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I just coached my sons for the last time. Some advice if it's your first.

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Last month, I walked off a basketball court with my 14-year-old son after our team's last game of the season. I was his coach. We lost in the playoffs. It was a bummer, but not as much as the thought that struck me then: This was probably the last time I would coach him or his 16-year-old brother. They're both either aging out of youth sports or playing beyond a level where dads do the coaching. It's a little sad, same as the other onramps and offramps we travel as parents.

Some of you might be on the other end of this journey – coaching your son or daughter in youth sports for the first time. A lot of you have your first practices this weekend. Maybe you have lots of plans and drills ready. Maybe you have nothing but the anxiety of a dozen little faces looking up and awaiting your coaching wisdom.

My advice? Relax. You'll be fine. And sometimes you won't. We'll get to that later.

First, my credentials: I've coached my boys both as an assistant and the lead dog for about a dozen seasons worth of basketball and baseball. The teams have done fine, with a few league championships and most seasons with winning records.

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Which brings me to Tip No. 1: It's not about you.

It's not about your record. Or your coaching brilliance. No one wants to hear about your baserunning strategy or half-court trap defense. You're not Gregg Popovich. You're just pop, or mom.

If it becomes about you – before, during or after games – you're doing it wrong.

Tip No. 2: Winning is OK.

Some of you aren't going to like this.

There are two basic templates for parents who coach. You can identify which one your child is getting in the first 10 minutes of the first practice of the season. That's when the coach gives the get-to-know-me talk.

Coach A is Fun Coach, the laid back leader who's all about the sunniness of sports – things like camaraderie and fun. Coach B also is Fun Coach, but at some point in that first speech he or she will note how “winning is more fun than losing.” Then he'll get started on drills.

The uncomfortable truth: Most parents want their child to be on Coach B's team.

Most kids want it, too. They want to get better. They want to beat their friends. They want to be the ones high-fiving at the end of the game.

If you're more of a Coach A, a tip of the ballcap to you. But if you're Coach Let's Try To Win, don't feel bad. Youth sports – all sports, really – is about meeting challenges, whether it's an opponent you're facing or a weakness you want to overcome. So put 'em to work. Do the basics. Hit a million grounders. Offer encouraging but instructive criticism. Hit a million more grounders.

It's that simple. And when it works – when a player makes a shot or snags a hard-hit ball that seemed impossible weeks before – it'll be worth it. Quick story: A few years back, the worst player on our team was hitless throughout the season. We worked on his swing at practice, and he worked on it hard at home, but he'd only managed to foul off a few pitches in games. Then, in the last game, he hit a ground ball up the middle for a single. I don't know if my heart has ever swelled so big.

About winning, though: It's going to bring some other kinds of moments. There are going to be times when you bark a little too fiercely at practice or leave a weaker player on the bench in a close game. Yes, you will. And you'll regret it. Or worse, maybe you won't.

Tip No. 3: No Daddy Ball.

This one is simple and so very hard: Treat your child as if he or she is someone else's kid.

Don't give him any more or less coaching than the others. Don't play her any more or less than another child with the same ability. Do Not Make An Example Of Him.

Sure, you're worried about other parents thinking you're giving your child special treatment. So don't. If they think you are anyway, that's their problem. (And also: See Tip No. 1).

OK, one exception to that rule.

Coaching youth sports is about you in an important way: Your child is going to be watching everything you do, from how you instruct kids to how you treat umpires to how you respond to wins and losses. It'll be a window, for better or worse. Try for better. Understand that you'll mess up a little. Know that you'll lose more than a little. But if a 5-6 record is how your child begins to learn that you're not great at everything, well, that's not so bad.

Because in the end, coaching is an opportunity for both of you. It's about sharing sports – and sharing time. Some of the best non-sports talks I've had with my boys have happened when we're throwing the baseball or shooting the basketball. Keep that in mind, coach. Odds are you're not raising a professional athlete. If you're lucky, you'll be raising a sports fan, and it's something you'll have long after you walk off the last court together.

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