Sports Teach Kids Valuable Lessons
By Stephen D. Keener
From *The New York Times*

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.

Give Children Variety and Time Off
By David Geier
From *The New York Times*

As adults, we should want our kids to play sports. They not only provide exercise but also promote mental well-being and social development. Some studies even suggest that sports and exercise can lead to greater academic success.

More kids are playing sports than ever before and with that injuries have skyrocketed. The injuries that used to only occur in professionals, like a torn elbow ligament, now afflict school-aged athletes.

Maybe the increasing importance of sports in today's society is to blame. The dreams of college scholarships and multimillion dollar pro contracts are certainly enticing. What most people don't realize is that less than 1 percent of athletes aged 6 to 17 ever achieve elite status.

Most youth sports injuries are caused by overuse, and as adults, we are largely to blame. Parents and coaches are pushing kids to play a single sport at younger and younger ages. In addition, kids train and compete year-round, participating in showcase events for scouts despite games and practices all week.

Most kids' bodies are not capable of withstanding the demands of playing one sport day after day, city after city, for years on end. Those physical stresses lead to bone and joint injuries. Worse yet, they can create emotional burnout, causing kids to quit sports all together.

Instead of focusing on future glory and winning at all costs, parents and coaches should make youth sports fun by letting kids play a variety of sports of their choosing; giving them a season off each year, or letting them play sports that stress different parts of the body; teaching proper techniques; and not pushing them to play through the pain.

Youth sports should be a key part of every child's life, but it shouldn't be everything.

Note: David Geier is the chairman of the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine Public Relations Committee and a member of the STOP Sports Injuries Outreach and Education Committee.