



Parents Request Their Children's Friends On The Same Team

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.

"We frequently receive 'friend requests' from parents registering their children for the season. Sometimes they claim it's necessary for carpooling, but sometimes requests extend to having five or six players put onto the same team. It seems some parents are trying to commandeer an entire team, and we are unsure how to handle the situation. This year, a couple of parents were so upset at their girls not being put together that they pulled them from the program. I would be interested to learn how other youth organizations have handled similar situations."

PCA Response by Joe Scally, PCA Trainer–Chicago

We should always remember that the game is for the players, not the parents, coaches, or administrators. League rules should support the goal of getting and keeping kids involved in sports so that they may learn the game and the many life lessons sports can teach.

There is no single approach to handling "friend requests" that will achieve this goal. Each organization must set its rules based on a number of factors including size of the organization, age of the players, number of coaches, competitive level, geography, desire for balanced teams, and previous experience with "friend requests."

For instance, the Park District where I live sets up teams in its recreational league based on which side of the tracks a child lives on. This has nothing to do with socio-economic status. It has everything to do with how long it can take to get across the tracks around "rush hour", a time when many practices are scheduled. It's easier for kids and coaches to practice on their "side of the tracks." This approach results in a high likelihood of players being on a team with kids they know. Although "friend requests" are considered, they are rarely made and usually not compelling.

This system is far from perfect. There are still complaints and those who try to game the system, but most are happy with it. Importantly, there is a high rate of player return each year. However, for another organization this approach may make no sense at all.

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BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE



Parents Request Their Children's Friends On The Same Team, continued

If we are to keep kids in sport, it is important that sports remain fun, and for many players, especially the younger ones, that means playing with friends. As those same players get older, fun for them may be more about balanced competition, or being on a team where everyone is striving for excellence together.

Also, meeting new teammates who become friends is fun as well as an opportunity to learn life lessons. Rules should be made to provide the experience that most benefits the players as broadly and fairly as possible, so it would be helpful to ask the players their opinions. No one said this was going to be easy!

It is important for organizations to adopt a policy regarding "friend requests." Whether the selected approach includes allowance of "friend requests," a one friend request per player limit, a draft, "coach requests," random selection, or any of the other options mentioned in the thoughtful blog responses, the policy should be widely published and disseminated. Rules and the reasons for those rules should be made clear to every parent and player. The policy should be consistently applied and followed by everyone in the organization.

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