

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

Help Your Kids Stand Out in a Sea of Siblings

By Michelle Wells, Guest Contributor



Playing second fiddle...
Being the understudy...
Assigned to second string ...
Low man on the totem pole...

None of these phrases evoke a sense of confidence. In fact, they all imply being second best.

Yet this might be how one or more of your kids feel if they are in the shadow of a sibling who is a Rockstar-athlete.

So, what can you do?

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As a mom to six amazing kids, I am very aware of this dilemma. Personalities differ greatly in our family, along with talents, interests, and tendencies. Our oldest happens to have set the bar high because she does many things well – with little to no trouble. When you have a “Rockstar” in the family, equipping each child to **shine on their own, and apart from** their siblings can be a challenge. Although the dynamics of your family are somewhat out of your control, here are three steps you can take to make sure no one slips through the cracks.

1) Recognize Individuality

For all of its wonderful benefits, sports participation does come at a cost to your family. Resources such as time, energy, focus, money, and weekends get used up quickly.

When one or more of your children have exceptional talent, it is easy to shift the resources in their direction. Unfortunately, this can leave their siblings feeling second best.

I remember when my family was much smaller and our oldest daughter began swimming with a competitive swim program. Within a short amount of time, she developed into one of the best swimmers in her age group. Visions of scholarships began to dance around in my mind – we simply needed to put in the time on the pool deck.

This plan certainly would have been easier if her younger brother shared her affinity to the water. Despite my attempts, he had no desire to join the swim team. Somewhat reluctantly we enrolled him in a karate class.

I would like to say that we were astute enough to know that he needed his own individual outlet and that he would have always been under his older sister’s shadow, but we honestly had no idea how important it was at the time.

Fast-forward 15 years and my son is not only an advanced black belt in Isshinryu karate but he also teaches it weekly to other aspiring, karate-chopping, kids.

Allowing him to explore his own sport was a recognition of his individuality and empowered him to stand out from under his sister’s shadow.

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Practical Tips

- Become a fan of the things that each of your kids gravitate toward.
- As much as it is possible, allow them to explore different activities.
- If going in different directions is not logistically possible, consider giving each child a season, in which the family resources are focused on their sport/activity.
- Set up one-on-one dates with Mom or Dad so that regardless of how busy the family is, each child feels valuable.

2) Facilitate Competence



One of the greatest gifts you can give to each of your children are the tools to be good at something. Mastery and even basic competence in a sport or other activity can fill in the gaps left by insecurities. This goes a long way when navigating through the awkward pre-teen and/or teenage years.

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At around the age of 11, our youngest daughter was desperately trying to keep up with her three older teenage sisters. We noticed that she loved to sing and actually had a very good voice. Thanks to the generous gift of a family friend we got her some voice lessons. Singing became her “claim-to-fame” in our large family.

In addition to building self-esteem, kids that are good at something don't usually feel as threatened by their Rockstar siblings. Parents that place equal value on all of the sports, talents, activities, and interests their kids are involved in send the message that everyone is part of the first string.

Practical Tips

- Be creative with ways to help your child master the skills necessary to be good. Things like: private coaching/tutoring, sports summer camps, mentoring by an older athlete, or just one-on-one time with a parent practicing skills, can make all the difference.
- Make sure they have the right equipment and/or instruments to do their sport or activity well.

3) Connect to a Higher Purpose

Have you ever witnessed a family that operates like a team? It is quite inspiring.

Each member right down to the youngest appears to have a job, knows what it is, and functions as though there is a shared purpose.

You can bet that the dynamic between them didn't happen by accident. A sense of purpose, as a family unit, starts from the top down – and it definitely comes from the parents.

Connecting your kids to a shared higher purpose gives a child a sense of belonging, regardless of their athletic abilities or specific talents.

Practical Tips

- Start with a healthy discussion about your family's “Why” – For what purpose do you exist? What makes you unique? What makes you a cool family? Make it fun and invite everyone to share their thoughts and ideas.
- Higher purposes such as faith and family unity are quickly embraced by young children when it is valued by Mom and Dad.

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- Plan family fun times that include activities that everyone can do well, ie. board games, camping trips, family movie nights.
- Encourage everyone to be supportive of each individual's games, performances, and successes.
- If faith is important to you, then have the family pray together.

Final Thoughts

It's undeniable that navigating through the sports experience impacts the entire family.

When parents invest equally in children, regardless of talents, participation in sports can be a springboard for exploring individuality, becoming competent in a skill, and connecting to a higher purpose – for everyone involved.

Michelle Wells is a wife to one and a mom to six, with 20 plus years of experience at both. With a love for being active in sports she took her passion for competitive training to the world of triathlons where she rocked the elite age group level for several years. In an effort to share her enthusiasm for a balanced and healthy life she inspires others through personal training and freelance writing.

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