



SPECIAL ARTICLE

Dear Don Cherry: Does Hockey Love Kids?

By Christopher Meuse

It is with great honor that I except the privilege of being able to share some of my ideas with you regarding child development, and at the same time reinforce many of the valuable benefits of having children enrolled in minor hockey.



When I wrote my book, Dear Don Cherry: Does Hockey Love Kids? several years ago, I was motivated by the many scenes of negative behavior that I witnessed in arenas; behavior which adults probably use with a positive intent, but which often hampers short term growth, and definitely results in negative long term development. The negative comments and criticisms children experience in life (not only at the rink) can be extremely disempowering. It has been scientifically proven that negative thoughts and comments result in decreased strength and performance. I have witnessed very talented players become totally confused and disorientated on the ice after being yelled at by adults. The players were than further criticized after the game for their poor performance, the adults not realizing that they were actually to blame for the players performance. We cannot empower children through negativity, whether in sports, at home, in school, or in society in general. If there are cases where negativity results in better performance, than I believe a greater problem exists. Often it is an emotional problem, which, must be dealt with in a positive and compassionate manner if we desire long term, positive growth and development.

I realize that coaches and parents spend a great deal of time and effort working with our youth, and that they should be appreciated and congratulated for their efforts. They usually have the best interests of the children at heart. But, there is a need for children and adults to sit down and re-examine the motives surrounding some of the methods used to motivate players. Upon re-examination, let us re-evaluate these methods to determine if the end results, of our adult behavior, actually accomplishes the desired goals, especially in the long run.

For example, why do we as parents want our children to excel and to be the greatest? Is it out of love for our children or is it to obtain some degree of social gratification? Is it because we love our children unconditionally or is it because we lack a strong sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and therefore, attempt to live our lives through our children?

I observed, what I considered to be far too much pressure placed on children to perform and win. The results proved to be negative development and a decrease in the love and enjoyment of the game. Hockey should be fun, especially for kids. When young children are expected to play like pros, and are criticized for making mistakes, the results are seldom positive in the long run. The game becomes work and the "play" and fun aspects

are lost far too early. As Joseph Chilton Pearce writes in his excellent book, Magical Child:

" through the function of play, the work takes place, and creativity unfolds...play is the only way the highest intelligence of mankind can unfold."

In ending I cannot over emphasize the notion of being "sincerely" positive with children, and that positive reinforcement must be more than ideal words. We must not merely use positive words in an attempt to manipulate children so that they will perform in a fashion that we believe they should. It is important to be positive and compassionate simply because this is what children need and deserve, despite how it affects performance.