



## **Kids No Longer Getting Decision-Making Lessons**

By Bill Gosse

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The fall WIAA tournament season is under way, and excitement abounds in numerous boys and girls sports. This is a special time of the school year, comparable only to the late winter, when the state basketball tournaments reign supreme.

Tournament time is when a team's leaders emerge like never before. During the regular season, the mainstay leaders identify themselves week after week, hopefully forging a successful campaign. However, tournament time is when special stories emerge. Some may indeed come from the established season stars. Quite often, now is when we hear about shining feats by replacements of injured starters, or incredible individual performances in inclement weather or quick actions producing a game-saving play. This is the time when decisions determine state champions.

Organized sports can be a great environment for kids to learn decision making skills. Good decision making is a complex process that sometimes takes years to master. Are coaches given enough time with their programs to help kids develop proper decision-making fundamentals? Do coaches have enough patience to wait for kids to develop great decision making skills? Better yet, do parents have enough patience to allow coaches to teach the players proper decision-making, or must they win now?

Have you ever noticed nowadays how quarterbacks rarely call their own plays? Aside from the occasional audible, a play is shuttled in by some other player. In baseball, coaches call almost every pitch from the dugout, and in basketball, coaches continue to stretch their coaching box in efforts to call another play.

It hasn't always been like that. Deciding what play to call next by communicating with my football teammates in the huddle was one of the greatest joys of being a quarterback. It was so satisfying when all 11 of us worked together and moved the ball downfield to score a touchdown.

If we made mistakes, the worst result possible would be a turnover, but usually, we were forced to punt. That meant a trip to the sideline and a reunion with my coach to discuss what we would do differently next time. In effect, he was teaching me the decision-making process as it related to high school football. He was teaching me how to act in a pressure-packed situation. We went over all of the scenarios leading into a decision, and then discussed all the options available. Based on the evidence presented, I was taught what decisions would most likely lead to success.

Of course, young players won't always make such deliberate decisions. But if they are coached properly and then given experience with good decision-making, they'll use it more as they gain maturity, and eventually, they will be able to make solid, quick decisions. According to a local varsity football coach, the demand to win is the unfortunate reason current coaches don't allow players to call plays.

Are we really teaching our players to be quick thinkers and, perhaps, future community leaders? Or are we training them to be glorified puppets? Will our kids really know how to react when a crunch-time decision confronts them?

There are other venues where kids can learn these skills, but sports used to be a fun way to learn them.

The best thing was we didn't even know class was in session.