

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

Long-term Motivation Requires Knowing Your Why

By David Benzel



In his book, [Start With Why](#) Simon Sinek defines your “why” as:

**The purpose, cause, or belief that inspires you.
It gives you a filter to make choices AND
will help you to find greater fulfillment in all that you do.**

The concept of “Why” has gained a lot of momentum in recent years but was originally popularized in this [Ted Talk](#), “How Great Leaders Inspire Action,” by Mr. Sinek.

Admittedly, most of his material speaks to adults in the workplace.

So what does “knowing your why” have to do with young athletes participating in youth sports?

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When it comes to long-term motivation, EVERYTHING. And not just for your athlete but also for you, as the parent, trying to fulfill your role well.

Let's look at 3 levels of discovering YOUR athlete's why.

WHY Do Youth Sports Exist?

Ideally, youth sports exist for these 3 reasons:

- To have fun
- To develop skills
- To learn to compete

According to a private firm — [WinterGreen Research](#) — youth sports are now a 17-billion-dollar market. Unfortunately, as the youth sports industry has grown exponentially, so have the “whys.”

With that much money involved, it's not surprising that program administrators, coaches, and parents are not JUST seeing these activities through the lens of fun, skill development, and competition.

However, if our kids are to stay interested in playing, we have to get back to the original “whys.”

Especially the aspect of fun.

Most often when asked for a reason for quitting a sport, young athletes say it is no longer fun. This might be because we have taken skill development and competition to higher and higher levels through travel teams, sports clinics, personal coaching, etc. Ultimately, this approach edges out the “fun factor” and impacts our athlete's longevity.

Remembering the original intent for youth sports is a critical starting point and might be a wakeup call for some families.

WHY Is YOUR Child Participating in Sport?

What element of being involved with sports has captured the attention of your athlete? Have you ever asked this question?

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Common answers they might give are:

- To be with friends
- Improve fitness
- Compete
- Learn new skills
- Have fun
- Belong to a group



If it was YOUR idea for “Suzy” to play on a team, the reasons might include:

- Striving for a scholarship
- Teaching her a sport that you played and loved
- Living vicariously through your athlete
- Building character
- Keeping her busy

Identifying your child’s “why” and your own “why” may reveal that you are on two different journeys — and this results in frustration on both sides.

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As kids mature their reasons for playing sports may change. It's important to have season-to-season conversations about why they want to invest the time and energy into being on a team.

This not only refocuses their efforts, but it gives you insight into what keeps them motivated.

WHY Focus on a Specific Sport?

Some kids are drawn to one specific sport. Their reasons may overlap with some of the ones listed above, but they might also include:

- Mom or Dad played it
- I want to wear the gear
- My body is “built” for it
- A gym teacher or someone else told me I would be good at it
- I have easy access to this sport
- It's my sweet spot, or I have a natural talent
- It will keep me in shape for another sport
- There are scholarships available
- My older sibling played

To help your child identify their “why” for a specific sport, it is helpful to ask,

“What are you busy doing in this sport when it is most satisfying to you?”

As they identify their favorite things about it, they might find the inspiration to work harder and make lifestyle choices that enhance their abilities.

Final Thoughts

Involvement in sports offers many lifelong benefits.

When parents help their athlete identify the purpose, cause, or belief — or the why — that most inspires them to work hard, they give their child a motivational tool to get through the natural ups and downs that come with sports participation.

David Benzel is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"*
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