



**What motivates children
to participate in sport
or to drop out? ►**

Understanding why children participate in sport is not a simple matter. One of the difficulties is that children have many reasons for getting involved, and some of their reasons change from day to day. To encourage children to stay involved in sport, parents and coaches must understand these reasons.

In general, children participate in sport in order to have fun, improve skills, belong to a group, be successful, gain recognition, get fit, and find excitement. Conversely, they drop out of sport because of other interests, boredom, lack of success, too much pressure, loss of interest, friends leaving, or because it ceases to be fun.

Dr. Terry Orlick, professor of sport psychology at the University of Ottawa, says children play sport because it makes them feel good. They need to feel wanted, valued, and joyful. But if he or she is suddenly benched or pulled from the lineup because the team needs to win, a child might feel incompetent and rejected.

Children don't join a team to sit around and do nothing. Sport is not enjoyable if they don't get much opportunity to play. Studies have shown that children would rather play for a losing team than be members of a winning team and sit on the sidelines. If they're not playing, they'll lose interest very quickly.

A 1992 study conducted by Dr. Martha Ewing and Dr. Vern Seefeldt of the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University asked 26,000 students aged 10 to 18 years about their reasons for participating in sport, why they quit, and how they feel about winning. The study found that 'fun' is the pivotal reason for being in sport — and lack of fun is a leading reason for dropping out. In fact, both boys and girls say that making practices more fun is the most important change they would make in a sport they dropped.

“It is interesting to note that even top athletes quit their very lucrative careers when sport is no longer fun.”

Dr. Stuart Robbins
Former national level soccer coach