



The Original Athlete in All of Us

Dr. Pete Temple

There are a lot of reasons why I love living in the Tri-Cities. One that I'm most grateful for is the quality of our high school sports. Each season, and in every sport, there is a team somewhere in our area that is having a spectacular season and vying for a State Championship. We get to enjoy this exciting entertainment for about four bucks, if not for free.

We pack the local gyms and stadiums to watch kids play sports. The support and enthusiasm we show our high school teams is awesome, but it can come at a cost if we're not careful. You see, high school sports are becoming very serious business. Don't get me wrong, I think the development our kids are getting and the sophistication of our local programs are fantastic. We have outstanding coaches and, in addition to learning the X's and O's, young athletes now are training harder than ever to meet both personal and team goals. This is great unless, of course, the pressure (and we as parents have a role in this) and demands start to take the fun out of playing.

As a protection against this, I'd like to re-acquaint high school athletes with someone they used to know. I want them to find their *original athlete*. What is their original athlete? Their original athlete is the kid who played sports for the very first time. He or she played for the pure joy of it. Their original athlete played hard because it was fun, not because someone told them to. Their original athlete played loose and without fear of making a mistake because mistakes were irrelevant to the process of having fun.

Their original athlete didn't worry about what others thought, or about disappointing anyone because expectations had no place in the back yard. Original athletes weren't playing for scholarships, they were playing because they simply wanted to. Original athletes played whatever sport they desired at the moment. Some of the greatest plays ever made were made by their original athlete.

High school athletes today are so talented—much more talented than when I was competing. They're stronger, faster, smarter, and better conditioned. They receive outstanding coaching and outside training. They are capable of playing their sports at a very high level and are expected to do so. Sometimes the emphasis placed on sports can get heavy for kids (I see it in my practice all the time). The weight can slow kids down, make them tentative and, worst of all, take the smiles off their face. I'm convinced that the happiest *and most successful athletes* are the ones who stay connected to their original athlete and let their hard work and training bring out the best in him or her.

This isn't just a "sports should be fun" position. Not at all. My experience has led me to truly believe that athletes that are having fun are more fluid, creative, in the moment, and more fully tap into their abilities. Kids started playing sports for a reason. If that reason has changed and they seem to be struggling, encourage them to reconnect with their original athlete. They'll remember.

Dr. Pete Temple is a Clinical Sports Psychologist and the founder of Mind's Eye Sports Performance in Geneva, Illinois. He specializes in the development of the mental game for high school and collegiate athletes throughout the Chicagoland area, and across the country. To learn more, please visit www.mindseyesports.com