

The following is a copy of a letter in Let's Play Hockey by Marshall Smith

So you're the new coach.....

**KEEP IT SIMPLE
MAKE IT FUN
CELEBRATE THE INDIVIDUAL
EXPLAIN WHY**

OPEN LETTER TO THE NEW COACH

So you're my kid's new coach? Congratulations!

Being a high school or youth hockey coach is an honor, no matter whether you beat out dozens of applicants or were the only one on the list who didn't say, "no."

You're the Leader, the Big Cheese, the Person In Charge, although no one should be coaching youth sports for fame and fortune.

It's a time consuming, emotional roller coaster of a job, if you do it right, and you deserve a lot of credit for accepting the challenge.

During the season, you will have my backing and encouragement, with no second guessing. I am trusting you with my child, though, so I'd like to share some thoughts and hopes with you beforehand.

You'll soon be setting goals for the upcoming season, and when you do, I hope you'll realize that it's not 1980, this isn't the Olympics, and you're not Herb Brooks.

Your players are kids, and although your job title is "Coach," your job description is "Teacher."

For a role model, try Joe Ehrman, the high school football coach in Baltimore who teaches his players to accept responsibility for their actions, develops loving relationships with others and serve a cause beyond themselves.

His teams win games, but only as a byproduct of these lessons. He says that youth coaches should teach skills by building players up, not tearing them down. He cares about every player, regardless of ability, and tries to help each one grow more successful as a person.

More good ideas come from Cal Ripken, Jr., future Hall of Fame baseball player. He stresses four principles for coaches in the youth league that bears his name: Keep it Simple, Make it fun, Celebrate the Individual, Explain Why.

If you follow these leaders, you'll teach sportsmanship, safety, skills and the love of the game to a group of kids who will trust you and look up to you.

Do it well and your players will gladly work hard to become better athletes and teammates. Mess it up, and you can single-handedly turn an entire group of kids away from the sport.

During the season, I hope you'll remember that you lead by your actions, not by your speeches.

If you work hard and keep your sense of humor, if you're honest, respectful and fair with everyone, the players will be right with you.

But if you play mind games, blame others for your mistakes, or make fun of the kids, they'll ignore you and you'll be miserable.

With all the work you'll be putting in, I hope you'll remember to enjoy yourself. If you're having a good time, the kids will share your attitude and play joyously, enthusiastically, and fearlessly.

If you're not having fun, if you're constantly critical or you get upset when the kids act happy, maybe you're in the wrong job. Don't be a coach who fears youthful chaos so much that you kill everyone's joy with your need for control.

Finally, I hope you realize that it's a kids' team, not yours. They play the games, score the goals, make the stops, serve the penalties.

They'll probably have big wins and bad losses this year, and they'll play against people who think that winning is more important than safety or sportsmanship.

But if your players know that they control their own actions and attitudes, and if they understand that the love and respect for themselves and others mean more than the game score, they'll make you and everyone else proud of them.

You've taken on a big responsibility, Coach, but you'll do fine if you don't let your ego in the way of the kids' growth and development.

The notion that "Winning is the only thing" is nonsense, especially for youth sports. When the

season is over, you can look back with satisfaction if you've taught your players to be responsible, caring people who understand that the true measure of their success is not how many games they have won. But how they have treated other people.