



**Are children
miniature
adults? ▶**

Of course not. But a lot of parents seem to think they are.

The mistake is easy to make when a five-year-old child, barely able to skate, is decked out in \$500 worth of hockey equipment, trying to play an adult game by adult rules under the supervision of an official. The mistake is easy to make when a nine-year-old figure skater jumps and twirls her way across the ice, sporting a high-cut costume covered in rhinestones and sequins.

Dressing our children to resemble professional athletes makes it hard to remember that a kid is just a kid. And many parents make the mistake of thinking children's sport is a miniature version of adult sport.

Dr. Murray Smith warns parents that adult sporting situations may be inappropriate, even harmful, to children. The way adults learn, play, and organize sport is not necessarily suitable for children. One reason is that children think differently from adults. Their minds are not fully developed and they are not equipped to make complex decisions or solve more than the simplest problems.

The classic example is 'beehive soccer.' Immediately following the free pass, 20 pairs of legs are within 10 yards of the ball, behaving like a swarm of bees following their queen. Meanwhile, there are sideline pleas to "stay in position" and "get back to where you belong."

Beehive soccer is the result of kids just being kids. The concept of 'teamwork' involves a set of relationships too complex for young children to grasp. When youngsters cluster around a ball, they are all playing as individuals. To play a team game, children must understand the rules and their tasks as members of the team. They must also understand the tasks of all the other team members. At a young age, these concepts are often too abstract for children.

Games should be modified to correspond to a child's level of development. Changing the rules of play to suit the developmental age of the players, and stressing fun and skill development more than the final outcome, will make sport more suitable for children.