

What to Expect From 'Worth It'

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I got an e-mail from a friend a while back that had this line in it:

"Last year 'my daughter' was on the "C" team. They put her on "B" this year. Hopefully, this means that the club league and the volleyball camp were worth it."

That line got me wondering, when he says 'worth it', what does he mean? What does he expect his daughter to get out of playing club volleyball and attending volleyball camps? At what point does the time and money commitment for a kid to play club volleyball outweigh the advantages of playing club ball?

That got me thinking about my own daughters playing volleyball. That's right I said daughters, plural. I have one daughter playing high school and club volleyball and her younger sister who is just starting middle school volleyball and is thinking about club ball. So I had to ask myself, what do I expect to get out of the time and money that my family is spending, or is going to spend, into them playing this sport? What is 'worth it' to me? What is worth it to my daughters?

I am a parent with a daughter(s) playing club volleyball; I am also a club/middle school coach and a club director. My oldest daughter does not play for my volleyball club. So while I expect parents to make a huge time and money commitment for their daughters to play on my club volleyball team. I am also expected to make the same time and money commitment to my daughter's volleyball club experience.

As a parent, 'worth it' means a lot to me. I expect my daughter to improve her volleyball skills. I expect her to improve her overall physical fitness. But most of all, to me, 'worth it' means if she is exercising regularly in a manner that she enjoys, and she is so busy trying to keep up with volleyball practices, volleyball tournaments, and homework that she doesn't have time to be getting into trouble. Then it is 'worth it', regardless of the cost, regardless of where the sport takes her.

Does my daughter have to be a starter on varsity, or on the 'A' team or the best volleyball player in town for club volleyball to be 'worth it'? In a word - No! Would I like club volleyball to turn my daughter into a state champion or a super athlete who has college recruiters beating down our door? Of course I would. What parent doesn't want that for their young volleyball player? But that is not what I expect from club volleyball. That is not why my daughter is playing. My daughter is playing because she loves the game. I am paying for her to play because I love that she loves the game. But I also love that she is fit, she is healthy, and she is spending her free time doing something she loves. She is hanging around with and forming friendships with like-minded peers and she is too busy to be bored and hence getting into trouble to alleviate that boredom. As a parent that is what makes the time and money I commit to club volleyball 'worth it'.

That is my parent answer to what is 'worth it'. As a volleyball coach and a club director, what should I tell parents to expect from their daughter's club volleyball experience that will make it 'worth it' to them.

I always tell the club parents if you are here - thinking that playing club ball will get your daughter onto the high school team, or eventually onto a college team - then you are here for the wrong reasons. A corollary to that statement is "Any club coach or director who tells you that they can get your daughter onto a certain team, or get them a chance to play in college or get them a scholarship. Unless that coach or director is in charge of the program they are promising your daughter a chance to play on - they are lying to you." No one can honestly promise those things and expect to deliver. There are too many factors involved in who makes what team, who gets scholarships, and who is successful and who is not, that are completely out of club coach's or director's control.

There is a lot that goes into a school coach picking a team. Coaches have to evaluate a player's athletic skills, their volleyball skills, their attitudes, their work ethic and their personality. Trying to explain how coaches make those kinds of decisions would take volumes. I will leave that up to someone else with much more experience than I, to write about it.

So if a parent and their child are not supposed to expect club volleyball to make their child an all-star, a varsity standout, or a college ready player, what should they expect from playing club volleyball?

You should expect to: Work hard, play hard, sweat, hurt, ache, laugh, cry, be happy, be sad, and hopefully to have a lot of fun in the process. You should expect to have days when you hate to go to practice and you should expect to have days when you can't wait to get there. You should expect to win some volleyball games and you should be ready to lose some.

You should expect to learn new things. You should expect to have to teach things to others (including your coach). You should be open to new ideas and to adopting new things and making them comfortable old habits.

You should expect to jump, hop, leap, dive, roll, slide, skid, run, skip, shuffle, sprint, crouch, spike, slam, tip, dink, pass, set, serve, shank, miss, hit, block, bump, crash, lift, shove, push, pull, weave, wobble, topple, stagger, swagger, accept, reject, laugh, cry, boast, brag, apologize, agonize, celebrate, commiserate, rejoice, revel, rebel, talk, hug, glare, grin, smile, sneer, talk, shout, yell, groan and grimace.

If you try to do all those things, you will learn how to be a better volleyball player. You will learn how to be a better teammate. You will learn how to win, how to lose, how to fail and how to succeed at a lot more than just volleyball.

You will make new friends. You will make new enemies. You will learn how to deal with both. And if you are lucky, and you are paying attention, you might just get to know yourself a little bit better.

And after all that, you might, if countless different factors all come together just right, you might get a chance to play volleyball in high school and/or maybe even in college or beyond. But club volleyball can't promise you that. It can only promise you the opportunity to try and the opportunity to play. Where those opportunities take you and what you get out of it - is up to you.