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**I wrote the following article a few years ago. Please read it. Think about it. And then ask yourself... "Are my plans, my ambitions, my untutored ideas getting in the way of my child's sheer enjoyment of playing soccer?"**

## **REALITY CHECK**

The purpose of kids' sport is, primarily, to allow them to have fun. Beyond fun there are many positive reasons for children's participation in sport... fair play, development of skills, increased levels of physical fitness, building self-esteem and developing confidence, teamwork, self-discipline, communication. As a coach who is absolutely 'sold' on the positive values of children's sport I would say the list of reasons for having kids involved in sport would be almost limitless.

There are, however, those parents and coaches who have another idea. Their idea, dream, hope... dare I say delusion... is that some way, some how, some where, some place, their little Johnny or Janet will be a terrific success, graduating to the top level professional ranks, in their chosen sport. And that usually means the parent's chosen sport!

Years ago, I read an article by Roy MacGregor in the Globe and Mail (8 November 2002) which outlined some very important data regarding just how futile are those dreams which many parents and coaches hold dear.

Mr. MacGregor quoted Dave King, the former coach of the Columbus Blue Jackets of the National Hockey League, who some years ago made a study of the progression of young, male, Ontario hockey players. Mr. King examined boys born in 1975. In a single year 30,000 of them signed up for their first year of organized hockey.

By the time they reached the age of 14 there were 22,000 of them still playing. Of those, 232 were drafted by junior teams.

105 of the junior draftees played one game or more at the junior level. Of those, 48 were drafted by NHL teams. Two others were later signed as free agents by NHL teams.

38 of those 50 signed NHL contracts. Of those, 22 actually played in at least one NHL game. In 1999, when they would have been 24 and in the prime of their careers, 11 of them were still in the NHL.

By Dave King's reckoning 0.0036 per cent of the original 30,000 actually made something resembling a valid career of professional hockey. That is 1/3 of 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one 1%! For those to whom understanding decimals or percentages does not come easily, that means that about three and a half boys out of every 10,000 actually made it.

And for all in soccer whose greatest desire is that their children play professionally or for Canada's national team here's the really bad news. There are even more kids playing soccer than hockey and there are far, far fewer realistic professional opportunities for Canadian kids in soccer than there is in hockey.

So... no more dreams? No more aspirations? Far from it! But leave the dreams and fantasies of playing for Canada, Juventus, Manchester United, Celtic to the children. As adults we should get on with the serious work of bringing our kids up in a healthy, fun, positive environment where they can grow and develop.

Anyway, who knows? Maybe some of our kids will make it. But, remember, that is their dream to have and to realize... not ours!

**Gerald Steele**