



# "Fun" Is Different For Every Athlete, And Changes With Age

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**Overall I feel he's well grounded with sports, not overly competitive, he seems to enjoy playing the sports he's in. But also can't have him quitting especially if he signs up for this team. It will only be the number of players they need. He also recently quit karate after 6 months, which he begged to start. I really do like him trying things at 8 so don't want to penalize him, but also frustrating to pay \$250 for a camp and not go. His younger brother is going to the camp and is really enjoying it. Any advice?**

## PCA Response by Joe Terrasi, PCA Lead Trainer

This is a tough question. Our children enjoy sports for a wide variety of reasons. We tend to lump all those possible reasons under one important term: "fun." What is fun for an athlete will vary from athlete to athlete and will usually change with age.

We often mistakenly frame "fun" as the opposite of "serious" training in sport. What we find in the world of elite athletes is very different: Maintaining a love of the game and a sense of fun is a crucial component of development. In his research on talent development in children, Dr. Benjamin Bloom cautions us to take care not to rush to the technical stages of development. This helps children build a love of the sport during the earlier "romantic" stage where fun is the core goal.

Dr. Amanda Visek at George Washington University has done significant research in what is fun for youth athletes. I would suggest looking at her "fun map" and talking with your son about what he really enjoys or hopes to enjoy in the sport (and appreciate that it may be different for baseball than it is for karate). If you can get a clear sense of that, ask yourself whether the process of the team he's on aligns with what he finds to be fun. Simply, are his baseball practices fun for him? We've seen a lot of athletes quit sports because of practices or teams that just aren't enjoyable.

*continues*



## Fun Varies, continued



Baseball is particularly tricky. I've seen more baseball practices than I'd like to admit that featured a lot more standing around than activity. If you're at an 8 year-old baseball practice and you don't hear kids laughing and enjoying themselves, that should raise a cautionary flag.

I have great empathy for your parenting decisions around the topic of quitting a sport. One of the reasons I love team sports for my own child is that they teach challenging lessons about commitment and service. It will be helpful to give your son an opportunity to try a sport with a short season commitment and to discuss with him at the outset that he is committing to his teammates for the entire season. If he's not ready for that, camps and clinics might be a better option until he's settled into the sport and mature enough to make a commitment. 8 years old is not "too young" to learn this necessarily, but readiness varies significantly from child to child.

I admire your commitment to working with your sons to address these difficult issues. However he develops and grows, your constant encouragement and support will be a great foundation. Thank you for your commitment to youth sports!

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