

Are You Better Than A 9-Year-Old?

Over the course of my coaching career I have had the privilege of being trusted to coach kids. I have coached kids as young as 5 in team sports (ice hockey and flag football) and as young as 8 in individual sports (athletics/weightlifting). These kids all want to be superstars and assuming you have a competent coach, are working supplemental drills for the majority of the training session. They do the little things that provide a base for development of the athlete first with the sport in mind. Kids will generally pay attention and buy in to the drills and put 100% effort into everything the coach asks of them.

Side note before we proceed. In the few years I spent coaching mini-mite hockey, I learned a few very valuable lessons. First, I was more than 20 years older than the kids I was coaching but we all acted the same in the locker room and outside of the rink waiting for the Zamboni machine to finish cleaning up the ice. Making faces at each other, sticking tongues out, all types of kid stuff. It made me realize that I am still a mini-mite kid at heart. The other lesson I learned is that, given the right circumstance, kids go crazy for a little bit. In this instance, you dress 20-25 6-7 year olds up head to toe in protective hockey equipment (aka full body armor) and a hockey stick (aka weapon); you get entertainment that Medieval Times can only dream about! Kids will be kids, and as long as there was a willing combatant, we let them have fun for a few minutes.

As Dr. Dre says, “back to the lecture at hand”, let’s find out if you are better than a 9-year-old. With the exception of the random 9-year-old Chinese kid front squatting 300kg or kids like Michael Kearney that graduated with a degree in Anthropology at age 10, most of you reading this are smarter and better athletes than a 9-year-old. But does that make you better? And what lessons can you learn from kids that you can apply not only in training, but everyday life.

KIDS SHOW UP READY TO WORK. In almost all cases, kids show up to training because they want to be there. There have been instances where athletes (kids and adults) have come to try it out, paid attention and did what was asked, but just didn’t want to be there. For one reason or another, they chose not to come back, which is ok. Do things that make you happy.

Given the correct incentive, kids are able to focus their energy on the task at hand and are able to leave just about all external distractions outside of the gym. This is extremely beneficial for many reasons. The main is I require, and expect, a beginner to have extreme focus on the points and queues I am teaching in a short amount of time. Somehow, even at an early age, no discussion is needed regarding focus. My beginning youth athletes have always given me their entire focus during the entire training session. Without those ‘outside of the gym’ distractions I am able to efficiently and an effectively teach much more without spending time trying to refocus my athlete.

How many times have you shown up to training and were mentally distracted by something that happened outside of the gym? How many times have you had a terrible

training day and it affected your work life the following day? More importantly, has a bad training day affected your home and/or personal life?

As adults, our emotional spectrum is more mature than a young child. However, bringing distractions from outside of the gym is not only detrimental to you; it can, and more times than not, is a distraction to others. Kids show up to the gym to train, so should you.

KIDS HAVE NO EGO. Kids are always working on supplement drills to help perfect the movement. This should be what the coach asks of them. My philosophy is to ensure any athlete is able to perform the basic movement patterns before moving forward with any additional complexity. How can anyone ask a kid to perform complex movements such as a snatch or clean and jerk if an athlete can't squat, press, or jump properly? Many hours, even years, I am teaching the basics to a youth athlete. It is monotonous at times, but kids are driven to succeed. There is a sense of accomplishment if they feel and see improvement with technique, mobility, or positioning. This comes by performing the movement correctly time and time again.

Learning how to move consistently and effectively is the main goal from beginners to advanced lifters. Lifting more weight is fun, and the end goal of competition, but learning basic movements should always take priority over heavy weight. How many times have you had a really good training day and things feel like it is coming together? Then you add that 1 more kilogram and it falls apart like a house of cards. Then your coach recommends that you stop and either move on or lower the weight and it feels like a punch to the gut. Do you keep pushing it or lower the weight? What would the kid athlete do? A good coach will analyze the situation and determine if additional technique is needed or just a good time to move on.

Imagine this, you are working on a project at work and you are stuck not making any progress. You are dead set on your idea/plan but your boss suggests a different route. Do you continue down your original your original path or change courses? Kids will always defer to their coach because they do not have any ego. Is this something you are willing to do?

KIDS TRUST THE COACH. This should be obvious, but for some reason people have a difficult time with this concept. A good coach has a plan to execute to allow for progression and peak performance. As athletes see progress, the trust and confidence in their coach grows.

For some reason, people will sometimes go off program to try to do 'extra' work, and more times than not, without even discussing with their coach. In some occasions, another coach has told the athlete it would be beneficial to do a certain exercise. In almost all cases, it conflicts with the plan as priority is given to something else. The additional work leads to overtraining, the plan doesn't come together, progress isn't made, and the trust and confidence in the coach is taken down a notch or two. Young kids are generally brought up to do what they are told, especially by authority figures. However, as time goes on, there should be an open dialog expectation by the athlete and

coach. The coach should be able to explain the plan to the athlete. The athlete should be able to provide feedback to the coach. The coach should be able to process the athlete feedback and either incorporate into plan or discuss why it should be ignored. Bottom line here is that the athlete must trust the coach and the coach must trust the athlete.

Back to your work project. You are ultimately responsible to ensure your project is completed by the deadline. Did you take your boss's advice and change paths? If so, it is because you trusted your boss to lead you down the correct path to complete your project on time. Trust is the basis in all relationships.

KIDS WANT TO BE ACCOUNTABLE. Set goals. Kids want to achieve milestones. They can't set their goals because they don't know what to do just yet. However, as they progress, goal setting should be a joint discussion. Ask them what they want to do and help push them to set higher, yet attainable, goals and hold them accountable.

Training is already tough enough. It is even tougher if you have not set any goals. How do you measure your progress? Then when you set goals, have you discussed with anyone? If not, those are just dreams. Dreams become goals when you have someone keeping you accountable to achieve your dream, which has now become a goal.

Do you have career goals? Education goals? Family goals? Spiritual goals? Other goals? Or are they just dreams at this point? Ask any kid about their dreams and they will not hesitate to share. Why be embarrassed to share your dreams? They are yours!

So I ask again, are you better than a 9 year old? Yes, your abilities are better, but if you can't train like a kid, you might not be for long. So when someone tells you that you are acting like a kid, take it as a compliment!