



# Ahwatukee Foothills Pony Baseball

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Coaches and Parents,

Coaching is a very rewarding and noble pursuit. A young athlete identifies with the coach as someone special. There is no doubt that the shaping of the athlete's general attitude is in part molded by the coach. The most common coaching objectives are to provide an enjoyable experience, to develop the players' fundamental skills, and to get players to perform to the best of their abilities on a consistent basis. Remember the motto "Athletes First, Winning Second". At the same time, managers and coaches should be teaching beyond the rules and basics of the game. Youth baseball is more than just a game. They serve as an "outdoor classroom" for teaching our children many life lessons, such as sportsmanship, teamwork, responsibility, fairness, self-control, courage, knowledge, perseverance, helpfulness, honesty, and respect towards self, others, and authority. Why do kids play baseball? The main reason is to have FUN! At all times, you have to consider the age and personality of the player. For younger kids, the competition isn't as important. They are more interested in having FUN and the excitement of playing. At this age, winning and losing often means more to the coaches and parents than it does to the participants. In the older divisions, accomplishment may be the most satisfying element of participation. For example, a 15-year-old pitcher may think it's FUN to practice as hard as he or she can in order to be successful. When a player has come through our program and is asked what he or she remembers most, we all know we have been successful when the answer is, "I had FUN." Above all, that is what each of us should strive for. Always remember (and remind your children) that even Hall of Famers make errors and have struck out with runners in scoring position. Yes, the big leaguers make errors; errors that sometimes cost their team the game. In such cases when dealing with youth, a coach or parent needs to take a positive approach. The positive approach to correcting errors includes emphasizing what to do instead of what not to do. Praise your athlete for trying to perform a skill correctly and for performing parts of it correctly. Your players won't always be able to correct their errors immediately, even if they understand your feedback. Encourage them to hang in there and stick with it. Remind them it will take time, and the improvement will happen only if they work at it. Make a concerted effort to encourage players with low self-esteem. Some athletes need more outside motivation to improve. An alert bench, one in which each player is mentally and spiritually in the game, is a great boost to building team morale and ensuring a FUN time for each participant. I know all too well the pressures put on our children by their own parents. I am no different. I have a son and daughter who has played competitive sports for years. I admit it, I push them competitively. But because of my involvement in youth sports and seeing first-hand how a FUN experience directly affects any young athlete, I do try to remember to stress to my children that having FUN in their own creative ways is just as important, if not more important as winning. In today's society, parents are known to push their children towards unrealistic goals like college scholarships and pro contracts. Perhaps we see dollar signs; or are looking for a free ride for our kids to go to college; or want the chance to relive our yesterdays through the lives of our children. For whatever reason, it is a rare person who gets to play professional sports – According to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) statistics; fewer than 2% of high school athletes will ever receive a college athletic scholarship. Out of that 2%, only one in 13,000 will ever receive a paycheck from a professional team. Contrary to the beliefs of many parents, early success in sports is not consistently correlated with success in later years. At a young age, the winning percentage should not be based on any measure of wins and losses, but rather on how much FUN the children have and how many want to play again the next season. As such, we must recognize the value and benefits of our child's league coaches' experience. Mutual respect and the desire to do what is best for children are the goal of most amateur coaches. Working together must be of paramount importance. Creating unrealistic expectations and pressures will only drive a child away from the sports they enjoy playing. Egos must be checked at the door in order for our children to enjoy the great game of baseball, and in order for our children to want to continue to play these sports. I would like to share a few lines from one of Michael Jordan's books co written by Pat Williams. "Remember choose to have FUN. FUN creates enjoyment. Enjoyment invites participation. Participation focuses attention. Attention expands awareness. Awareness promotes insight. Insight generates knowledge. Knowledge facilitates action. Action yields results. And it all started by choosing to have FUN." As coaches and parents, we must remember to remain conscious of the messages we send our kids. We must give positive encouragement and be there for our kids when they need us. We must help them accept loss. One of life's most interesting sayings is that we learn more in failure than in success. Working together to provide a FUN and educational environment on the playing field should be our most important goal. Be creative and have a great summer and I look forward to seeing everyone who wants to have some fun next season!

Jerry Marino, President  
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