

Response from last week: Thanks for your help. I totally agree with your stance in multiple positions for training the kids. I had two sons and one daughter very involved with sports over the years, and sometimes it is very frustrating. Now I am looking at the same thing with my seven-year-old grandson! Karen

First of all, this is the season of giving thanks and I too will join in. To so many of you that have responded to my articles expressing your desire and commitment to learning how to have a better youth coach: Thank you. My heart is to help create an environment in which youth sports is always focused on benefiting the kids. I hope that all youth coaches have an attitude of wanting to learn and improve. Thank you!!!

Now let's move on to the second part of kids being able to play more than one position on a team.

These are the reasons I gave last week that some coaches have young players only learn how to play one position:

1. It's easy
2. It produces wins

So, why is it beneficial for the kids to play multiple positions? Here's a quick look at four reasons:

1. The biggest reason is that kids all mature physically, mentally, and socially at different ages. What I see all too often in basketball is big kids being put only at the inside positions. They never develop the dribbling skills or the outside shooting skills in their younger years so when they stop growing in the eighth grade and all the other kids become bigger and taller, they become a guard and an outside player with very little skill developed for that position. Many of these potentially successful kids then get cut from their high schools teams because of the lack of coaching when they were younger.

I have seen right fielders (the position generally given to the worst player on the team) never given the opportunity to pitch or play in the infield.

The "rule of rhythm" is a term which refers to those young players who mature both physically and mentally later than others. Suddenly, it all clicks together for them and they start to excel. They become motivated and confident.

If you let kids play multiple positions, they will be better prepared for when the rule of rhythm kicks in for them.

2. They will actually play that one position better because they understand how other positions work. I remember my playing days at ASU with Alton Lister, one of the best centers to play at ASU. Every time I had the ball on the wing, he thought I could pass it to him down low. He felt open, but couldn't see the traffic I had to pass through to get it to him. One day during open gym, pre-season play, Alton and I switched positions. It was then that he saw what I saw. After that time, he knew how to get himself into a better position for me to be able to pass the ball. This learning situation is so true to every sport!

3. They will have a better understanding of the whole game, and not just its different parts. This is how kids learn strategies and game plans for the game. It's always fun to watch a player play who fully understands the game. Larry Bird would fall into this category!

4. Kids that play multiple positions develop multiple body mechanics. A basketball player needs to develop ball handling and outside shooting skills as well as rebounding skills. A baseball player needs to learn how to track fly balls as well as field grounders. Football players need to learn how to block, punt and throw a football.

Even if it is only for a few innings or one quarter of a game, it is important for the right fielder to play short stop, the full back to play goalie, the center to play guard and the right tackle to play running back.

Don't forget that safety is always a consideration in all of this.

Coaches: Let's be committed to fully developing our young athletes physically and mentally to enable success in their later years!