided to go back and give it my all. Once again I was saved by the challenge system, which allowed me to move up.

Nonetheless, as the first game of my sophomore year approached there was still some question about whether I would be a starter, so I asked head coach, Bob Blackman, what my status was. He wasn’t keen to start sophomores the first game because, he said, they made lots of mistakes. I managed to convince him to give me the chance to start from the first play of the first game. We ended up winning the Lambert Trophy, and I led the team in minutes played.

I learned early on that there was a direct correlation between how hard I worked and how I did. I also learned to talk through important issues with the boss.

Anyone who plays the offensive line understands the meaning of being a team player and, for the most part, does not need the spotlight or media attention. I was just one cog in the wheel, but I knew the way I did my job could make a big difference between success and failure for the team. And my whole team was made up of high school football stars. We didn’t do it for the perks or the glory, we played because we loved the game.

There’s something special about being a lineman. If someone cares about being a star or getting attention, then they don’t want to be a lineman. If you’re out there in the dirt and the mud, play after play, loving it and doing well for the team, then you more than likely will do well at a firm like Goldman Sachs. It’s all about teamwork, and if you’re a real team player it’s hard to be arrogant about your position, whether it is at work or on the field.

As a businessman, I like people who are participators. It could be in sports, on the debate team or in the school play – whatever. I just want to see if you work well with others and put yourself on the line. The single biggest factor holding people back is fear. Fear of getting hurt, fear of failing. The self-confidence that comes from working hard, getting better, and growing as a person is part of being happy.

Editor’s Note: This is the 18th in a series of excerpts from The New York Times best seller The Games Do Count by Brian Kilmeade, co-host of FOX TV’s “Fox and Friends” morning news program. The book shows kids how sports, if done right, can teach them to be great, honest, respectable people. To order the book, which is also available in paperback, visit www.briankilmeade.com
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