

## Coaching Softball

By

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I have three children who have all chosen to play softball or baseball. My oldest daughter started the tradition by trying several sports; soccer, basketball, and softball. I wanted to be supportive so I volunteered to coach each of these sports. Each year that I coached I learned more and more that it is all about reassuring the girls that sports are a place to have fun, work hard, and be a part of the team!

I have coached children as young as 4 and as old as 14. What I have found to be the best way to keep practices meaningful is to have at least two stations for the children to rotate through. This keeps the girls active and they do not end up standing around waiting for their turn. My knowledge level of softball was low when I first started coaching. What really helped was my eagerness to learn. I asked for help from other coaches. I asked for help from several of the parents when the children were young. This really helped because the children loved to see their parents participate! For the younger age groups it became clear that the children just wanted to have fun. Whenever I got the question, "Coach, did we win the game?" my standard answer was always, "Did you have fun?", "Yes!", "Well then, we won the game!!!!" My biggest goal was to make sure that I had 100% of the girls return the next season to play again.

My favorite moment was when I put a girl who was not sure that she wanted to play softball into the third base position. My assistant coach was concerned that she might get hurt because she did not always pay attention! I spent a large amount of time when I coached the younger girls to make sure that every child played at each position equally. She had not played at third base all season, but it was her turn. I stayed close by to make sure that her attention was on the batter. Sure enough, the batter hit a pop fly directly towards her. It was beautiful! She looked up, reached out her glove, and pulled down the ball! The smile on her face was so big! She ended up playing softball for three more years, getting better each year!

What I have enjoyed most about coaching has been staying with the girls for several years, watching them switch from playing for fun, to playing competitively (and still for fun!). Going to the softball field and hearing from the girls that I coached several season prior, telling me about how their pitching is going, or how they just hit their first home run! Seeing their pride and sense of accomplishment is priceless!

As the years have passed I have noticed that the games have become more and more competitive. My advice to new coaches and parents would be to remember that without the love of the game, children will not stay with a sport if they do not have fun. Winning is not their only source of fun! If they learn, improve their skills, and make long lasting friends...they WIN!