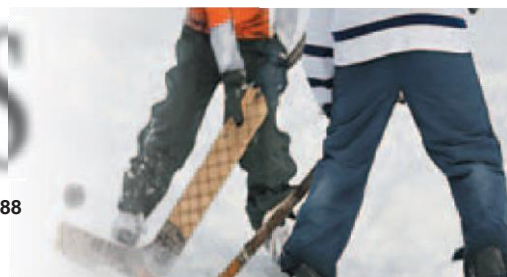


# SPORTS

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## We have to do something about bullying in sports



**Jim Loughlin**  
Training Matters

I have been blessed with the opportunity to work in sport for the last 20 years. Over the course of my time as a coach and sport administrator, one topic that comes up each year is the role that bullying plays in creating a negative experience for those participating.

What surprises me most is not that bullying goes on in a sporting environment. Bullying happens everywhere: In schools, the workplace and in relationships.

In the animal world bullying plays out in the form of dominance amongst packs of animals. In our house there are two dogs; a female and a male. While the male is larger and quicker, there is no doubt that the boss is the female. Whether through a growl, a quick nip or even pushing the male out of the way, the female is constantly staking her claim as the alpha dog. Sorting out a pecking order is a taken for granted part of being a pack animal.

Get a group of children together and a similar sort of jostling for positions occurs. While this is normal for the most part, this type of activity becomes unacceptable when an individual uses inappropriate force, harsh words or both.

Unfortunately, this type of behaviour doesn't just occur with children. It also occurs with coaches striving to clarify they are the ones in charge. While setting expectations and boundaries are necessary while coaching, any actions that put participants in a position where they feel uncomfortable or even threatened is unacceptable and should be dealt with immediately.

Sadly, bullying by children or coaches is seldom dealt with immediately for fear of reprisal.

Parents have told me they either didn't want their son or daughter to feel uncomfortable, or that they didn't want to damage their relationship with a set of parents and certainly didn't want the coach to take it out on their child should they express concern.

Their argument is that currently their child is being treated poorly and to avoid having their child being treated worse they are going to say nothing. They are suggesting that they are satisfied with their child being treated just poorly versus extremely poorly? Huh?

The alternative solution is that the parents pull their child from participating in the sport or the child chooses to quit. As far as I'm concerned, this is one of the many reasons we have an epidemic of children dropping out of sport.

So what is the solution? While overly simplistic, I propose three basic ways to deal with this issue.

First off, sport organizations need to educate coaches, parents and participants prior to the start of each season about what is and what isn't bullying. They need to clarify that they will not tolerate such behaviour and that should a concern be raised that they intend to deal with it seriously and promptly.

Second, organizations need to have an anonymous early warning system in place whereby parents can express concerns that there might be an issue for the organization or coach to look into. The system would be used in an attempt to nip the potential issue in the bud. If an organization reads about a potential concern they can give the coach a heads up to start initiating change or to keep an eye on certain individuals. This is a proactive approach to dealing with bullying.

Finally, organizations need to have a clearly spelled out code of conduct that also includes how bullying will be dealt with. This is the final action that would need to be taken to deal with a potential bullying situation.

The only way for bullying to negatively impact a participant's experience is if it isn't dealt with immediately!

Bullying needs to have light shone upon it and dealt with by parents, coaches and the sports organizations. Through creating a safe pathway for initial concerns to be shared and dealt with we may decrease the number of participants having negative experiences and dropping out.

Parents, hold yourselves, each other and the organizations you spend your hard-earned money with to take bullying seriously now and in the future. All the best in working on creating a healthy sporting environment for all those involved.



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