

2018 Challenge: Sport v Computer game - How do we make sport more appealing?

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Have you ever wondered why as parents we are constantly battling with our children over time on devices or specifically on computer games?

Are you ready to help me as parents and coaches to take on the challenge of toppling the computer game?

There is no doubt that many of us dislike the number of hours played on devices by our children each week and many of us do our best to impose time restrictions and manage the situation to the best of our ability and we must continue to do so.

It is obvious that we need to limit this time, encourage them to be creative with other games away from a screen, go outside and play as well as ensure that they are getting enough physical activity during a regular week.

Two recent surveys show that children under the age of 8 spend over two hours a day in front of a screen whilst those between 8 and 16 can average as much as 6.5 hours a day across multiple digital platforms.

So what is it that makes the computer game so appealing to children rather than the alternative of going out to play?

One of the major reasons I am afraid and this is a warning to both parents and coaches is that the computer game meets the needs of the child and they are the focus of the whole experience unlike in many sporting environments where the needs of the adult can often be seen to be met first.

Many of the games designers are often asking for feedback from children meaning the next version of the game goes even further in meeting the demands of the child, making the experience even better than before with the child craving more and more of the perceived good stuff.

They allow the child to participate the whole time, play with friends and be part of the whole experience. There is certainly no waiting in a line for a go or spending time on the bench waiting to get on the field.

They allow the child to be in control of a situation, make their own decisions, take educated risks without ramifications and dust themselves down and start again without criticism from a third party.

By the time we have thrown in that children get to live in their own reality, learn by doing without fear, problem solve on their own terms and at their own speed you can see why the computer game is so appealing to them.

Do the sports environments that your children are involved in reflect this? Are you having to drag your children off the field because the session has been both exhilarating and addictive? This is definitely possible and many coaches will be creating such an environment if they are not then hopefully you will find an alternative session for your child in 2018 or that coaches will start to evolve and make changes to the environment they create.

Parents: What can you do to make sport and physical activity more appealing than the computer game?

- Focus on the learning of your child as opposed to the winning
- Support your child, try not to be a 'second' coach
- Make sure they are having 'FUN'
- Ensure the activity is set up to meet the needs and demands of your child
- Allow your child to participate in multiple sports and in multiple environments
- See mistakes as an opportunity to learn
- Allow them to fail and experiment, this will help them become more creative and problem solve

Coaches : Do you put as much hard work and thought into your sessions as the video game makers do to make the experience one worth participating in for the children?

Sporting sessions can be just as exhilarating and addictive as the video game and perhaps the real success is if we are having to drag our players off the field because they want to keep practising and playing.

If we can make it all about the children's experience then success is just around the corner, the technological industry can vouch for that!

We have talked about the 'Ultimate Success' of children participating in sport and physical activity for life and coaches and parents creating an environment that is fun and child centred as opposed to meeting the demands of the adult.

If all parties can work together on this in 2018 then it may well be the year that sport wrestled back some control from the computer game.

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