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# **Let's Motivate All Of Our Children By Rewarding More Than Sports Excellence**

[sports medals](#): a good or bad concept in kids' sports? Most kids' sports these days award medals or [custom ribbons](#) to teams that excel. Many children have a bedroom lined with rows of medals and ribbons. They may be hung on the wall or displayed in special cases. The children may wear special uniforms and tee-shirts. These objects are a symbol of pride and accomplishment. But is awarding medals and ribbons a good thing for children?

On the positive side is the pride and motivation that children feel when they are seen as winners. Kids who might play half-heartedly might play just a little harder and work to improve their skills if there is a reward for success. They might practice more and take their place on the team more seriously if they know that they will receive a tangible symbol of their skill. If the child's goal is to win an athletic scholarship, a roomful of awards is one tool for reaching this goal.

However, there are equal arguments for the "no" side. First, games kids play should be played for fun. We want every child to play sports so that they get sufficient exercise and develop a strong, healthy body. But think of the kids with less natural ability. In a formal sports program, they will struggle and are less likely to be a star. When they watch the other kids walking away with trophies and awards, they may come to see themselves as no good at sports or as losers. Feeling discouraged, they will be more likely to drop the sport and take up computer games. If kids get together and play casual games just for the fun of it, more kids are likely to be included.

Another objection to sports awards for kids, particularly in a school setting, is that the athletes are set above the other students. The athletes are viewed as the school heroes, the popular kids, the "good catches." There are whole other groups of kids who excel at what they are good at, but they may not get the recognition that the athletes get. The group that comes to mind is the academic achievers. In many schools, it's cool to be athletic, but it's not cool to be academic. Many smart kids try to keep their lights under a bushel so that they aren't labeled as "nerds," "brainiacs," or "suck-ups." On the other hand, the athletes wear special sweaters and jackets that announce their abilities. This objection would just go away if schools would recognize scholars the way they do athletes and if the attitude that people who excel academically are "elitists" went away.

So, which side wins: the "for" or the "against"? In my opinion, anything we can do to interest kids in sports is a good thing. Trophies, medals, and ribbons are strong motivators. Kids respond when their success is recognized by trying even harder. But we need to keep the negatives in mind and work to overcome them so that all kids can achieve an equal sense of accomplishment for the things that they do well.

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