

Hodag Basketball Youth Philosophy: Key principals

Why do kids play sports? Why do we put so much time and effort into a game? How does this benefit our players and participants in the long run? As a coach in the Hodag basketball program, we need to constantly ask ourselves these questions and reflect on them. Are we not only able to answer them, but are we basing our philosophy around what our answers are?

Why do kids play sports?

- ***Enjoyment:*** One of the biggest reasons we participate in sports is because we enjoy playing the games. As youth participants, that enjoyment should grow throughout our years in Little Hodags, Camp, Traveling team, etc. If players aren't enjoying themselves, why would they continue to participate? What am I doing as a coach to make sure this is a positive experience? There are ways to teach the game, while also having fun. Everyone should be playing and given an opportunity to enjoy the game. Our main focus as youth coaches is for players to enjoy the experience and improve, not just winning.
- ***Peer relationships:*** Majority of my close friends are people that I played sports with. Team sports are a way for people to work together to accomplish a common goal. During this process friendships and relationships blossom as players learn to trust each other and work together. As coaches, are we emphasizing the importance of team and togetherness? Are we making everyone feel important and teaching our players to value every player on the team? Players may not be the most talented, but they can always bring something to the team. Maybe they're the positive teammate who cheers others on. Find a positive role for everyone and teach players to appreciate even the smallest role.
- ***Improve Self-Esteem:*** All players want to feel good about themselves and some join sports as a means of improving their self-esteem. As coaches, we can be teachers who not only build and improve player, but find ways to make them feel good about themselves and embrace their shortcomings as challenges and opportunities to improve, not as labels that define them. Improving self-esteem in Hodag basketball doesn't mean everyone gets a ribbon and constant, often false, praise. It does mean encouraging players in a positive way, embracing improvement, challenging each individual to improve themselves and not compare themselves to others, and taking pride in effort and attitude.

Why do we put so much time and effort into a GAME?

- ***Life skills:*** According to a Forbes.com article in 2013, employers are looking for employees that have the following attributes; Action oriented, Ambitious, Leadership, Team player, Confident, Hardworking, and passionate. Team sports are going to improve all of these skills and help players prepare for their future.
 - ***Action Oriented:*** This is a skill where a person is always trying to get better and improve. When a player is always trying to improve in sports that becomes part of their personality. Always get better and don't be satisfied might be them as a basketball player now, but it will be them as a person and employee later. These personalities also don't become discouraged with failure. They see each failure as an opportunity to improve and embrace challenge. They aren't going to sit back and wait for things to happen, they are going to take action.

- **Ambitious:** Having big goals and dreams and then working to accomplish those dreams are what ambitious people do. Athletes not only dream of winning championships and being great, but they learn that it requires lots of work and practice in order for that to happen. They learn to set goals and create a plan of action to work towards accomplishing that goal.
- **Leadership:** Leadership is necessary for a team to be successful. When players are put in position to be leaders in sports, they can grow and embrace the challenges and rewards for that leadership. They learn that being a leader isn't being in charge, but instead leading by example and through positive encouragement of teammates. Players have multiple opportunities in sports to step up and be a leader, while also learning to be led.
- **Team Player:** Being a team player is about understanding roles and embracing the success of the group. In basketball, there is only 1 basketball and 10 players. Players become team players by embracing the attitude of what's best for the whole and what role can I play within this group. This skill will again benefit them off the court as they become an employee and member of society who views themselves as a part of a whole and not the whole itself.
- **Confident:** Sports breed confidence in many ways. One way is through constant failure and improvement. Confidence is believing in yourself and your abilities. When you understand failure as a way to improve and embrace your shortcomings as areas to improve, you become a confident person. Sports also creates a number of situations where players find success. When players see themselves become successful, their confidence grows. Lastly, players in our program should be praised and encouraged constantly. This helps to build confidence in the players as they see that someone else believes in them and they hear the positive things they can do.
- **Hard work:** The beauty of sports is how challenging it is to be successful. Hard work and effort should be our greatest emphasis in everything we do. By praising and emphasizing this trait, players learn its importance. They become people who are always giving their very best effort in whatever they do.
- **Passionate:** When a player becomes passionate about a sport and their team, they pour their heart and soul into what they do. They take pride in their team, teammates, accomplishments, and the struggle. When their playing days are over, their passion will still need to be fueled and will find a new vehicle in which to bring those same feelings. Now they will be passionate about their families, employment, community, and other facets of their life.
- **Developing a healthy lifestyle:** Sports are a physically demanding activity. Players learn that a healthy body and lifestyle are key to their success. In order for athletes to be successful they have to monitor their diet, sleep, and activity. According to www.stateofobesity.org, since 1980 childhood obesity rates have tripled! Videogames, TV, and fast food are just some of the reasons our society has become so unhealthy. Players participating in sports not only have a current way to stay physically active, but it gives them a strong foundation to continue on a healthy lifestyle.

- ***Developing Friendships and social interaction:*** When you're a member of a team you are interacting with peers and creating friendships. Sports exposes kids to social interaction in a positive and enjoyable environment. Players learn to work together, handle stress and stressful situations, and learn to respect teammates and opponents. This social interaction helps participants develop socially while having fun. When we join a team, we are participating in an activity with other people who enjoy that same activity. This common bond is a great way to build strong, healthy, and lasting friendships with others involved.
- ***Building a sense of community:*** When players participate in athletics they represent their community and begin to see themselves as "Rhinelander Hodags". This creates a love and connection for their city, school, and the people involved in the community. They learn about sponsorship and the people who support programs so that they can participate in these activities. They will eventually realize that a lot of people are involved to help give them opportunities and become appreciative of that community.
- ***Extension of the classroom:*** There is a reason schools sponsor athletics. These activities should be an extension of the classroom and provide the same learning opportunities and expectations as a classroom. The mentality should be that this is a learning environment where participants grow and develop.
- ***Something positive to do!*** It sounds simple, but athletics are a positive way to spend our time as youth. It gives us a positive outlet to spend our time and keep us busy and focused. Parents and family become involved with the activity and it soon becomes a family affair. If kids aren't participating in athletics, what are they doing instead? Are those alternative activities giving them the same experiences and skills that athletics are? Probably not.

You will hear people talk about how sports are just a game, but they are missing the potential for what sports and activities can do for children. These are just a few of the reasons that sports are far more than "just a game". Believe in what you are doing as a coach and never lose sight of all the positives that athletics provide the athlete. It isn't about winning and losing, but instead about always giving our best effort and enjoying every part of the experience.

Hodag Basketball Non-negotiables

There are many ways to teach and implement our philosophy, while still having your own unique coaching philosophy. Below are a few things that we want to always do or emphasize at all levels of our program. These are little things that we feel make a very big difference.

Hustle everywhere: *This is a simple concept, but must be emphasized at all times. We want players to develop a mindset of always giving our best effort and never wasting an opportunity. We want to eliminate all wasted time to breed efficiency and players should always run from place to place. In practice some ways to improve hustle timing transitions to create purpose, praise hustle and players moving with purpose, Coaches hustling to spots, and many other ways. The following are a few areas where player hustle is very important.*

- *When called in by a coach*
- *Going to a huddle at a timeout or end of quarter*
- *Transitioning from drills*

Active Listening: *Young players often hear what coaches are saying, but with short attention spans they aren't always listening. Listening is a skill and like all skills, they need to be taught and practiced for us to become efficient. Some ways you can improve and teach player listening skills are:*

- **Demand the Big 3 when talking:**
 - *Basketballs aren't dribbled, all eyes are on the speaker, No talking*
- **Sound Bytes:** *Say more by talking less. Find efficient ways to communicate with short spurts of talking. Make everything you say be quick and to the point.*
- **Say instructions once:** *The first few practices players may miss a key point or two, have a consequence. Players will listen more effectively if they know the instructions won't be repeated and they have one chance to get it right.*
- **Encourage questions:** *Players should be comfortable and know that when they don't understand something, they should ask a question. Questions are how we gain information and should always be welcomed.*
- **Fill in the Blank:** *Make statements to players with a blank that they must fill in. This gets them listening, but also thinking and processing what you're saying. Comments like: "Defensively we want to move on....." Player response: "Airtime"*

Always Compete: *I feel that the development of a competitive mindset is one of the most important traits to instill in our players. I think the me vs. you at times is important, but the me vs. me is the greatest kind of competitiveness. Our players should always try to better themselves and be the best that THEY can be. Focus more on the mindset of always trying to do your best and get better, and less on defeating your opponent. Why is this important? Players that are the most talented on the team can become complacent when they know they are the top players. Players that are the least talented can become discouraged when they know others are more talented. By competing against ourselves and focusing on improvement we create a culture where players are simply doing THEIR best, and that is all we can ask of our players. If everyone is always competing and giving their best effort, winning will take care of itself.*

- **Track Progress:** *Have drills that you do throughout the season where you establish a baseline score and work to improve that score throughout the season. These can be team drills and individual drills. Players can then see improvement throughout the year and have to focus in drills. Every time improvement is seen, it should be recognized and celebrated.*

- *Set goals:* Having drills with an established goal not only helps create a competitive environment, but helps improve player focus with a clear goal and purpose. If these goals aren't met, there should be a small consequence. Anytime goals are met, there should be excitement and celebrations.
- *Reward Hustle & Effort:* Whenever there is great effort and competing taking place in a drill, scrimmage, or game, be sure to recognize and reward that effort.

Control the Controllable: *Players and coaches should not waste energy on things that are out of their control. Our focus should be on everything that we CAN do to be successful and not concern ourselves with anything else.*

- *Officiating:* Sometimes it can be very poor, especially at the youth level. Complaining about it and getting caught up in officiating changes nothing about the officiating itself. In my experience officiating is an excuse for the losing team commonly, and is a coping mechanism for our own failure. When we focus on officiating, we forget the real reason we lose and don't reflect on self-improvement enough. As a coach, set the tone by focusing on player improvement and the team only. NEVER allow a player to discuss officiating and share those same principles with the parents as well.
- *Effort and Attitude:* These are the things that we can always control and should focus on controlling them before anything else. Sometimes the shots don't fall, sometimes the other team is bigger than us, but if we control what we can control we put ourselves in a position for success.

Be a Great Teammate: *If basketball is going to be a positive experience, we need to create an atmosphere where ALL players are comfortable with making mistakes and improving at all times. This happens when players are great teammates.*

- *Encouragement only:* Players can encourage only! Players are never allowed to yell at, criticize, or display any other negative behaviors towards each other. This should be discussed, demonstrated, and emphasized throughout the season. Making players say nice pass to a teammate after a basket or the basket doesn't count is a way to get players to be aware of dishing out praise. Give points to the team that encourages each other even when they may struggle.
- *Cheerleaders:* When players are not actively in a drill or on the bench, they should be cheering each other on. A quiet bench isn't focused and it isn't making the team better. Teach players that they have a role even when they're not immediately in the action. Practice this by having them cheer each other on during drills as well. This will also help improve player focus and ensure players are paying attention.
- *Help each other up:* When a player goes down, teammates should sprint to help them get up. This is not only intimidating for the other team, but it lets each player know that others are there for them.

Growth Mindset: *Players should know that their goal is to always improve. We improve by getting out of our comfort zone and challenging ourselves. If we never make a mistake, never fail, and never get out of our comfort zone, then we are not improving. Tell players to embrace the struggle and challenges and focus more on overcoming challenges and viewing challenges as an opportunity to grow.*