

## *Why My Kids Played Sports*

I never put my kids in sports because I thought it guaranteed scholarships, fame, or professional careers. Of course, those things would have been incredible. Every parent loves watching their child succeed, score goals, touchdowns, hit big shots, win games, and celebrate accomplishments. Those moments are special, and they always will be.

But the older I get, and the longer I spend working with young athletes and families, the more I realize sports were never really about the destination.

They were about who my kids became along the way.

Sports taught my children things they could never fully learn in a classroom or at home. You can talk to your kids about discipline, resilience, teamwork, sacrifice, confidence, and accountability — but there is something different about living those lessons in real time.

There is something powerful about standing on a field or a court after a tough loss and deciding to keep going anyway.

I wanted my kids to learn how to walk into difficult situations with confidence. I wanted them to understand how to compete in rooms where people may underestimate them, doubt them, or think they do not belong. I wanted them to learn perseverance. I wanted them to learn how to lose without falling apart, how to fail, even publicly, and still wake up the next morning ready to work again.

Sports taught them those things.

I wanted my kids to understand accountability. To learn how to work with people who think differently than they do, come from different backgrounds, and see the world differently. I wanted them to learn how to sacrifice for something bigger than themselves. To understand commitment. To push through exhausting practices, uncomfortable moments, criticism, setbacks, injuries, losses, and disappointment.

I wanted them to understand that effort matters more than excuses, and that growth almost always comes through adversity.

Sports taught them that too.

Some of the most important moments in sports are not the wins. They are the moments after getting cut from a team or sitting on the bench when they thought they deserved to play. Learning how to respond when life feels unfair. Learning how to respect coaches, teammates, officials, and opponents even when emotions are high.

Those moments shape character.

What I have learned over the years is that confidence is not built through comfort. It is built through challenges. Through pressure. Through competition. Through overcoming fear, failure, doubt, and adversity. Confidence is earned when young people realize they can survive hard things.

And there is something incredibly powerful about watching your children discover their own strength. Not just physical strength — but emotional strength, resilience, leadership, discipline, toughness, humility, and self-belief.

Research continues to show that kids who play sports are more likely to experience higher levels of confidence, lower rates of anxiety and depression, healthier lifestyles, stronger relationships, and greater success later in life. But beyond all the statistics, I have seen firsthand what sports can do for young people.

I see shy kids become leaders.

I have watched insecure kids become confident.

I have watched young athletes learn how to handle adversity with grace, toughness, and maturity.

I have watched sports give kids purpose, friendships, structure, and belief in themselves.

That is why my kids played sports.

Not because I needed them to become athletes forever — but because I wanted them to become strong, resilient, confident people forever.

After the trophies are forgotten, the uniforms no longer fit, and the games are over, the lessons will remain ingrained in them forever.

Those lessons were always the real prize!

Donnie Emerson, Executive Director Bend FC