

THE RACE TO NOWHERE IN YOUTH SPORTS

Changing the Game Project

Posted In Coaching, Problems in Youth Sports, Sports Parenting

“My 4th grader tried to play basketball and soccer last year,” a mom recently told me as we sat around the dinner table after one of my speaking engagements. “It was a nightmare. My son kept getting yelled at by both coaches as we left one game early to race to a game in the other sport. He hated it.”

“I know,” said another. “My 10 year old daughter’s soccer coach told her she had to pick one sport, and start doing additional private training on the side, or he would give away her spot on the team.”

So goes the all too common narrative for American youth these days, **an adult driven, hyper competitive race to the top in both academics and athletics that serves the needs of the adults, but rarely the kids.** As movies such as “The Race to Nowhere” and recent articles such as this one from the Washington Post point out, while the race has a few winners, the course is littered with the scarred psyches of its participants. We have a generation of children that have been pushed to achieve parental dreams instead of their own, and prodded to do more, more, more and better, better, better. The pressure and anxiety is stealing one thing our kids will never get back; their childhood.

The movie and article mentioned above, as well as the book *The Overachievers: The Secret Lives of Driven Kids*, highlight the dangerous path we have led our children down in academics. We are leading them down a similar path in sports as well.

The path is a race to nowhere, and it does not produce better athletes. It produces bitter athletes who get hurt, burnout, and quit sports altogether.

As I said to my wife recently, the hardest thing about raising two kids these days, when it comes to sports, is that the vast majority of the parents are leading their kids down the wrong path, but not intentionally or because they want to harm their kids. They love their kids, but the social pressure to follow that path is incredible. Even though my wife and I were collegiate athletes, and I spend everyday reading the research, and studying the latest science on the

