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## Do we take our kids' coaches for granted?

By [SUSAN GAST](#) | Wednesday, February 21, 2007, 11:41 PM

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



[Susan's Bio](#)

The Braves aren't the only ones putting in a bit of batting practice these days. Front lawns everywhere are seeing some action.

Signups for spring baseball and softball ended Wednesday at South Gwinnett Athletic Association in Snellville. This weekend, the fields off McGee Road will be flooded with little ones (and not so little ones) trying to show prospective coaches how well they can throw, hit, field and run. Teams will be picked, practices will begin, and then comes the season.

Across town, at the city's Briscoe Park, soccer practice is under way.

And next month, signups for football and cheerleading begin. The fields are alive with the sound of youth sports — or soon will be — and not just in Snellville, but around Gwinnett and the metro area.

In 2005, more than 13,000 volunteers worked in 20 youth athletic associations in Gwinnett. More than 43,200 kids participated in those programs. And those are just ones monitored by Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Division. There are city and travel leagues, too.

My family has graduated from that phase of our life, but I still marvel at the sight: parents camped out in lawn chairs, kids going through the regimens. And there are the coaches trying to teach the players, appease the parents, build a team.

Each time I see them, I wonder — in the words of Butch Cassidy — “Who are those guys?”

Or, in some cases, who are those women?

I know from experience who some are. They are teachers, accountants, owners of stores and businesses. Some oversee warehouses, some wait tables and others hold an assortment of office jobs.

What I mean, more specifically in my question, however, is how do these volunteers devote the time required to coach a team? It is more a question of logistics than of altruism, motivation or passion for the sport or the kids.

In metro Atlanta, where commute times are legendary, in an era when both parents of two-parent homes often work, in Gwinnett County, where single-mother households doubled from 1990 to 2000, it is remarkable that so many can step up to coach.

Do these people start work at 5 a.m. so they can leave early? Do they have flexible work schedules? Do they have understanding bosses? Are they their own bosses?

I answered the call one year when an assistant coach was needed for one of my children's teams. Though my skills were extremely limited, I didn't mind the effort. What was tough was making sure I finished my real job in time to navigate traffic and still make it to practices or far-flung ball fields at the appropriate time each day.

Most seasons, I've been on the other side. I've sat on the bleachers. I've heard parent rumblings against coaches. I'm sure some comments are justified.

But I try not to take those for granted who give their time season after season after season. In my children's forays into football, soccer, baseball, softball and cheerleading, we've been blessed to have far more “good” coaches than “bad.” Who are those guys coaching our kids? How do they manage it? Are they taken for granted?

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**Comments**

By jc

February 22, 2007 07:23 AM | [Link to this](#)

I've coached youth sports for years. What is sad is I am even a coach at a school where I have no kids attending. They never have enough parents to help out. So every year I get the call and am glad to step in and help out. I really get a kick out of all the parents who know more than I do about the sport but never step up to the plate to help....

By Techie Dad

February 22, 2007 10:07 AM | [Link to this](#)

I usually leave work a little early and also do some work from home to makeup for any missed assignments at the job. I do it because I want my kids to not sit all evening or weekend in front of a PS/2. Over the years I've seen too many parents who just leave their kids with coaches. Parents should know kids want your support even if you don't coach them.

By ADL

February 22, 2007 11:26 AM | [Link to this](#)

I coached youth baseball for several years. My first team was kids pulled from other teams because more kids had signed up than expected. The coach was one of the moms who volunteered just to get her son on a team. I offered to help at the first practice and when it was over she asked me to take her place. I was amazed by the participation of the parents. I met at least one parent of each child after the first practice. I can't remember anyone just dropping their child off and leaving. In fact, two dads stepped up to help coach.

By GaNative

February 22, 2007 11:31 AM | [Link to this](#)

This coming spring will be the first time since 1988 that I have not been a coach of a girls softball team. I've loved every minute of it. I rose at 4:00am, got to work at least by 6:00am and left at least by 4:00pm to make my practices. Down through the years I've made a lot of lasting longtime friendships with parents and players. Some of the players are grown now and are starting their own families, some are in college. I guess this spring I will start going back to fishing on the lake.

By John

February 22, 2007 11:34 AM | [Link to this](#)

I coached both basketball and baseball when my children were younger. I did it because I liked it and because it needed to be done. We would not have had a team one spring because two other parents and I were the only ones willing to do it.

It was difficult sometimes to leave work in time to make early games. There were days when I wanted to go straight home instead of practicing. The worst drawbacks came from the one or two parents a year who complained about playing time and positions and the occasional player who whined and didn't put forth the needed effort. All in all, I enjoyed the experience.

By serfer

February 22, 2007 01:13 PM | [Link to this](#)

fully agree and "Hats Off" to the volunteer coaches - and should also give a big thanks to the Team Moms - who are often just as important and critically overlooked...they spend a ton of time with, usually, little support. Our Park has found a local Georgia website this year that is a big help for this - [www.sportsteam-mom.com](http://www.sportsteam-mom.com) - any Parks should check it out for help with their Team Moms which is not as readily available as for Coaches...

Thanks to all!!!

By PD

February 22, 2007 01:17 PM | [Link to this](#)

I've coached, assisted, and chaired various teams and committees over 40 years. I have found the most effective way of dealing with criticism is to assume the critic is volunteering, give them an immediate assignment, and announce it immediately with the due date to the parents/team members. It's a really effective way of (1) getting help, or (2 and more likely) cutting down on the sniping.

By ConstantCoach

February 22, 2007 02:40 PM | [Link to this](#)

I've been coaching baseball for the better part of 15 years. I did so long before I had kids of my own to coach. The reason I continue to coach year after year is that it is simply my way of giving back to the game that gave me so much pleasure. I played through the minor league level but was forced to stop due to injuries. Coaching gives me the opportunity to teach the game I have such a passion for to kids just starting their baseball "career".

There is nothing more satisfying than the sheer pleasure a child gets from participating in sports. The life lessons that participation in sports provides (when the program is run right) are something that stay with a player forever. To be even a small part of that kind of growth for a child is my greatest pleasure and reward. I thoroughly enjoy being on the field and having a player now in high school or college come back to the park to say hello. Having one of my former players come back asking if I remember them is special. I remember them all. They become like an extension of my family.

I have never felt that I have been taken for granted as a coach. I have been very blessed to have wonderful players and parents while coaching at all levels from little league through high school. I have never really experienced any major problems with parents on any issue. PD's right on track in terms of involving the parents. If they are involved with the team in even a small way it really negates any negativity.

By Georgia

February 22, 2007 03:15 PM | [Link to this](#)

I absolutely admire anyone who gets involved with kids, especially at the volunteer level. My daughter played softball for years out of George Pierce Park, and we have made some wonderful friends as a result. There is nothing in the world I love as much as being in the ball park. I love the sound of those bats hitting the balls, the kids voices, the energy, etc, the family environment. I really miss it all now that my daughter no longer plays. Although, I do catch myself loading up the dogs and heading over to the park, just to watch the kids play ball and meet up with some old friends. I was a Team Mom on her team a couple of times. It was so much fun. I met so many wonderful people.

By GaNative

February 22, 2007 03:38 PM | [Link to this](#)

Great comments **ConstantCoach**. One thing about parental involvement is this: you have so much of it until the kids get old enough to drive themselves to the park. Then the parental involvement drops off.

By jeff

February 23, 2007 07:42 AM | [Link to this](#)

I'm convinced that the job layoffs of the late 80s and 90s have created a legion of small businessmen, consultants and...volunteer coaches. We practice at 5pm and most everyone is there on time. More dads than moms are bringing the kids too. There's just a much greater flexibility among parents than when I was a kid and only the moms were shuttling us around. Maybe job uncertainties have caused problems at home, but they've been a boon for the little leagues.

By coach

February 23, 2007 08:16 AM | [Link to this](#)

I have been coaching and running a youth football league in DeKalb County for almost 30 years. Many things have changed, but I believe two things stand out to me.

First, there are many parents that drop off their kids and come back when practice is over. I understand it is necessary sometimes, but it is nice to have all of the parents available at the end of practice or if there is bad weather.

Second, it seems that many of the parents today want to dictate to the coach where and when their child will play. I know that most parents think their child is the superstar quarterback or running back, but in order for those positions to function, you must have linemen. Many times in youth football, there are kids playing on the line that end up in a skill position in high school because of their size or because they matured a little later than others. Please understand that most "coaches" are trying to do what is best for the team. If the only reason someone is coaching is just to be with and coach their kid, I believe they are in it for the wrong reasons. I have one son and only coached a team he was on three years.

Please give your coaches support and ask them if there are little things you can do to make things just a little easier for them.

By Scott

February 23, 2007 08:28 AM | [Link to this](#)

I have been a Baseball & Football coach since 1987. I recently decided to change career's in January and had decided not to coach this Spring because of not knowing what my new hours would be once I found a new job. I received several phone calls asking me to coach my 6 year olds T-ball team and decided I would. Driving home from our 1st practice I was discussing with my wife that I did not know how much time I would have once I found a Job. To which my 6 year old promptly responded "Daddy now you have a job coaching my Softball Team". It just does not get any better than that. The pay is not very good, but who cares.

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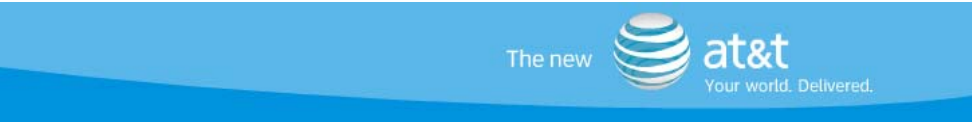
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