



What Can I Do About Coach Benching My Child?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“My question is, can a coach bench a player for the season for missing a practice? My son, age 13, has played and won 5 championships and has been a starter for 5 years. Coach voted him MVP last season, and my son was a big factor in his first year of success as a coach. The first game this season his coach benched him.

The past two games, my son has played two innings and didn't come to bat for the whole game. In the past, he always played 2nd base and has hit lead off. This year, the coach yells at my son, and when my son does make a play, the coach says nothing but 'Get to the bench.' I, and others, don't understand. We have yet to win a game. I'm thinking of withdrawing my son. First, I'd like to know if I am overreacting.”

PCA Response by Joe Scally, PCA Trainer–Chicago

Because of the tremendous amounts of time and energy coaches commit to their teams, they have the prerogative to decide playing time. Of course, coaches must follow league guidelines regarding playing time. Absent a violation of those rules, we discourage parents from questioning a coach's decision about playing time. A situation of reduced playing time is often frustrating for a parent, but it is an opportunity for the player to learn a variety of life lessons.

One of the most important ones is how to speak to someone in authority regarding ways to achieve one's goals. You could encourage your son to speak directly to the coach about getting more playing time or playing a different position. You should coach your son on how to have a respectful conversation. He can ask questions such as “Is there something I can be doing better? What can I do at practice or at home to improve? What can I do to best help the team?” This might be a difficult conversation for a 13 year old, but it is a developmentally appropriate step.

It must be confusing for your son to go from MVP to a bench player in the course of the off-season. There may be a reason for the switch: e.g. new players or improvement by existing players on the team, a change in competitive level, a change in your son's attitude. It would help for the coach to explain the reason to your son.

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Even if the coach is operating within league rules regarding playing time decisions, benching a player for the season because of missing a practice, yelling, and telling a player to get to the bench is harsh treatment. You do not indicate the competitive level of the team, so it is difficult to say whether not batting for a game is mistreatment. Certainly, if that were to happen game after game it would be demotivating to your son. Good coaches find a way to get kids into games at every competitive level, including getting an opportunity to bat.

Nevertheless, a conversation between your son and the coach may clarify the situation. If the coach does not respond by telling your son the reasons for his role on the team and offering some suggestions for improvement, then you will have to decide whether to seek a meeting with the coach.

First of all, make sure your son is ok with you doing so. Ask for a private meeting at some time other than before or after a game. Do not raise the issue of playing time. Ask questions like those listed above. You can ask if he agrees with your observation that he is treating your son differently this year and, if so, the reasons. Recognize that the success your son had in the past does not entitle him to a particular spot this season.

If these steps do not resolve the issue, then you will have to decide whether your son will complete the season. Again, make sure you understand what your son is thinking before any decision is made. Focus only on the potential life lessons your son can learn by dealing with an adverse situation. Winning on the scoreboard is not relevant.

Unless the coach is being abusive, consider encouraging your son to keep on trying. You can acknowledge to him that the situation is difficult and confusing. With your support he can maintain his love for the game and move on to a better situation next season.

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