



## THE SECOND TIME AROUND

By Kerry Schmidt 05-15-2005

Countless millions, myself among them, have experienced the thrills, excitement, glory, and sometimes defeat, of being involved with your children as they begin playing sports. And you continue all these emotions sometimes up through high school and maybe beyond.

But it all starts with the “youth leagues.”

As I will recount later, I spent over 15 years with my kids involved in sports, and I experienced every emotion possible. Also, I learned the MVP of all those sports leagues is the VOLUNTEER. Without those countless individuals, none of these great memories would exist.

But today I am looking at “the second time around.” I am watching the kids now as a “paw-paw,” as we say down south, or grandparent.

Have you seen the car commercial wherein the man is driving his (and other’) kids around to football practice, and he says, “My dad used to do this for me? (Sic) Now I have become my dad.” So true.

This particular story takes place in the little Southeastern town of Madisonville, Louisiana, population of about 850. But it is the identical story that is played out all across America, in small towns like here to the largest cities.

For the last two years, I have been able to experience the pleasure of watching my granddaughter, Paige Dupuy, play softball. And from the first inning on, all the memories came flooding back. I felt the great pride as I watched her go from never having played, to first year All-Star and winning the whole thing, and again last year, “MY GRANDAUGHTER IS AN ALL-STAR!, I proudly tell everyone within earshot. Even if they don’t care.

Believe me, a proud grandparent is just as rabid as a proud parent. In some ways, the second time around is even better.

Listen to a couple of grandmothers on this subject.

Ms. Lou Angelle, a true Cajun – complete with the wonderful accent - from Lafayette, who works a couple hours a day at Madisonville Jr. High, was at the new Madisonville complex last Monday night to watch her granddaughter play. She said her daughter, now a flight attendant with a major airline, played and she went to all her games.

When asked the difference, she said “I probably enjoy the grandchildren more, because I have more time. I don’t have to run home and cook dinner and clean and all the other stuff moms have to do.”

She added, “I wouldn’t miss these opportunities for the world.” Amen.

And there is Faye Turner, who lives in Vicksburg, Mississippi but drives over “for every single game. I will not miss one.”

She said she did the same for her children, and as she sat there with her daughter, Pam Ousterhout, the big smile told me all I needed to know about these moments.

Ms. Turner said, “Grandparents should come to the games. It means a lot to (the kids). They love to see both their parents and “maw-maw and paw-paw” there.



I asked her about the long trips to get here and, with that proud grin, she exclaimed, “Oh, it’s no problem. I will not miss a game, and I will continue to come as long as I am able.”

My granddaughter’s coach, Larry Ward’s daughter plays on his team. “I thought I was finished, but I got pulled back in,” Ward said with a laugh.

He said his happiest moments were when he coached/watched his two sons, Scooter and Bubby play ball. He said Bubby made it to one of the youth World Series in Omaha.

Ward said he enjoys this just as much, maybe more. “With girls, when they run up and give you a big hug after a game, those are memories I will never forget.”

Yes, a Master Card moment.

My two sons will be 31 and 35 this year. My eldest was more into individual sports, and he was a champion wrestler. My younger son was the better all-around athlete, and he starred in all three major sports. He gave up football after making the varsity his freshman year to concentrate on basketball and baseball.

But it is the Little League years that were, in many ways, the best. I was one of the MVP’s (volunteers), and acted as coach, groundskeeper, league president and just about everything else.

Spring Saturdays in Malibu, California were all about baseball. As I look back some 25 years ago, tears can quickly fill my aging eyes and the wonderful memories flood the mind. As I write this, I have a picture of my then eight and 12 year old sons in their raggedy uniforms. I have my hankie handy.

When they got into high school, since I own my own company, I still made every single game/match, and I was just as proud, but there is definitely something about the innocence of kids when they first start to play. Hope springs eternal in every parent, but nothing is really expected, because it is new to them. Thus, every win, every great play, every shinning moment, is etched in your mind, easily re-run 25 years later. And yes, the big loss, the error, even those “bad” times now bring a smile to your face. It should, because all those moments, aged like a fine wine with time, are truly wonderful.

They say you can’t go back in time, and that’s true. But, you can re-visit it! The names and the times are changed, but the youngsters are your family, “AGAIN,” as Forrest Gump often said, and having experienced it the first time, age and wisdom helps you refine it so that the second time around you may actually enjoy it more.

My youngest son is now a junior high teacher, and soon will finish his masters and hopes to teach at a junior college, and coach basketball. I called my two sons before I wrote this, and they both could instantly recall those great moments, the pizza afterwards, all the wonderful memories. We laughed and we cried.

And yes, hopefully in a few short years, I will travel regularly to San Diego to watch my other grandchildren “PLAY BALL!”

So all you maw-maws and paw-paws, don’t let this second time around pass you by.

Turn the clock back and enjoy the youngsters all over again. I highly recommend it!