

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Finding Fulfillment in Coaching

If you're a sports junkie who longs for a chance to coach youth sports teams at the community level, but you figure you just don't have the time to get involved, Fred Duboe, M.D., has some advice for you.

Just do it. "When all is said and done, I don't think people are doing to count how much salary you took home or how many babies you delivered," said Dr. Duboe, an ob.gyn. who practices in Hoffman Estates, Ill., northwest of Chicago. "People are going to count what you gave to society and how you helped kids grow up—how you helped people in the community and what difference you made in your community in the long run. Show kids that doctors aren't 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week scientists. Show them that they are humans, with a real feel for life outside the hospital."

For the last 11 years, Dr. Duboe has helped coach boys' baseball teams in the Buffalo Grove (Ill.) Recreational Association. He started coaching when his oldest son, Michael, turned 8. He then coached his middle son, Jason. Last year he served as an assistant coach for a traveling team featuring his youngest son, Eric.

Eric is 12, and Michael and Jason have moved on to college and high school, respectively. Dr. Duboe said he has gained personal fulfillment from watching his sons "learn how to play as part of a team and not simply be engulfed in individual accomplishments alone; having them learn the discipline," he said.

"They have a rigorous school schedule. For them to balance sports with their school schedule also helps them prepare for later years, when life is going to be not just a matter of A vs.

B; it's a matter of integrating recreation and athletics, as well as working hard. If they play hard, they work hard. I think they learn to apportion their time more efficiently. They learn to be happy when they're active. Every kid deserves a little bit of time sitting around, but I think [sports] has helped them to gain confidence and interpersonal skills with their friends."

He added that his role as assistant coach is a "tremendous stress outlet" from the pressures of increasing managed care, declining reimbursement, and increasing malpractice insurance rates that obstetricians and other physicians face from day to day. "It allows you to go back to work a little bit more refreshed than you would

otherwise," said Dr. Duboe. "I'm very dedicated to my patients and my job, but it's a great source of recreation for me, of health. I hope it will keep my heart a little bit younger as I get into my decades coming up."

Last winter, Neil Goldberg, M.D., served as head coach for a sixth-grade basketball team that his son Ross played on as part



Dr. Neil Goldberg coached the sixth-grade basketball team of his son, Ross.

of the Scarsdale (N.Y.) Tri-County Basketball League. "The parents would come to almost every game, so I got to see kids star in front of their parents, brothers, and sisters," said Dr. Goldberg, a dermatologist in private practice in Bronxville. "I got to see kids star and shine. With basketball, you could make just one good shot, and even if you sucked the rest of the game, that's enough to carry you for a whole week. It was just so rewarding to me to be in the middle of it all the time."

It also provided him time to spend with his son. "Kids quickly get old enough that they don't want to hang out with their parents," Dr. Goldberg noted. "And they quickly get old enough that they're coached by real coaches in school. There are only so many years that a dad can coach his kids playing sports, and they should just grab every minute."

You don't have to look far to land a coaching opportunity on a youth sports team. Good places to start include your local YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, community recreation center, Little League, or American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), to name a few. Dr. Goldberg first volunteered to help teach and coach basketball skills to youngsters when Ross was in kindergarten.

"I started to be one of the people who did the organizing," he recalled. "I finally got to be one of the people who did the coaching; then I worked my way up to being the head coach. It's a long process, because there are a lot of dads who would like to coach these teams."

He described his team's style of play as vigorous. "We play an in-your-face, up-

every-second, high pressure defense with a lot of substitutions," he said. "Every kid is tired when they finish playing us and when they play for us."

Coaching also helps physicians assume a different role in the community, noted Rafael Silva, M.D., a family physician who coaches an AYSO team in Chula Vista, Calif. "I've made a lot of friends by being involved, and I run into people who know me as the coach for their kid a year ago or 2 years ago," said Dr. Silva, who practices at the Bonita branch of Kaiser Permanente. "That's been a real plus."

Moreover, the players you coach sometimes become your patients. "I have a couple of kids who were on the first team I coached who found out I'm a doctor, so they decided to come and see me as a patient," he said. "That's going to be fun to watch them grow up and know that they were on my first team."

Another reward for him is watching youngsters improve their skills and learn good sportsmanship. "It's a precious moment when they score their first goal ever," he added. "Their face lights up."

Coaching can also bring self-reflection.

"My dad was a traveling salesman, and he didn't have a lot of time to devote to sports because he was so busy working his tail off," Dr. Duboe said. "Hopefully, coaching will be something my kids will carry on to their kids, as well."

Coaching isn't just for dads. Melinda Silva, M.D., serves as an assistant coach for her husband's team. The couple got involved with AYSO 5 years ago when their oldest son, Rafael III, turned 6 years old.

"The level of involvement that you have is not really as important as that you are involved somehow, whether that means you help them stretch before the game for 10 or 15 minutes," said Dr. Silva, a family physician at the Otay Mesa, Calif., branch of Kaiser Permanente. "It's amazing how much an impression will make on a child for how little involvement you give. People are afraid [to get involved] because they're always afraid of what the time commitment means, but you can have varying levels of involvement. Just try."

Having young children of your own is not a prerequisite to becoming a coach, noted Dr. Rafael Silva, who played soccer in high school and in adult leagues. He plans to continue coaching in some capacity after his other three children move beyond school age.

"I still love the smell of freshly cut grass and mud on my cleats," he said. "I still have the love of the sport, and that's what keeps me going back."

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau

Advice on How to Make the Time

So you decide to help out as a coach for a youth sports team, but you wonder: "How am I going to fit this into my schedule?"

Physician-coaches who were interviewed for this column offered the following advice:

► Coordinate with your office staff and practice partners. Set your office hours once the practice times and game times have been finalized. "I make it balance by being efficient with office work and with reviewing charts and trading time between partners, maximizing the time off and vacations as much as possible," Dr. Duboe said. "The fact that I have four partners and a nurse-midwife makes things manageable, as well."

Dr. Goldberg noted that it pays to achieve the rank of head coach, because in most cases, that person gets to arrange practice times and sometimes even games around his or her own schedule. "For practice nights, I picked the days I didn't work late," he said. "I got to schedule the Saturdays. I saw patients on Saturdays where I knew I didn't have early morning games."

That strategy works for indoor sports, but when Saturday matches of

outdoor sports like baseball and soccer are canceled due to inclement weather, "you're home not making any money and not doing anything, and the kids can't play," Dr. Goldberg said. "That drives me crazy."

► Consider reducing your work hours. Dr. Rafael Silva works a 90% schedule so he can preside over his soccer team's Thursday afternoon practices. "I chose to take a 10% pay cut to have a free afternoon so I can do something else," he said.

His wife, Dr. Melinda Silva, works an 80% schedule so she can help with team activities, as well as other family activities. "That's a priority we made because it's important for us to have that balance in our lives," Dr. Melinda Silva said.

► Start slowly. Dr. Rafael Silva advised starting out as a team parent or an assistant coach. That way you get a realistic idea of the time commitment required. "If they see that they would like to be a head coach the following year, then they can jump right in," he said. "I think the position to be a team parent or an assistant coach is a good way to learn. That way you don't feel stressed out about starting something totally new."