

Being part of a Team

By Richard Stratton, Ph.D.

What does it mean to be part of a team? It means you are part of a group who have come together to achieve the same goals. You are a piece of a puzzle. All of the pieces -- you, your teammates, your coaches, and maybe even the parents of the team members -- must fit together to make the whole puzzle which is the team.

While some coaches try to emphasize teamwork with the slogan, "There is no 'I' in Team", you should understand what they are trying to say. It is important that each member of the team have their own individual goals that they hope to achieve while playing the sport. But there are also goals the team as a group want to achieve.

All team members must be willing to adjust their personal goals to fit in with the team goals. Not everyone can be the leading scorer. There are starters and there are substitutes.

I once coached a middle school basketball team that had seven players who were essentially equally skilled and could all be starters. Of course, only five could be starters in any one game. After the first game, one of the boys came up to me and said he was quitting the team because he did not get to start. I explained to him that only five of the seven best players could be starters in each game but that as the season went on, all seven would get to start the same number of games. I also pointed out that if he looked at how much playing time each of the seven was getting, he would realize that they all played about the same amount of time during the game. My point was that each member of the team has an important contribution to make and that the team would only be as good as how hard everyone on the team did their particular job.

Being part of a team means helping your teammates whenever you can. Cooperation among all members of the team is very important. Jealousy of teammates has no place in sports. No matter how good you are there will always be someone who is better than you. You should admire those who are better than you and work even harder to bring your skills up to their level. You should see this as a challenge rather than something to be angry about. Being angry at a teammate will hurt your performance and will hurt the team's performance.

Finally, being part of a team means giving 100% all of the time. When people are part of a group they sometimes do what is called social loafing. This is where you give 100% when you play alone but less than 100% when you are of of a group. In essence, you slack off and expect others in the group to pick up part of your responsibilities. What would happen if everyone on the team did this? The team probably would not do too well. You are an equal partner on the team and must contribute your fair share of the effort, take your fair share of the credit for team successes, and your fair share of the blame for team failures. This is what it means to be part of a team.

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