



What Takeaways Are There, If Any, From The Show *Friday Night Tykes*?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“I’m curious as to PCA’s viewpoint on the show *Friday Night Tykes* sensationalizing screaming coaches and parents... all over 8-year-old football...”

PCA Response by PCA Lead Trainer, Joe Terrasi

Friday Night Tykes, a reality-based television show which recently landed on the USA Network (from its original home on Esquire), depicts youth football coaches, athletes, and families as they conduct practices and face opponents in a competitive season. Positive Coaching Alliance is sometimes asked for our point of view on the events depicted in the show. Here is my take on it as a PCA national lead trainer and long-time youth advocate and sports coach.

For starters, it is important to recognize the medium *Friday Night Tykes* represents. A former colleague of mine was an integral behind-the-scenes component in the popular reality show *Laguna Beach*, and he was ever careful to point out that the show’s primary purpose was entertainment, not information. As such, show producers and editors carefully compose “story arcs” by compiling footage that is sometimes not exactly an exact representation of events. The individual moments that make up the story certainly happened, but there is no way for a viewer to see them in their full context. This isn’t to excuse any bad behavior that is shown, but it is important to note that we don’t necessarily have all the information to make a fair assessment. For better or worse, excessive or over-the-top behavior from parents and coaches has a high entertainment value; it stands to reason that a reality show will depict more negative behavior.

There are definitely moments depicted in which coaches or parents work with athletes in ways we wouldn’t recommend or endorse. An easy example that comes to mind is one in which a coach demands his nose tackle hit the opposing center before the snap – a clear violation of the rules – in order to “send a message.” One of the core tenets we promote as part of honoring the game is respecting the rules – this particular moment was a clear departure from this ethic.

While there are definitely questionable examples portrayed on the show, I’ve also caught moments of excellent coaching and parenting. One such moment shows a fantastic coach working with a quarterback who had a difficult first half. The coach convinces the young athlete that he should focus on having fun in the rest of the game. I recall vividly how the player looks as if a weight is lifted from his young shoulders. The coach clearly

continues

enabled the player to focus on factors that are within his control; the positive results were immediately evident in the player's affect.

Without passing judgement on the show itself or its events, I do find that there is much to be learned from watching. I find myself considering how I would have handled a moment or incident on the show. It's especially interesting to watch athletes' reactions and results based on how they were coached.

One of the things I love about coaching youth sports is that we have a unique opportunity to model passion for our players. Say what you will about specific coaching and parenting moments on the show, but it would be hard to deny that they are fueled by great passion. As a coach and parent, I work hard to remember that I am called to model passion with dignity and with high ethical standards.

Positive Coaching Alliance neither officially endorses nor denounces *Friday Night Tykes*. If you enjoy watching it, and you're a youth coach, we'd suggest that you watch with a learner's eye and use it to reflect on your own coaching approach. If you are not a coach, and you dislike some of what you see, we'd strongly encourage you to get involved with a local youth league and become a positive influence on players' lives. We've seen consistently that many of our finest coaches are not defined by their previous sports expertise or accolades, but by their relentless belief in advocating for children and making better athletes, better people.

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