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To Our Little League® Coaches



By **Jennifer Dean**

Jennifer Dean is a contributing columnist with The Hinsdalean newspaper in Hinsdale, Ill. She's also a Little League® Mom, with three boys, from ages 5 to 11, playing at Hinsdale Little League. This column was originally published in late February, and is reprinted in The Parent Connection with the permission of The Hinsdalean.

Believe it or not, MLB pitchers and catchers report this week, which means another Little League season is just around the corner. So to those of you who are about to embark on the awesome journey we call Little League Coach, I humbly offer some heartfelt entreaties from a Baseball Mom.

First of all, thank you. I know you're not in it for the gratitude but as volunteers with actual jobs, families of your own and a host of other commitments, you're owed it. I wish more parents realized how much time and effort you put in; leaving jobs early, rescheduling business meetings and family outings, getting your players home safely, buying extra gear with your own money – it is really rewarding, but it is also really hard work.

There is nothing more beautifully, complicatedly American than the game of baseball. Teaching it to a new generation is an honor that should not be taken lightly. The rules are intricate, the strategy is complex and the physical skills need time to develop (seriously, these kids are only a few years out of diapers when they start!). Failure is an intrinsic part of the game. How you, as a coach, model the handling of these inevitable failings is the real lesson.

Baseball in its purest form teaches empathy, perseverance, team spirit, leadership, integrity, how to lose graciously and

to win even more graciously. All life skills that come in real handy – far more than winning for the sake of winning ever will.

You will have a mixed bag of talent when your team starts the season but I guarantee they all have one thing in common – they want to have fun. Sure, winning is fun, but not as much if you're always in left field because you're slower to develop. Or when you feel the pressure of the entire game resting on your shoulders because you're the current "superstar."

Please consider this - No matter the "end goal" with any player (MLB prospect or a kid done by age 12), the outcome of a single game or even the entire season does not matter. Just as a college application won't ask for 2nd grade transcripts, neither will the college recruiters ask for the win-loss record of a 3rd grade Little League team.

Little League is about inspiration and development – both physical and emotional. Every kid should be able to walk away from their Little League career with a few key moments where they were the hero and a few key moments where they failed. Both will weigh equally in their memories and in their growth. Please remember this and treat all the kids you coach as if they have hero potential, for truly they all do!

One of my favorite (unattributed) quotes that relates perfectly to Little League is: *"Small boys become big men through the influence of big men who care about small boys."* Thank you, coaches, for being those men. Play Ball!

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