

## “In Youth Sports, Participation Trophies Send a Powerful Message”

By Parker Abate

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In our competitive, sports-laden society, the better athletes play through high school and the elite go on to play in college. These athletes do not care about participation trophies. Their goals are mementos that say “Champions.”

But what about those children who will never get to play competitive sports after the age of 14? Despite knowing that they are not particularly talented, these children go out and participate, generally to the best of their ability. They learn about teamwork, sportsmanship and they learn the importance of exercise. Those are all great things to know.

This is why the trophies that are given to less-talented athletes who participate in youth sports do not have to say “1st Place,” “M.V.P.,” or “Champion.” These young athletes should be honored in lesser ways and all deserve to feel some form of accomplishment.

Self-esteem is a big part of one’s childhood. Watching a peer receive a trophy and not receiving one yourself can be degrading. Any kind of honor can make a young kid feel as if he or she meant something to the team, and that could boost the child’s self-confidence -- children today need as much of that as they can get in our society.

Let’s give the winners a trophy and the participants a certificate, or give them all small trophies. These kids dedicate time, effort and enthusiasm, and they deserve to have something tangible to make them feel that their participation was worthwhile. It could be the only form of athletic recognition they ever receive.

In addition to acknowledging their effort, participation trophies or certificates, remind them that they were part of a team. It will be very hard to go far in the “real world” without understanding teamwork. Participation awards begin to instill the idea in a child’s mind that working with a unit can lead to success. Does success always mean coming in first? No. Success can mean working collaboratively and becoming a team.

Playing and working hard may not lead to success later in life because of the competitive world we live in; but no one has ever been prosperous by failing to work hard from the start. So while these children may not win the championship, working with a group of peers with the goal of succeeding teaches them that in life, teamwork will be extremely important along with giving it

your all. For these reasons, all young athletes deserve to be commended and feel a sense of accomplishment for something that they were a part of.

*Parker Abate, a sophomore athlete who studies communications at Misericordia University in Dallas, Pa., has been involved in youth sports since he was 5 years old, as a player and then as a coach.*