



Experts: Children need positive reinforcement, encouragement

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Crazed sports coaches are feared and hated by the players they coach, but none is as ugly as the coach who breaks down children emotionally to get wins.

Mayor Harry Kim has seen that coach, repeatedly. As a football, track and soccer dad, Kim watched youth sports coaches in their “subtle ways” coldly cut a player from the team. He listened to them tell players “you’re only here to warm the bench” and “you’ll only play the last 30 seconds of the game, the part that doesn’t matter.”

“What’s wrong with today’s kids is what’s wrong with us,” Kim said Friday during the “Facilitating Extraordinary Accomplishments in Hawaii’s Youth” workshop’s opening session. “What does this have to do with sports? Every single damn thing.”

Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) Big Island, Volunteer Resource Center of Hawaii, Shinnyo-en Foundation and Hawaii County sponsored the eight-hour workshop, which about 100 people attended.

[Workshop Organizers report 165 participants registered and participated in the April 8 event.]

It aimed to help education and youth activity leaders develop positive character traits and broaden opportunities, so they and their players can be successful in life. Success stories and descriptions of barriers to overcome were offered.

For 20 years, Kim coached youth sports because it was “the best way I could help kids understand sports and the rules of the game.” In the 1970s, he was an assistant coach at Honokaa High, and in the 1980s, he was the head coach for Hilo and Waiakea High schools.

”Every single day, every single thing that comes out of your mouth, realize who you are and your importance,” he said.

Kim urged participants to be aware of the way they treat students, asking them to “honor and respect the haves and have-nots.” He admitted his recent apology to a head coach of the University of Hawaii-Hilo Vulcans, saying he should have been supportive throughout their losses.

“Do not make them ashamed,” Kim said. “It will scar and hurt somebody for the rest of their life. Hurt is hurt. Please know everything you do is for care -- not for victory, not for money. It’s for care and nothing else.”

Following Kim’s speech, Randy Hirokawa, Ph.D., UH-Hilo College of Arts and Sciences dean, led a panel discussing keys to success and the challenges faced along the way. The panelists were: Dr. Earl Bakken, Medtronic, Inc. co-founder and chairman emeritus and Five Mountains Hawaii president; Jim Thompson, PCA founder and executive director; Dr. Rose Tseng, UH-Hilo chancellor; Dr. Harumitsu Inouye, Shinnyo-en Foundation executive director; and Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai, Institute of Sathya Sai Education director.

At 4 years old, Bakken had a fascination for electricity in light bulbs. His mother allowed him to play with electrical components, while his uncle, an electrician, verbally disapproved. Though his family was “extremely poor,” Bakken’s mother managed to purchase chemistry kits, electrical parts and erector sets.

By 9, Bakken discovered in old Frankenstein films what he wanted to do for the rest of his life -- reanimate life. In 1957, he developed the first wearable, external, battery-powered, transistorized pacemaker. Bakken attributed his success to his mother, proving parents play an important role in their children's lives.

Thompson shared the wisdom of Mr. Rogers: “Kids will coast for as long as they can until something excites them. Then they’ll give everything they got until an adult squelches them.”

That’s what is happening in youth sports today. An alarming number of children are dropping out because of the “win at all cost” mentality of parents and coaches, he said.

Thompson explained how that mentality creates a pressure-filled environment, which “children misunderstand too well.”

Too many children think that in order to be loved and accepted they need to excel in sports. But regardless of their performance, children need to be happy, he said.

Thompson recommended that participants encourage children to discover themselves and reach high limits, but not threaten them with punishment if they do not perform.

”When he does lose a game, I remind him it’s OK and say, ‘Dinner will still be on the table when you get home,’” Thompson said while recollecting the words of Maria Sabathia, mother of Cleveland Indians pitcher CC Sabathia.

After the discussion, Diane Chadwick of Hawaii Community Foundation plans to work on Jumsai’s five principles: Determination, self-discipline, discrimination, dedication and devotion.

She agreed with Jumsai, who told the audience, “Life is simply a game. Play the part and do the best of your ability.”

“To support our youth, we have to instill a lot of value,” Chadwick said.
“Spirituality can play a part of that. It’s also important we overcome ourselves.”

Marsha Valenzuela of Honokaa High felt the workshop encouraged her, as well as her colleagues.

“They showed us how important our role is and the family’s role in the community,” she said. “In order to be encouragers and positive coaches, we need to know our values.”



The Lucas article also appeared at the top of the Sports section of the Hawaii Tribune-Herald on Sunday, April 10, 2005.