

**Friday, June 10, 2011**

**Outside The Classroom**

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Sports have been a part of many cultures for centuries, serving a multitude of purposes. In earlier years, sports were mainly used as entertainment and involved some rather cruel displays of competition. Yet, people assembled to watch. Today, sports still serve as a major form of entertainment but the participants are viewed quite differently. Most of today's athletes are considered celebrities or heroes. In addition to entertainment, sports are the life line of many families, communities, cities and states. Of course, this aspect of sports is limited to the professional and collegiate levels. Sports, being a cash cow in many respects, is often disregarded or disposed of at the lower levels where it does not produce income. States, cities and schools appear to deny or fail to realize the other values of sports. Convincing, our political and educational leaders that there are some things more important than the dollar, can be an almost impossible task.

The sports arena is a melting pot where participants of all races, sizes, religions and sexes can come together to learn and display their athletic abilities and wits. Since everyone is not what we consider a true athlete, it is important to realize that sports provides a place where kids of all ages can experience more than the thrill of competition, the celebration of victory and the agony of defeat. Sports teach many lessons including some of the very virtues we hope our children will process at some point in their lives. I've always viewed sports, particularly baseball, as an extension of life giving all who play an opportunity to experience, learn, build and display life's realities and virtues.

Sports provide an opportunity to experience the joy of success and victory as well as the disappointment of failure and rejection, while learning the value of compromise and communication necessary for success as they realize that determination and patience is needed to overcome the feeling of failure and rejection. As we build character and relationships, we become confident in our ability to compete, never forgetting to display humility, acceptance, cooperation and trust.

With an understanding that there is an economic factor involved, I still feel that we are not taking full advantage of the opportunities that sports can provide. It's very disturbing to hear that when ever budget cuts are mentioned in our cities and schools, recreational and sport programs almost always are at the top of the list and looked upon as having no real positive impact on the development of our youth. We constantly state that our children are our future but in my opinion, we fall short of completing the task preparing them to be successful in carrying the torch of leading or competing in a demanding environment. We are making a mistake in thinking that everything needed to succeed is learned in a classroom. I do not intend to imply that sports are more or just as important as academic education, but I am suggesting that there are many valuable lessons to be

learned outside of the classroom; lessons that can only be learned through experience, lessons that sports will expose our children to daily. I've played sports all my life, in fact, I can't remember a time when I wasn't playing baseball or some other sport. The experiences, through baseball and other sports, have helped me to overcome many of life's cruel realities: failure, rejection, prejudice and disappointments while achieving a level of success with determination, patience, acceptance, cooperation and trust. Through these same experiences, I'm better prepared to handle many of today's opportunities and accomplishments. The most important of all the lessons I've learned are humility and that there is reward in failure. Without question, I can say with confidence that there is plenty to be learned outside the classroom.