



Playing Time Philosophy

The most powerful motivational tool a coach has in teaching life lessons and building character is the control over playing time. Stewards of the Game believes strongly that playing time decisions should be left to the discretion of our coaches. Other than having *minimum* playing time rules, we do not endorse or legislate the concept of “equal playing time” at a league-wide level.

People occasionally ask, “Why doesn’t Stewards of the Game have rules that mandate equal playing time.” The answer is simple. We put a greater emphasis on teaching life lessons than we do trying to make everyone happy. We strive to create an environment where both skilled and unskilled players are motivated to work harder and improve their fundamental skills. Legislating equal playing time reinforces an “entitlement mentality” that sets kids up for failure and disappointment later on in life when they face real-life situations where effort and skill trump entitlement time after time. Stewards of the Game strives to help our players develop strong character and prepare them for life events such as trying out for their high school team, applying to college, interviewing for their first job, etc.

Allowing coaches to make discretionary decisions on playing time is an important ingredient in Stewards of the Game’s vision for teaching kids life lessons such as the importance of hard work, learning to be a genuine team player and overcoming adversity. We challenge coaches to balance good judgment with a genuine concern for the best interests of the team and the players as they make age-appropriate, discretionary decisions on playing time. Along those lines, we provide coaches with the following general guidelines for making playing time decisions:

- **Playing Time Factors:** Playing time should be determined by the coaching staff based on the following criteria:
 1. Attendance and level of effort demonstrated during practice
 2. Overall attitude, respect, and commitment to team play demonstrated during practices and games
 3. Skill level demonstrated in practices and games.
- **Age vs. Talent:** As players mature, ability will naturally become more and more a determining factor in playing time; assuming all players are showing up for practice and displaying a high level of effort, respect, etc. As players get older, it is very appropriate to gradually ratchet-up the impact that a player’s skill level has in determining playing time as we try and prepare

young people for the time when skill and ability truly do matter in life. Simply put, at the T-ball level, assuming all players are fairly equal in attendance, effort, respect, etc, playing time should be fairly equal across the board regardless of differences in talent. However, as players move-up through the various age divisions, skill level will have a greater influence on playing time. So, assuming attendance, effort, respect, etc are on par, parents and players should not be surprised when they see a 10 year-old ballplayer with marginal skills playing 3 innings while some of his teammates with more advanced skills are playing four, five or six innings. If parents or players have questions about playing time, they should direct their concerns privately and respectfully to the head coach at an appropriate time and place. (i.e. not during a practice or game.)

- **Challenge / All-Star Play:** As players hone their skills and earn the right to participate in Challenge or All-Star play, skill also plays a more significant role in playing time as all these players are typically showing up for practice and putting forth an exceptional level of effort, respect, etc...or they wouldn't be on the team. First and foremost, these players should be honored to make the team. Many players who typically pitch and play shortstop will find themselves playing different positions during Challenge and All-Star Play. Bottom line, they will play where the TEAM needs them most. Outfield play is as critical as infield play at this level so parents should be ready to reinforce the importance of whatever position their child is playing. The coaches sure will.

Some players will inevitably get more playing time than others. Players will be given an opportunity to earn starting positions based on their skillful execution during practices and games. Players on the bench are expected to support their teammates from the bench, watch and learn from what's happening on the field...and be ready to play when their turn to contribute comes around. Some players may be selected to play a supporting role on a Challenge / All-Star team solely due to a specialty skill such as pitching, catching, base running, pinch hitting, etc. Again, parents need to be supportive of this role and reinforce to their kids how crucial an inning of relief on the mound or a great pinch-hit at the plate can be for the team. This is especially challenging for players, and their parents, who are used to being the stars on their regular season teams.

Parents who tend to gauge an All-Star experience solely based on the scoreboard, or how many innings *their* child plays, or whether or not he gets to play his favorite position...would be best served by not participating at all. On the other hand, those parents who measure this experience by the fundamental skill development resulting from the advanced practice and play, the life lesson opportunities presented by the stiffer competition, the new relationships developed on the field and in the stands, as well as the pure joy associated with seeing a TEAM full of skilled players take their game to new heights...these parents and players will find that tournament play can be a tremendous opportunity for character development and...a real blast!

LIFE LESSONS LEARNED FROM DISCRETIONARY PLAYING TIME

- **Strong Work Ethic**: If you want to get better at something, you must be willing to work hard at it. If you aren't pleased with your playing time, your grades, your salary...you have a couple of choices. You can wine about it. You can quit. Or, you can dedicate yourself to work harder and improve your chances of success. Of course, we want to teach kids to take the latter approach.
- **Teamwork**: All players must learn to put the interests of the team before their own. This isn't easy when you're a child. Let's face it...it's not easy when you're an adult. But it's an essential ingredient in developing a Christ-like, servant mentality. When you're on the bench, you have a couple of choices. You can sulk. You can quit. You can secretly wish that your teammates will fail; therefore increasing your chances to play. Or, you can cheer on your teammates and learn something from studying the action on the field. Again, of course, we want to teach kids to take the latter approach...the one that helps develop humility and unselfishness.
- **Perseverance**: "When the going gets tough...the tough get going." Bottom line, kids need to learn early on that "life is not always fair." Things are going to happen in life that you won't like. Again, you have a choice. You can fret about it...and let the past eat you up. Or, you can knock the clay off your cleats, keep your chin up...and try your best to overcome the adversity. If a player is not playing as much as he or she likes, the real question you want them to ask themselves isn't "Is this fair?" The question you want them to ask themselves is "What am I going to do about it?" If you don't have the God-given abilities of the other players, the reality is that you're going to have to work harder than your teammates to even keep up. Realizing of course, that you still may not achieve the same level of success as your teammates. But one thing for sure...you will get better by trying.
- **Thankfulness**: All of us need to learn to be thankful for what we have vs. being constantly aggravated by what we don't have. Young people especially need to learn early on that all things in life are not distributed equally. This includes good health, intelligence, common sense, good fortune and...athletic ability. We all have different gifts and abilities. Nothing can be gained by coveting the gifts of others. Be happy for the gifts that others are blessed with. And, be thankful for the abilities and gifts you have...and focus on using your gifts to honor God...not yourself.