



Koa Sports White Paper:  
**The Importance of Learning  
from Non-Parent Coaches**

*When my son was very young, it was fine for me to coach him. But soon enough I realized that it was not good for me to be on the field. For one, I really didn't know the proper techniques, and two, my son didn't want me there. I'm much more comfortable having a non-parent coach running the show. It's a better learning experience for my son, and frankly, for me as well.*

*Bill S.  
Potomac, Maryland*

## **Our Mission**

The mission of Koa Sports is simple: to use sports to teach young athletes about competition, sportsmanship, and commitment. We at Koa firmly believe that the best way to ensure a positive experience for kids in any sport is to utilize professional coaches, not parents. That's not to say that we have anything against parents! Most Koa Board Members are parents whose children played sports from a young age through high school, and some even through college.

There are three reasons why athletes are much better off learning from non-parent, Koa coaches. First, learning from non-parents helps kids develop important skills that are critical to the growth process. Second, non-parents don't have as much "skin" in the game, and therefore are not as emotionally attached to the actions of any one player. Third, athletes learn better from those who played ball at a high level, and most of the time, this isn't a parent coach.

## Learning From a Non-Parent Helps Kids Develop Important Skills

Other than in the travel environment, most newcomers to Koa Sports have not had an opportunity to play for a non-parent coach. This is a new experience for the athletes, and it ultimately teaches a lot about life, on and off the field. Through sports, athletes will connect with different coaches in different ways. Koa uses a rotation system which allows the athletes to have exposure to different coaches. We never assume that every player will form a bond with every coach. Sometimes it happens, and other times it doesn't. While at first we *think* we'd prefer that our kids go through their sporting experiences without any setbacks, frustrations, or tears, the reality is that all top performers – whether on or off the field – endure adversity. And that adversity is not a bad thing!

*For the first month of the season, my son really didn't like Coach Tony. My son would complain that he didn't like doing sprints after the game. When high school tryouts came around, though, my son had a whole different perspective. He realized that Coach Tony's hard work with the team made my son a better player. That was a wakeup call for my son, both on and off the field.*

*Mary S.  
Bethesda, MD*

Athletes of all ages, K through high school, mature from their encounters with different coaches. Overcoming some adversity, even at a young age, helps them succeed later in life.

Whether in a team or clinic environment, the players often get exposure to the different techniques that our coaches have to offer. While we do work hard to systemize our instructional techniques, we also encourage the coaches to be themselves. Ultimately, this is a great opportunity for the kids to grow and develop so that they can take the on-field experiences and apply them to their off-the-field lives.

## Non-Parent Coaches Don't Get Too Emotionally Charged

Parents who coach teams oftentimes have too much "skin" in the game. This is to say they are overly connected to the outcome of the game, as well as the performance of their own children or other children that they know personally. We all have seen many parents become too caught up in their children's athletic careers.

They may become obsessed about their own children making plays, making teams, or even making careers. A 2001 survey conducted by *Sports Illustrated for Kids* reported that almost three quarters of the three thousand of the then-readers said that they had witnessed out-of-control adults at their games. At Koa we firmly believe that by allowing the Koa coaches to coach, it's much easier for parents to remain on the sidelines and become less emotionally charged.

The reality is that few athletes will ever earn a living by playing on a field; this very real fact must be kept in perspective. Koa has numerous athletes who came up through our system (or through its predecessor Next Level) that are now playing or have played college ball. We have three Advisory Board members who played high level professional ball (MLB, NBA, NFL), and most of our coaches played a sport in college. That said, the truth is that a small percentage of athletes ever play beyond high school.

Cal Ripken, Jr. put it best when he asked,

*Deep down inside, do you expect your child to develop into a true athletic star – maybe even someday receive an athletic scholarship to play in college ... [or do you] hope that your child simply finds that he very much enjoys playing competitive sports (regardless of what that sport may be), and that along the way he learns about all that sports have to offer – concepts like sportsmanship, team play, competition, commitment, dedication, and sharing in the fun of playing with one's teammates and friends.*

*Parenting Young Athletes The Ripken Way*, Cal Ripken, Jr. (2006).

As a sports organization, our objective is to provide a superior environment for kids to learn about competition, about winning, about losing, and about working hard. Providing such an environment in a way that keeps things fun is our mission.

*I was recruited right out of high school, and at the time all I could think of was baseball. I was one of the fortunate few for whom the stars and the moon lined up. I played in the big league, and even was the starting shortstop for the Royals in the World Series. But truth be told, what I value most about sports is the important life's skills I was taught – mainly about overcoming hurdles. And that skill is what I believe has helped me the most since I stopped doing my job on the diamond.*

*Buddy Biancalana*

*Koa Advisory Board, and Former MLB Player (Astros, Royals)*

Interestingly, as Cal Ripken, Jr. and so many others who have authored books on youth sports point out, most complaints that youth organizations receive come from parents when teams are losing. The conversation often begins with the parent

making a statement like, “I don’t care whether we win or lose, but . . . .” The truth is that teams which begin with adversity, but then work hard to overcome it, create players with the best character. The Koa coaches understand, without getting overly emotionally charged, that playing to win is important, but working hard is more important.

## Athletes Learn Best From Athletes

Player development is very important to Koa. Three of our Advisory Board Members played at the professional level – one in the NFL, one in the MLB, and one in the NBA. Most of our coaches played a collegiate sport; this means that they have had a long sports career beginning with recreational leagues, transitioning to travel ball, then high school, and then onto college.

Regardless of the sport, athletes will best learn from those who played at a high level.

*My daughter had been having a very hard time getting the bat on the ball. She liked playing softball, but had no confidence when she got up to bat. A few weeks into the season the Koa coach – who played Division 1 – made a comment about my daughter not looking at the laces on the ball. That changed everything, and she started seeing the ball much better. It’s not that I hadn’t been telling her to watch the ball, it’s just that when the comment came from the Koa coach, my daughter actually listened!*

*Mike S  
Bethesda, MD*

Koa coaches are better equipped to improve player development in a way that parent coaches typically cannot. We all know that it’s much better to teach proper habits from the beginning than fix bad habits later. Who better to teach proper fundamentals than someone who played at a high level? Oftentimes just one comment from a knowledgeable coach can dramatically improve a player’s technique.

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In short, we want the players in our programs to interact with multiple coaches, and to experience winning, losing, and adversity ... all in an age-appropriate manner, of course. Through these on-the-field experiences, Koa athletes have an opportunity to grow and mature in a way that they otherwise would not if they were coached by their parents.

We, at Koa, understand that you have many youth programs from which to choose. We firmly believe in our model, and we thank you for allowing us the chance to coach, and teach, your children.