

Before You Complain...

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By Special to USA Hockey

There's nothing quite like watching your own kids play sports. There's also nothing that taints the experience faster than a parent or two yelling from the stands or trash-talking the coaches or volunteers behind people's backs. We're all entitled to our own opinions, but when it comes to youth sports, can't we all work together?

It's easy to complain, but complaining accomplishes nothing. So ask this question when it comes to youth sports: "Before you complain, have you volunteered yet?"

In many cases, the parents who yelled and complained the most never stuck around to help. They rarely volunteered extra time to help with fundraisers, events, etc. They rarely showed up to the meetings, cooked food or helped carpool.

In today's fast-paced life, we're all busy and we understand that youth sports can take up even more of our time, but volunteer opportunities come in a variety of commitment levels.

It's important to get involved, make the effort, build relationships and enhance the overall experience. It's a chance for parents themselves to become part of the team; to become part of the family.

Volunteerism is the engine that drives the youth sports experience. That is especially true when it comes to hockey. The more volunteers we have, the lower the cost for everyone in the association. Every time you pitch in, the association, the team and the kids benefit. And let's not forget about the ultimate volunteers: the coaches.

15 Ways to Volunteer

- Food prep. Bring snacks to tournaments, host the team for a spaghetti dinner or organize a potluck.
- Offer assistance with team or association fundraising events/campaigns.
- Carpool. Offer transportation services to and from games and practices.
- Record stats during the games.
- Run the scoreboard and game clock.
- Be a penalty box attendant (and hope your son or daughter doesn't visit you).
- Assist with travel arrangements for games and tournaments when needed.
- Organize a social event for the team or even just the parents when appropriate.
- Recruit. Help spread the word of hockey to other families in your neighborhood. Assist or lead the association's efforts to get more kids playing hockey.
- Offer to help with the end-of-the-year awards banquet.

- Help identify, order and pick up team apparel for the season.
- Volunteer for the concession stand.
- Coach.
- Serve on the association's board of directors.
- Are there any equipment exchange programs? Offer help or get one started to lower the cost for families.

If you're looking for a different way to contribute, just ask. The coaches will likely have something they need help with if you let them know you're interested. They will be grateful you did.

Youth sports can be a wonderful experience for all when we work together. No matter what sport or season it is, we ask you to revisit this:

“Before you complain, have you volunteered yet?”