



**How can
sport be
more fun? ▶**

Sport provides children with an opportunity to succeed by learning new skills or accomplishing new tasks. When young children enter the sporting world, they often learn new skills quite quickly. Some, for example, will show up at the first practice unable to catch a ball or throw accurately. A week later, they'll be catching the ball most of the time and throwing fairly well. Children who see themselves improving can gain a lot of satisfaction from playing. For some, sport may be the sole opportunity for success in a difficult childhood.

Dr. Steven Danish, director of the Life Skills Centre and professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University, believes fun in sport comes from *balancing* challenge and skill. Enjoyment is highest when people set their *own* challenges and assess their performance against these challenges. The reward comes from competing against your own potential and goals, not from a competition over which you have little control.

To reinforce this point, Edmonton sport psychologist Dr. Murray Smith suggests watching young skateboarders at play. "This activity can be dangerous and requires a high level of skill," says Smith. "Virtually none of the children get hurt because they are in control of the risks they take and can decide for themselves when they are ready to go to the next stage."

Children need to be challenged, but if a game or activity is too overwhelming, a child might become anxious and not want to play anymore. On the other hand, when children are forced to repeat drills endlessly and pressured to become so proficient that they are not being challenged, boredom sets in.

Fun in Sports: A Balance between Skill and Challenge³

