



**A Note from:
The Coach and Parent Education Committee of the MLBA**

The Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA)* at Stanford University has developed materials to help coaches like me do a better job of using sports to build character in young athletes.

I am committed to being a Positive Coach, rather than a "win-at-all-cost" coach. A win-at-all-cost coach has only one goal: to win. A Positive Coach wants to win, but has a second goal: to help players use the sports experience to learn "life lessons" that will help them be successful in every aspect of their life.

That's why PCA calls a Positive Coach a "Double-Goal Coach."

I intend to promote three major Positive Coaching themes with my players this season. I'd like your help in promoting these themes so that our young athletes get a consistent message from coach and parents.

I believe that these three themes, if taken to heart by each of us, have the power to do what the PCA is trying to do: "transform youth sports so that sports can transform youth." The three themes, which are explained in detail on the following pages, are:

- A) Redefining "Winner"**
- B) Filling the Emotional Tank; and**
- C) Honoring the Game.**

A) Redefining "Winner"

In the professional sports entertainment business, there is only one goal - to have the most points at the end of a contest. In youth sports, however, there is a second goal: to produce young people who will be winners in life.

In order to help our children get the most out of competitive sports, we need to redefine what it means to be a "winner." Regardless of what the scoreboard says, here's what winners do.

They

- Make maximum effort.
- Continue to learn and improve.
- Refuse to let mistakes (or fear of making mistakes) stop them.

This is referred to as a Mastery Orientation. PCA has developed a memory aid for athletes called the "Tree of Mastery." We say that the; **Tree of Mastery is an ELM Tree where ELM stands for Effort, Learning, and Mistakes.**

If our athletes approach this season with these things in mind, not only will they be successful in practices and games, but they'll also develop habits that serve them well throughout their lives.

There is an added benefit. Athletes who are coached with a Mastery Orientation tend to have reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence. And when athletes feel less anxiety, they are more likely to have fun playing their sport!

Here's how you can help:

1) Tell your children that you want them to be winners in life and remind them of the three things that winners do (remember ELM).

2) Let your children know you appreciate it when they and their teammates try hard even if they lose the contest.

3) Challenge yourself not to ask, "Did you win?" until after you've asked several, more important questions. Reveal what matters most to you through the questions you ask: "Did you try as hard as you could?", "Are you getting better?", "When you made a mistake did you bounce back?" You could also ask them if they had fun!

4) Recognize that commitment to Mastery is hard work. Be patient and selective when criticizing your child's play, choosing times when they're most receptive. Also, point out situations in which you noticed them trying hard. Tell them when you notice that they are improving regardless of the outcome of a particular play or contest.

B) Filling the "Emotional Tank"

Research shows that the home team wins about 60% of the time. This is because of the emotional support a team receives when it plays in front of its own fans. I want to develop a portable home team advantage that our team can take with us wherever we go. The key to this has to do with something called the "Emotional Tank."

Like gas tanks in cars, all of us have an Emotional Tank that fills and drains. An athlete with a low emotional tank is irritable, pessimistic, and unable to deal well with adversity. On the other hand, an athlete whose tank is filled is cheerful, optimistic, and better able to deal with adversity. The bottom line is that players with empty tanks are less coachable, while those with full tanks are more coachable. I want to will fill our players' tanks so that they'll be able to play their best.

As coaches and parents, there will be times when we need to correct and criticize. Research has shown that a "Plus/Minus Ratio" (praise to criticism) of 5:1 or better is ideal for children's learning. When the ratio of praise to criticism drops much below 5:1, children become discouraged (their tanks become drained!). I am going to strive to achieve this "Golden Ratio".

I want to foster an environment where coaches, players, parents and fans fill each other's tanks.

Here's how you can help:

1) Fill your child's Emotional Tank. Encourage them regardless of what happens in the game. Try not to give them a lot of advice (which after a tough game can seem like criticism, which drains a person's tank). Remember, it's difficult to do well with a low tank. When they make a mistake, you might say something like "Don't worry. It's okay. Let's get the next one. You can do it." After tough losses, it's often helpful to acknowledge your child's feeling of disappointment. For example, saying "I can imagine you must be disappointed to have lost." might help them recognize your sincerity.

2) To give advice your child can hear, try using the "3-Pluses-and-a-Wish" technique. Before you give advice, find three things about your child's performance that you appreciated.

Phrase the advice as a wish:

"You really tried hard in the game today (Plus #1)

I also saw you filling your teammates emotional tank after he made a mistake (Plus #2).

And that play you made towards the end of the game shows how much you are improving (Plus #3)

One thing I wish is that you wouldn't get down on yourself when you make a mistake." (Wish)

If you can't come up with three pluses, don't say the wish because then it may drain your child's emotional tank rather than fill it.

3) Remember the Golden Ratio. Try to praise your child about 5 times for every time you criticize. If you do, your child will be better able to hear your criticism without becoming defensive.

C)" Honoring the Game"

Sportsmanship may seem like an out-of-date concept today when professional athletes and coaches act in ways we would not want our children to imitate. We intend to reverse this trend on our team with the concept of "Honoring the Game."

Honoring the Game gets to the ROOTT of the matter, where ROOTT stands for respect for:

- Rules
- Opponents
- Officials
- Teammates
- Tradition

Rules: Respect for the rules is important, even when it's possible to break them without getting caught. I want our team to play to the letter and spirit of the rules, and to refrain from "bending" them when it dishonors the game.

Opponents: Without opponents, competitive sports make no sense. A worthy opponent challenges us to do our best. We must respect opponents and remember they are members of our community. We will try our hardest to win but not at the expense of demeaning or demonizing our opponents. I intend to show respect for opposing coaches and teams and teach that to my athletes.

Officials: Officials have been selected and trained to enforce rules to keep sports from degenerating into chaos. Officials are not perfect (just like coaches, athletes and parents!) and sometimes make mistakes. However, there is no excuse for treating officials with disrespect when they make errors. I want my players and their parents to show respect for officials, even when they disagree with the call.

Teammates: Our players should feel a commitment to each other as teammates. I ask them to encourage and support one another on and off the playing field.

Tradition: The game our children play has a great tradition. I want to share that tradition with my athletes. It is important to me that my players recognize how privileged we are to be able to participate in organized sports.

Here's how you can help:

1) Let your child know that you want him or her to honor the game. Discuss the meaning of each element of ROOTT with your child. This idea may be difficult for younger children to understand so you may have to adapt the idea to the age and comprehension level of your child.

2) Be a good role model. Honor the Game when you attend your child's games. Cheer our team and the opposing team when good plays are made. If, in your opinion, an officiating mistake is made, refrain from yelling at the official. Use this as an opportunity to think about how difficult it is to officiate a game perfectly.

*For more information about Positive Coaching Alliance, you can visit the PCA website at www.positivecoach.org, call 650-725-0024, send e-mail to pca@positivecoach.org, or write Positive Coaching Alliance, Department of Athletics, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6150.

If you wish to know more about the MLBA's affiliation with the Positive Coaching Alliance, contact the MLBA.