

“It’s more than just Pay To PLAY!”

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Gas is floating around the \$5.00 a gallon. Food costs have skyrocketed. Heating costs up dramatically. School districts operating expenses are going up. As districts begin to face many difficult financial decisions, the phenomenon of “Pay To Play” has hit many areas and has become part of our sports vocabulary. Is the term fair? Is the term really representing what is happening? Are teams just playing?

Many teachers, coaches, civic leaders, business people, doctors, lawyers and working professionals are where they are today because of a coach. A coach who through sports, that taught them many important things about life and gave them life skills that they would later call on in adulthood. One only has to have read Steve Bertrand’s July article in Northwest Runner Magazine on his coach Marvin L. Gray, to see the impact Coach Gray had on and still has on Steve’s coaching and life. Steve has picked up Coach Gray’s baton and now has the similar impact on his student/athlete’s. Some of these skills just can’t be learned in a chemistry, biology or algebra class regardless of the classes’ importance. So perhaps the term “play” is only slightly representing what is going on in our co-curricular activities. It might be easier to charge a fee or even raise the fee when we use the term “playing” but what about the many valuable life skills one attains through participation in co-curricular programs.

Before examining so called “Pay to Play”, I think it’s only fair we call after school activities what they really are. Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to call after school activities, co-curricular than extra-curricular? Co-curricular means along side of your curricular work or part of, not in addition to. It’s much easier to charge a fee to someone when we use the term “extra-curricular” activities, just as it is for using the term “playing.” So having said that, let’s look at what co-curricular activities really do for the well-rounded student who is preparing for life.

Co-Curricular activities teach us at least 25 items that will help us later in life:

1. Sports aren't always fair and neither is real life!
2. Goals are important and you need to have them, short, middle and long term. Have vision!
3. Self-discipline is very important. If you can't discipline yourself, others will help you.
4. There will be good times and bad times. Enjoy one and **prepare** for the other.
5. You'll get knocked on your gluteus maximus a lot. It's what you do when you are knocked down that really matters. Life will hit you harder than the spike in volleyball or the linebacker in football.
6. The person you are competing against won't ask you how your self-esteem is and later in life, seldom in your job, will your boss ask you that either. Your boss is interested in you getting the job done with success.
7. Being successful takes work and you'll need to push your mind and body to levels that are uncomfortable.
8. Character and humility can take you and those around you a long way.
9. The score does matter even in junior high/middle and high school. Later in life, they keep score and there are winners and losers. Make no mistake about that!
10. You'll be around people you don't like but still have to get along with them for the good of all and success of the team. Just wait until you get a work colleague or boss you don't like and you'll most likely run across a few of those throughout life.
11. The coach will tell you things you don't want to hear and so will the referee. Later your boss will do the same thing. Your response to both will matter. One may park your gluts on the bench. The other might fire you. The bench will look like a soft landing in comparison.
12. Time management is a great skill to learn for school success and later in life.
13. Your competitors may cheat or demonstrate poor sportsmanship. How will you react? There are rules you must play by in sport and life.
14. The art of listening and focusing will help create success. They'll both save time and later save money.

15. Your teammates may say things that hurt you. Get use to it. Just know there are more darts headed your way in life. You can take the high road if you choose.
16. Balance in life is very important. Be well rounded.
17. Lifetime fitness is just that. It is forever and your school sports team will teach you just that, giving you skills and knowledge for a lifetime of physical well being. Your competitive days will one-day end but lifetime fitness is never ends. We should all be alarmed by the onslaught of Type II diabetes and increase in childhood obesity to understand the importance fitness plays while participating in co-curricular programs, not to mention how exercise and adolescent brain development go hand in hand. NOTE:(Childhood obesity is a national crisis. Check out CDC figures. The thought of cutting Physical education or recess opportunities for kids today with a 'pie in the sky' idea that it will elevate high stakes test scores makes absolutely no sense!)
18. Sports give you the opportunity to pick someone up that needs to be encouraged. In life, encouragement is caring. People make mistakes. Don't stomp on them when they are down. Help them learn from that mistake and allow them to help you correct your mistake.
19. Sometimes you'll need to take the lead and other times you'll need to be a good follower. Both are important.
20. You may not get 5 times to get it right. Ask a running back if he wants to give the lineman 5 times to get it right in the game. Also, in real life there will be a correct answer to the question and you'll be required to get it right. You may not be rewarded just because you showed your work, especially if it's wrong!
21. When the odds are stacked against you, you have two options. Give up or get after it!
22. Saying "Thank you" is really powerful. Start practicing on your team and coaches.
23. A weak link in the chain can hurt everyone. People around you are counting on you.
24. People older than you have wisdom, so ask questions and learn.
25. Along with rights come responsibilities. With more rights come more responsibilities.

No one can argue that co-curricular activities have many lifetime benefits for the student/athlete. What about the student who can't afford a so-called "Pay to play" fee. Is there a fund set up to help that student? Will the fee be

waived for that person because of financial hardship? Are there alternative funding options other than a “pay to play” fee? What about families with more than one child or those who participate in multiple sports offerings?

It’s easy to say, “Well, kids pay fees to participate in club sports.” The other side of the argument is that not all kids play club sports. For many kids, school co-curricular programs are the only opportunity that student may have to acquire the many benefits those programs have to offer. The book “Game On, by Tom Farrey states, “Even Physical Education classes are disappearing, thanks in part to the misconception that private, non school sports will fill the void. Playing sports has become a case of the haves and have nots, just like other phases of American life.” Many schools who instituted “Pay to Play” have seen participation numbers decrease. It’s hard to argue that fact.

“Pay to Play” is likely here to stay but must do all we can to make sure that no child is left behind that wants to participate. If we’re not going to leave them behind in the classroom, we can’t leave them behind in co-curricular activities. They say, “some things money can’t buy.” In this case money is buying at least 25 great things that will help our student/athletes and leaders of tomorrow. It’s more than just “pay to play!” Co-curricular activities are a great investment that our kids will benefit greatly from forever! Whether it be Coach Marvin L. Gray or Coach Steve Bertrand or the countless hundreds of coaches in the State of Washington, a list to large too mention, the message is always the same. **Everyday Washington Middle School and High School coaches teach lifelong skills through sports and it’s far more than just playing.**