

# COACHES OF EXCELLENCE®

## THE DENVER POST



### “Keeping Sports Fun for Smaller Sluggers”

More than 50 million kids play organized sports between the ages of 6 and 14, but many drop out when they reach high school. Dropping the win-at-all-costs attitude might help retain players and improve parent-coach relations.



You know that one guy. The one yelling from behind the backstop. "Hey ump, you're missing a good game here!" Or worse. It's usually a parent on the other team, right? Maybe it's even a parent on your own kid's team.

It might even be you... Just this summer in Colorado Springs, two girls were charged with fighting and an adult arrested for third-degree assault after a conflict at the Four Diamond Sports Complex. The disagreement started when a softball player was hit by a pitch and charged the mound during a game between Cheyenne Mountain and Wasson High School club teams. The umpire ejected the girl and stopped the game, but tempers flared in the parking lot. Police reports say up to 30 people were involved, some with bats. It's a perennial story.

"I think it is as bad as it's ever been," says Jim Evans, who umpired for 28 years in the major leagues and now trains professional and amateur umpers. "It's not getting any better." Starting

**"With these 21st-century kids, if you can't get their hearts, they will bail."**

**- Coach O'**



**Rod Olson,**  
[www.CoachesofExcellence.com](http://www.CoachesofExcellence.com)

with T-ball and Pee Wee football, on up through college and into corporate conduct, coaching consultant Rod Olson wants to change the win-at-all-costs attitude that has penetrated youth sports, tainted parent-coach relationships and led to arrests. Olson, who goes by "Coach O," says he expects to see more intensity on the sidelines this summer as parents' stress levels increase and families use youth sporting events as their "staycations." Plus, parents are more involved in their kids' sporting careers. "That's a good thing and a bad thing," says Olson. Ex-ump Evans agrees. "Too often, parents try to live vicariously through their kids. They're looking for every advantage, every break." The purpose of all youth programs is not to train youth for the pros; it's how to be good citizens, how to take getting benched, striking out, how to be humble."

Olson states that between the ages of 6 and 14, 57 million children play sports in the U.S., but that figure drops to 7 million by

the time the kids turn 15. Why? "Ninety percent of that dropoff is caused by the win-at-all-costs mentality by coaches and parents," says Olson.

After 20 years of coaching all levels of college sports and his own children, 11, 13 and 16, Olson has turned to coaching the coaches.

"We need to redefine what it means to win. Is your kid learning and growing and wanting to come back next year? That's winning," Olson told volunteer football coaches Thursday night in Littleton. The Panther football club invited him to speak to the men who coach their 6- to 14-year-olds after hearing Olson speak to the South Suburban Arapahoe Youth League, where they play.

"Coaches have so much impact on kids," says Janet Holmes, a YSO President, who organized the mandatory meeting. "We want to show we are on top of what we want the coaches and the kids to be, to take it to the next level."

"The next level" is a well-used term in sports, but the teams who hire Olson are looking for support beyond the scoreboard.

Whether they simply want to improve morale among coaches, parents and players, or in response to previous conflicts, many youth sports organizers want to shift their focus to character development.

Olson shares that the current generation of kids in youth sports does not respond to "do it because I said so." They have a sense of entitlement that can work for them — or against them.

"We've done a great job of teaching our kids to think for themselves and ask questions," says Olson. "These kids have been taught that someone should care about you, not yell at you."

That means coaches need to adapt, he says. "Does motivation by fear work? Sure it does, but the shelf life is not long," Olson tells the group.

They'll go do something else, maybe try another sport, play an instrument ... or something else," Olson says darkly, hinting at the trouble kids can get into when they drop out of group activities.

He calls his approach "Three-Dimensional Coaching:" First, teach the fundamentals of the game. Second, understand the psychology of the players. Third, speak to their hearts.

This approach will result in shorter rehab times, more adaptable players, increased creativity and deeper relationships.

Kent Calkins, football and lacrosse coach, says the message extends beyond the sports world.

"It's not just specific to coaches, it carries to families as well."

## Car-Ride Rules for Parents!

**Before the game:** Tell the kids that it's OK to be nervous. If you don't have some butterflies in your stomach, that's a little weird. Saying you can't be nervous is wrong.

**At the game:** Just cheer for the kids.

**After the game:** Give three put-ups and a wish. A "put-up" is a sincere, specific compliment. Tell the child three things he or she did well, then give your advice. Build them up, and then you've earned the right to give some advice. Say "I wish" instead of "You need to." And Dairy Queen always works!

By Kristen Browning-Blas Feature Writer Denver Post

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