

# THERE'S ONE WORD THAT WILL CHANGE THE GAME IN YOUTH SPORTS



There's a lot of talk about how to change the game in youth sports, a lot of really good ideas that are ultimately aimed at getting rid of negativity that permeates today's competitive culture.

I feel the antidote to negativity in youth sports can be summed up in one word: gratitude. Not simply saying please and thank you, but the kind of gratitude that has much deeper roots.

There are two kinds of gratitude: routine is the kind we easily express every day. It is habitual and often superficial. Thank you for the gift. Thank you for serving me.

But the type of gratitude that will be an attitude changer is exceptional.

"Exceptional gratitude is intentional, proactive, and extraordinary. Anyone can be appreciative of something obvious and observable, but it takes a joy-filled person to perceive the mustard seed of potential in a thorny situation or with a difficult individual." (Tommy Newberry, *The 4:8 Principal*)

Exceptional gratitude starts with being thankful for even the smallest victories as your child plays sports. For your child's good attitude, even though he struck out. For the fact that your child can play with his friends.

It also means that you and your child are thankful for other people. For the coach who gives his time. For the team parent who works hard. For the refs who do their best to make it a fair game.

There's no need to wait for a perfect opportunity, express gratitude for progress! Exceptional gratitude doesn't require that something is missing before it can be appreciated!

Negativity is a waste of time. Dwelling on your problems or the problems your child is having in sports doesn't fix them; it just makes you very well acquainted with them! And in the process, eats up your insides even as it dominates what comes out of your mouth.

Gratefulness, on the other hand, means you focus on the victories, on the progress. You and your child can reach for excellence, without being depressed about the lack of perfection. Let's face it, if we look for it, the reasons for negativity are abundant and easy to find.

Someone will always hit better or throw better or swim better or catch better than your child. Thinking that way keeps you in the negative zone. But if instead, you are grateful that your child has made progress and is enjoying the sport, you can grow a grateful attitude.

Gratefulness is a habit that is well worth the effort. It could truly change the culture of youth sports if parents and coaches practiced it, while teaching it to kids.

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