

# Quality Over Quantity

**John Pinkman**  
**October 2010 --- Again**

You may wonder why this article is appearing in Collegiate Baseball with its dedication to college programs. But you may not realize that the CB has a wide readership of recreational coaches and parents. During the winter meetings in Dallas, many concerned college coaches approached me with this very subject. They clearly see the results that the following culture produces. Summer and Fall coaches, this may hit you hard. You may feel trapped between what you want to do and what you think you can do. To begin with, please permit me a couple of old sayings which in and of themselves, you will agree. To you I say, "The tail doesn't wag the dog," and "quality is always better than quantity."

I must remember to save this article; because I will certainly need to reissue it in the near future. Why? Because I (we) have been saying the same damn thing, every year since 1995! Perhaps my message was/is unclear; I've failed to communicate properly... naaah. Nonetheless, every year without fail, independent recreational teams will ask for advice on creating a competitive program. Each year my preamble advises, "coach, what I'm about to say, you will:

- undoubtedly ignore
- succumb to parent pressure
- ultimately regret you did
- and the following year, forget you did... and repeat the identical process"

They do.... each year.... without fail.

Do what? Recreational coaches fail to build a team with a sufficient number of players to insure a dependable, quality, and competitive team. AND most important a HEALTHY & SAFE playing experience. Here's the reply; and by the way, it is always the reply. "I agree with you John, but the parents want their kids to get a lot of playing time."

Anyone that has read my columns for the past 15 years knows that I do not play favorites in my opinions. I'm strictly a one at a time issue journalist. I call'em as I see'em. I'm not a shill for coaches or players or parents. (I must admit to a little consistent anger at the NCAA, but...who doesn't)

So copy the following, hand it out and put the retribution on me. It addresses both sides of the "my kid has got to play a lot" issue.

***If you wish contact me send an email to [john@pinkman.us](mailto:john@pinkman.us) and I will send you a PDF copy of the following.***

## **PARENTS**

Our ball club is designed to accommodate 20 players, not 12. In the past you may have participated on teams that have promised your son a tremendous amount of playing time involving many games and much exciting travel. You may have concerns as to why we chose to carry this number of players. As you read, please begin to recall that experience.

We created this team as a quality alternative to open enrollment leagues. The term quality is important. We believe that quality is vital to our mission. We will make four promises to you;

1. We will never lie to you
2. Your son will play
3. Your child will leave this program a better player than when he arrived
4. If you have any concerns we will immediately address them directly in a meeting with you and your son together, in a location other than the field.

If you total that all up it defines fun. Fun is not failing, succeeding is not always winning. It is not fun to fail, irrespective of the game's outcome.

We believe that quality has nothing to do with playing every inning of every game. A quality competitive experience exposes a player to equal or superior talent, in which the player can compete at his chosen position with consistent enthusiasm, effort and skill. He will receive training based on recent scientifically proven information. We will give him an opportunity to lead and motivate others. As such he must be mentally and physical prepared to accept that role every day. If your son elects to compete to play in high school or college, recruiters will look for a consistent demonstration of superior skill. Playing 6 games in one week will expose anything but consistent skill. Scrapping together 9 to 11 players to play a game will not demonstrate anything but mental and physical fatigue.

As you have sought, we are a developmental program. No one can develop by merely repeating last season's skills. There is little chance of improvement by merely playing games. **You may recall this statement from your personal training in your own business career; Improvement requires change. It is impossible to improve or develop by repeating last year's skill set. This is most misunderstood in baseball.**

For us to complete our promises to you we must engage teaching coaches who can educate your son athletically to become a student athlete. Our coaches need to direct his motivation to incorporate his innate intelligence into his athletic experience. We also must design a schedule that accommodates practices. In a developmental program, practice workouts are as important and in many ways MORE important than actual games. You are not alone in thinking traditional baseball practices are boring. There are good reasons for players not wanting to attend. We have invested in continued baseball education and coach training to assure you that that boredom will not be your experience with this organization. We will provide practices that are fun as well as instructive. Our practices will reflect issues that have occurred in previous games and include input and leadership from players as to their specific ideas and personal needs.

We believe that playing time is more related to total immersion in the game, than merely occupying a position on the field. This is why we carry a sufficient number of players to be competitive in every inning of every game and to conduct meaningful practices. Why choose an independent team experience with accompanied financial and time commitment strains and receive a house league experience?

***We realize that you still may not be convinced of the merits of our policy to roster more players.***

You may recall being in this situation. Beginning in July, a team of 12 to 14 will routinely see 9 to 10 players attending games and (if there are any) practices.... maybe 5 attend, severely limiting the process. The following are, by most everyone's standards, reasonable and acceptable absences for not attending recreation commitments. They have all been SUBMITTED BY PARENTS.

#### **The TOP 10 Reasons**

1. Family vacation
2. Family emergency
3. Religious conflict
4. Educational tutoring
5. Injury
6. Illness
7. Colleges visits and exposure camps
8. Single parent business travel and child care
9. Transportation
10. Financial strain - one that is never said, but often present

All legitimate personal reasons.

But remember this; the team is still left with 9 players and occasionally forced to recruit a player from the opponent. By weeks end the skilled pitchers are fatigued, sore and are logically out of healthy innings to pitch. Others, who are not pitchers, if you will, pitch in, to pitch. The rest of the team, who has played 4 to 6 games that or the previous week, are at best lethargic. Most recreational players lack the proper conditioning and nutrition for the ordeal. The game is miserable. Is this the fun you all sought? Is this a familiar experience? Please remember: in the beginning of the season, the parents sought a team that carried a limit of 12 players so their child could play more.

**Our program chooses quality over quantity.**

We would rather have players play 4 to 5 innings a game, motivated, alert at 100%; focused and competitive every moment, than field a tired fatigue shell of a body, occupying a position that he does not know or cares little to learn. We understand that our players will legitimately miss a few games; others will stand in his place, equal to the task. We will be formidable, competitive and provide the best baseball education to child has experienced to date. Thanks for your cooperation,

Your Coaches

**POST SCRIPT:** I'm back with you now. It has been my direct experience that too many parents and players think they are qualified for independent baseball teams. Many mistakenly believe that they will improve their reputation by merely playing on a "TRAVEL" team and they will automatically improve by playing more games. Some are socially pressured to participate. Players/parents overestimate personal talent and underestimate the full commitment required; especially the time. Players are not physically, mentally or emotionally prepared to commit to the process. Families do not have the financial ability to endure the hidden costs (motel, meals, transportation, etc.) that invariably arrive with mid or late season travel. This is not a criticism. But the decision should be carefully considered. The independent team experience requires many family sacrifices. Open enrollment league teams offer fewer family scheduling interferences and much less economic strains. In either option parents must clearly learn, prior to making a commitment to participate, all the issues that the family will face in that commitment. Coaches have a responsibility to clearly communicate the team's mission statement, core values and required player (family) commitments -- in writing. Or the team will suffer occasional or permanent defections. Independent means, players can vote with their feet.

The massive turnover in independent teams identifies that both parties are not doing a good job communicating with each other, resulting in unfulfilled, promises and expectations. The only people profiting here are the uniform manufacturers!

Parents, think seriously about the commitment to the independent team. Call a few of last season's parents to obtain their personal experience, before you get into the stands at a game. Due diligence will insure that you sign on to a significant athletic experience, not an unpleasant social exercise.

Coaches, as independent organizations you should teach, as well a play. If you can't or won't ---don't create the team! If you think your responsibility lies merely to "general manage", create a schedule, fill out a game roster, then after the game take the kids to center field and unload criticisms, you will suffer the disappointment surly to follow. If you think you can create a serious schedule and meaningful program with 12 players - you are wrong. If you have tried in the past, did you forget what happened? Why would you think it will change?

Run your team as if it were your business: define your mission and lead the group to achieve. Acquire the information needed to excel, determine the skills needed to develop, hire great people to execute the plan, discover leaders within and help them lead.

If these comments and issues jog a recent memory or experience, the logical extension should be more players on fewer teams, resulting in the elimination of 35% of independent teams. It probably won't for one simple word, ego; every ones! A tired old phrase, "it's all about the kids!"..... Really?

This article will repeat itself in one year.