

Sports Teach Kids Valuable Lessons

By Stephen D. Keener

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For the past 75 years, parents have enrolled their children in local Little League programs. Of the millions of children who wear the Little League uniform patch, very few actually enter into Little League competition, one of our nine World Series tournaments. But the lessons young players gain between the foul lines have guided some to become astronauts, emergency first responders, bestselling authors, military heroes, professional athletes and even president of the United States.

To be successful in baseball and softball, you need to learn from failure and losing, more so than the act of winning. Perfect games are a rarity. Even some of our World Series champions have had to fight back from a tough defeat earlier in a tournament. Striving to win is important—it's a line in the Little League pledge—but the more important lines are “I will play fair” and “win or lose, I will always do my best.”

While striving to win, children learn about teamwork, leadership and sportsmanship, all of which can contribute to their development as solid citizens. In organized team sports, children work together to accomplish a task and learn from their mistakes. These lessons directly translate into the classroom and beyond, and they are the reason that Little League considers itself a youth leadership organization, as much as it does a competitive baseball and softball program.

Every summer, millions watch the Little League World Series tournaments and are reminded that there are extremely talented athletes on our fields. But more important, they see a pitcher shaking the hand of a batter he just hit with a pitch, or a third baseman giving a high five to an opposing player as he rounds the bases after a home run. These wonderful, heartfelt scenes, brimming with life lessons for all ages, were inspired by the spirit of competitive team sports.

Note: Stephen D. Keener is the president and chief executive of Little League International.