



Train
Your Game

Dennis Poppinga Interview

Raising Your Young Basketball Player the Right Way

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Dennis Poppinga Interview

“Raising Your Young Basketball Player the Right Way”

HSA: Good day everyone, this is Andy Lauder with HoopSkills Academy. The topic of this call is raising a successful basketball player and as you can tell by the title, as you could guess, the subject we are going to be covering today, is going to target mostly parents however, if you're a player, a kid out there, you're definitely not going to want to tune out of this. You're going to want to listen in, because there's a lot of take away from this call that you are not going to want to miss out on. Even though we are talking about the subject of raising a successful basketball player, you'd be surprised how much you're going to get out of this. As a kid, you often wonder, whether you're playing at the youth levels, whether you're a teenager, how helpful your parents really can be. I think some kids really buy into that and welcome the help that their parents give them. I was there once and I know that there are times when you don't want you parents involved, you wonder if they're more of a hindrance than they are a help and if you're really serious about wanting to play to the best of your ability, if you want to play high school varsity if you want to move on a play at a college level, you're going to want to know what your parents or it could be another role model, what their influence could do, to help you reach your goals and know how much of a difference they really can make.

Now on the line right now with me, we're joined by a gentleman by the name Dennis Poppinga. He is from Evanston Wyoming and we're certainly lucky to have Dennis with us. He's going to be sharing some valuable insight with us on this topic and the first question you're probably asking yourself if you're listening in, is how Mr. Poppinga, a guy from a town in Wyoming is really going to help us out with this topic and I'll tell you, there is a couple of things; Dennis has been with his career, he's been involved with youth athletics of a number of years. I know that maybe he can give us an exact time here in a little bit but, its well over ten, fifteen years I know of. He's seen a lot, he's experienced a lot, he's seen the kids that have all the talent in the world go through the programs and just not make it out in the long run, to be the player that they thought they were going to be or that every body though they should have been and he's also seen players come through his programs, that maybe they were the underdog and maybe people doubted them and they've gone on to achieve some amazing things athletically and he's going to be able to share with us some of the stuff that he's seen, that makes a really big difference that you're going to want to key on. But really most impressive to me, aside from that, the thing about Dennis that's really, really spectacular and unique is that fact that he has three boys and all three boys ended up making it to the NFL and on the day and age that we live in, with how competitive sports are, its just absolutely amazing for a father to have one kid play at the NFL level. Even to get a division one scholarship is just an amazing accomplishment, but to have all three and go three for three. I bet you, we can count on one or two hands how many times that has happened in the United States. So, it's a really big accomplishment Dennis, I know has been very much involved with his sons with his boys as they were in athletics and so, he knows a thing or two about whether or not parents involvement can help and I'm sure he's had some things that he's probably regretted that he can share with us. The other thing about Dennis is, he's got some daughters and two of his three daughters or all there of them were very successful

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in athletics and two of them went to play at the college level as well in athletics. He would never come out and say it or admit but, the guy knows the subject probably more than anybody I can think of who is out there. So, Dennis with that welcome, how are you doing?

Dennis Poppinga: I'm doing well Andy; I appreciate the invitation to be with you today.

HSA: Alright wonderful. Just to get the record straight, how many years has it been that you've been involved in youth sports?

Dennis Poppinga: Well, I've been in the field in Parks and Recreation for thirty-seven years and I have been involved with youth sports in my job here in Evanston for the past thirty-three years and so I've been and seen it from both side of the parent side and the side of the administration of the youth athletic programs.

HSA: And I didn't talk much about you, but you're no slouch either, you played the division one college football, correct?

Dennis Poppinga: Yes I played at BYU, from '68 to '72 and participated in a lot of sports in High School. Each year I get older because I kind of forget how it was in school but it's been a great run.

HSA: And with your three boys, I'm lucky enough to know a couple of them, lets talk about them for a little bit. They've all had stints in the NFL but one currently, Brady, talk a little bit about Brady, he's currently with the Green Bar Packers.

Dennis Poppinga: Yeah

HSA: Brady currently is starting on defense isn't he?

Dennis Poppinga: Yes, Brady has been starting and playing special teams and he really enjoys playing in the NFL, it's a very highly competitive business and a lot different than college and high school or youth sports. I think some of the things that he learned when he was younger, has certainly helped him as a professional athlete and the things that he learned when he was very long that we'll probably talk about, I think has helped him kind of stay the course and stay on track with trying to compete at that high level.

HSA: And how long has he been at Green Bay now?

Dennis Poppinga: This is his fifth year, starting his fifth.

HSA: He was drafted by the Packers right?

Dennis Poppinga: Yeah he was drafted in the 4th round and his first rookie year, he played primary special teams and then he blew his ACL out and near the end of the season, which is very disappointing. The first major injure he'd ever had, but he came back from that ACL probably as fast or faster than any one at the Packers program had ever seen and he was back in training camp the next year and really has only missed, I think, three or four games in his career even

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though he had an ACL. He's just a very dedicated, passionate person that knows how to work hard and use his skill and reach his goals which is really important.

HSA: Absolutely. He's impressive, old Brady. He's a special guy and then you've got Casey who spent some time with the Philadelphia Eagles, Kansas City Chiefs, Seattle Seahawks, I might have missed a few in there, but then you've also got the younger boy Kelly who, correct me if I'm wrong but, he spent some time with the Miami dolphins and the Arizona Cardinals, is that correct?

Dennis Poppinga: That's correct.

HSA: Also our listeners would be specially interested in knowing this, just as I know, that all three of those boys played basketball in high school and had some pretty successful careers in that sport as well, didn't they?

Dennis Poppinga: They did. They were very all successful in basketball, was probably one of their first loves and probably the one sport that they spent the most time developing skills in, in high school because it was the largest season that you have at high school and so they have a great love for basketball.

HSA: Alright, well, I know that first hand, I actually had a chance to play against both Casey and Brady, remember that very fond memories, they were great players in high school.

Dennis Poppinga: Oh great.

HSA: Oh right. Let's jump right in this Dennis. One of the first questions I have for you that I think are on a lot of parents' minds and I know is on a lot of kids' minds too. It was on my mind as a high school athlete and so a little bit of input on this here will be very helpful. Do you think its important for parents to communicate with their child's coach when they're in junior high, when they're in high school, at those levels, do they need to stay in the picture or do they need to stay out of it and let the coach handle it?

Dennis Poppinga: Well my philosophy has been, the higher the level you go in athletics in the school system, I think the more hands off you need to be. From the youth level, of course, your coaches aren't as skilled and trained as those that are up in the middle school and junior high school and college level are. I think its important when you have kids at that age, you need to get to know the coach and introduce yourself, make sure they know what your philosophies are and then, on the other side of it to, you've got to accept the weaknesses and strengthens that these coaches have, because they're not as skills as these coaches that are at a higher level, but you have to respect them and I think the only times I've really approached the coach is if there was a severe difference in philosophy or something he was doing that I just felt was not completely with what I agreed with and I would talk to him on the side, not in front to my kids, but pull him aside where I could get a one on one with him and then of course, the more competitive you get in the different levels of sports and the coaches of course I think that its important that you know them. I really didn't get involved in the high school level and above with the coach unless I had a real problem or there was an issue that came up with one of the boys or one of the girls and luckily enough, my kids had some really good coaches. They had a few that wasn't as good

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as they could have been, but for the most part they had good role models, good coaches that developed their skill and at least give them a good guidelines in what they needed to do. When they were younger, because of the position I'm in and I'm involved in sports, I was able to coach them in a lot of sports which helped a lot and I tried to make sure they weren't the star, even though they were good athletes. I tried to make sure the other kids were involved and I didn't put them in a position that they were always scoring points or getting the ball. I tried to be as fair as I could with them. The bottom line there, I just think you've got to respect the coaches that your children have and my philosophy has always been to keep the distance, but make sure they know that you're watching, that you're involved, that you have an understanding of the sport and that you're there if there's a problem and if there is a problem, you're going to speak to them directly about it. So that's kind of where I've taken the stand over the years.

HSA: Yeah, I like that. You hit on some good things. What I'm hearing is, it's definitely a mistake for a parent to just, kind of completely be so paralyzed by the fear of saying something wrong to the coach that, they don't want to sit completely on the side lines and never, ever, ever say anything but at the same you don't want to be overbearing, you want to know hey, I'm here I support you, I'm very actively involved in my child sporting career though and I'm watching and I'm interested. Because I think if the coach doesn't know, not that they would ever do it on purpose, but I do think that special time and attention for, just lack of focus could come down on a certain child just because they know that the parents are not in tuned with what going on. Is that a correct assumption?

Dennis Poppinga: Yeah, I think you're right. A lot of the youth coach or the youth parents I see in the youth programs, they don't like what position their child's playing, they don't like that he's not playing as they'd like and from an early age, they're just on the coach and complaining and that's a different philosophy. You shouldn't have that kind philosophy at the anger level. Get up at the higher levels like I'm saying, sometimes the criticism or comments made to the coach like you say, are going to come back on the kids and that's certainly what you don't want. So it's a tough call on a lot of situations because you don't get to choose those coaches, you've got to sometimes take what they give and that's why I say, you've got to accept their strengths and weaknesses for the most part because, they will have them, they're not all going to be perfect.

HSA: Good stuff. I make this comparison, and I've made it in a couple of other calls, I want to point this out, because I think it's one of the main points of what you're saying here and what I feel. I was talking to an assistant coach of the women's BYU basketball program and she was talking about recruiting and I asked her, how aggressive or how proactive should a parent or a kid be, in bonding a coach about wanting to get recruiting and getting recognized and she said it was amazing, so many kids out there are just definitely fearful of saying the wrong thing or bothering a coach or the parents just completely sit back because they're so nervous about saying the wrong thing or just being a pest and she's like, we don't look at that at all, if you don't ever come in and talk to us or make a phone call or send an e-mail, a lot of times, we don't know your kid exist and you've got to put your kid on the map and I think it's the same with parents involvement with their child's basketball career. You've got to at least, let the coach know that you're there, you're very actively participate in your child's sporting career and that's how the coach-parent relationship can be strengthened, you've just got to be careful not to be too aggressive and too passive.

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Dennis Poppinga: I agree.

HSA: Good stuff, good stuff Dennis. Another question I have for you is, I'm curious at what age your kids – with your boys in particular, these guys are NFL athletes, at what age did you start to really see hey these guys have got some skills, they've got some things that can make them a good athlete?

Dennis Poppinga: Well, you know, I was trying to think through that a little bit and for each one of them, it was a little different, including the girls. Of course, because my background in sports I introduced them to sports quite early, through the spectator end of it and going to different sporting events and stuff and I guess the one thing that I try to do with my kids, is I try to make these things fun when we went to an activity or when we started playing when they were really young, I wanted to make it fun, I didn't want to make it a competitive thing, trying to figure out what sport they were going to play some day and then just take them in one particular route trying to get there, but what I found out from my experience and after watching kids – I work a lot with these athletic programs in our town and once they start around 5th or 6th grade they start playing t-ball or they might do soccer or wrestling and I know down in the Utah area and a lot of the big, big area, they start playing basketball even at 1st and 2nd grades. You can start to see at least hand eye coordination, you can kind of see the confidence they have and some of the skills that they've naturally got. So, if my kids, I think the first sport we usually had them play was t-ball and I could start picking up on them a little bit that they had good hand eye coordination, that they were running hard., that they were interested and they wanted to learn more and they had some passion and so, I think, it may sound a little early, but I think you can start picking up on those things early. I've seen young kids that I didn't really pick up on early, develop a little later. That were just late developers, but I think by the time you get to the 3rd, 4th, 5th grade levels there, you can find a little bit of what their interest are and what their skill level is and like my boys, like Casey, my oldest, he was a very thin and tall and lanky, through most of this younger days and I always tagged him as a basket ball player and I always thought he's going to be a strong forward and he got into sophomore in junior high school and all of a sudden, he just started to develop physically and to be just a strong kid and that's when the university of Wyoming saw him in a track meet and one of their coaches, the Coach who was recruiting the series at the time, he saw Casey on the track meet and he picked up on him right away, he said that kid is going to be 6'5", 6'6", 260 and he's got in about three or four years and he started to recruit him right there. So it's a amazing how a lot of these college coaches, they can evaluate that talent at a pretty early age and see things that parents can't because they just see them more on a day to day basis. They might not go and see them at every track meet, every basketball game or every new sport. Anyway, I think that's where you can pick up on different things at different levels - around five or six years old you can just see which direction they start maturing and lead them in that direction I think.

HSA: Yes, that's good to hear. I think that there are some parents out there that worry that their kids maybe in 1st grade and all he can think about is star wars and whatever is going on, on the TV and they think, oh no, it's a silly thing to worry about. You've got some parents wondering my kid's not going to be a basket ball player, he's not interested, from what I'm hearing you say is, it's not necessary the case, it takes a little while for them to grow into it and get the interest and its not the same for every kid, right?

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Dennis Poppinga: That's right, it's not the same for every kid and I'm a firm believer that kids need to learn how to play. They don't necessarily need to learn how to play basketball or football or baseball, they need to learn how to play and that starts from their early age and goes through almost to high school. They need to enjoy themselves, have fun and learn a lot of different things that they're interested in at the time and then things will start being eliminated as you go through life and developing into maybe a couple of different sports that they really have got some passion for. But my philosophy, because I'm in leisure and parks recreation, is you've got to have fun and you've got to learn to play and if you have those two things then other things are going to develop with that, that you'll be able to pick up on.

HSA: Good point, would you say that a parent that does show signs of heartburn and stress when their kid who are five and six years old and they're stressed out thinking oh no he likes space and not basketball and starts to worry and the kid sees that and it could have the opposite effect, in a lot of cases to where the kid kind of have a nasty taste in his mouth about basketball or other sports.

Dennis Poppinga: Yeah, you need to guide and push your kids to a certain point, but there is a limit I think, you've got to let them make some choices along the way with you help. People get a little worried about their kids when they're at that age if they're not going to like sports or be involved in other sports; they've got to be patient. I mean, honestly, not every young man or young woman is going to be a basketball or a football player or baseball or whatever it may be, they're going to have a talent for something in their life and you've got to find out that it is and unfortunately sometimes its not in the athletic field but it doesn't mean they can't like it and enjoy it, it just means they might not have the skill level and you as a parent, you've got to accept that and help them find out what is their great asset and their abilities and lead them in that role. No, I wouldn't get too concerned for parents that are worried that their six, seven and eight year old or nine year olds that they really think and want them to be good players, they're going have to give them a little time.

HSA: Sure, that makes sense. Would you say Dennis that, when you compared yourself to other parents out there, other dads and the amount of time that you spent hands on with Brady, Casey and Kelly with football and basketball, would you say you spent more time helping them train for sport or about the same, nothing special? I'm curious as to –

Dennis Poppinga: Well, I mean one of the advantages I have in my profession, is that I have access to recreation and fitness centers and of course all the athletic field are under my responsibility and all that stuff, I do have to say I spent some time with them more probably then others because I had the facilities to come to and use and I did it for a couple of reason, I did it because I want to bond with them, I wanted to have some time with them and be there as a dad and then I wanted to help them learn some skills that probably, they weren't going to learn form a coach that didn't have maybe some strengths that I had. So, I'm lucky enough that I had some pretty good coaches that I knew, that I had some basic skill levels from a lot of sports so at home, even in the basement of our house, at the park, at the gym, we'd work on things that they didn't know. I was making these things fun, but at the same time we're working on, for instance basketball, I'm a firm believe that kids can never shot too much. If all they did, in my opinion, if you had a basketball practice for young kids and all you did, was do shooting drills the whole practice and that's all you had time for, that's what I would do, because in basketball you've got to learn

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how to shoot. You can always learn to play defense, you're going to learn how to do some other things but you never can get enough shooting and we'd always make games up a different way. Different ways to shoot and try to get to get the ball over their heads and fall through, get the ball on their finger tips and those kinds of things, at the palm of their hands. I spent some time, I wouldn't say I spent every day of the week doing that, I can tell you that few parents, because I come into the rec. center quite early. There was a father that I know very well, that had a daughter and three boys, they were not the most gifted athletes in the world, but he was here at the rec. center every morning when it opened at 5:30, five days a week, almost every day Monday through Friday during their career from I'd say 7th grade to high school and they were working on shooting, they were working on dribbling skills and I mean, talk about a parent that put in extra time and each one of them were successful in high school, junior college or a small college offer and they were good players, but they weren't the most talented, but he worked them to death I think to a point that, I didn't do that

HSA: Ok. That's interesting to hear.

Dennis Poppinga: I wasn't that far off, I did a more fun thing as a family thing as something I enjoy with my kids, but I got to a certain level with them, probably once they get into freshman and high school or sophomore depending on how the school system is set up. After that, they pretty much did their own thing and I would come and help them on specific things, if they're having trouble with their foul shots or if they're having trouble catching the ball in football but I left it up to the coach as from that point. I felt that I got them to a point that they had to take it from there and they could always ask, very seldom did because they were passionate enough that they were going to work on those skills on their own.

HSA: Interesting. One thing I'm really curious about Dennis is, I know some fathers that I know actually quite well, they get really frustrated, they might have been successful in high school, went on to play in college, things like that and then they see their kids or other family members kids and they're really concerned with the fact that these kids have to be reminded and often all the time to go hit the weights and we're talking at the age of about 8th, 9th grade, I'm curious what your boys were like. Did you have to remind them, have to stir them along to go out them and train and hit the weights or is that something that they just completely disciplined themselves and did on their own?

Dennis Poppinga: You know, for the most part they did it on their own. I introduced them to lifting and then of course, they had some pretty good coaches in middle school and especially in high school that were strong into lifting, but I introduced it to them when they were, about 7th or 8th grade, again it depends on their maturity level, around the twelve year old mark and so on, I think is about the time you really can start giving them a little orientation in lifting and some of the things you can do, but once they understood that lifting was going to benefit them, as far as leaping ability, strength in they legs for blocking and running and of course arm strengths for a variety of things and then on top of it, really they had a great high school training strength coach that really got them in the weight room and they got the bug, all three of them did and then the other good thing too was Casey was a good example for Brady and Brady was a good example for Kelly and so that tradition kind of passed its way down and each one of them took it on and they wanted to do as good as their older brother and Casey was the one that started it and I know you know Casey and you've seen him when he was really buffed out and he still works out to-

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day, but there's something that goes along with this, I think it's very important. We talked about working out and training at a young age, I think no matter what the age is, there's things you can do that are going to eventually lead them to that training mentality, that they'll be self disciplined and from the earliest age you can, you've got to teach them to work, have a work ethic, because if they don't have a work ethic, they're never going to learn how to work and how to play hard. So they've got to be able to make a commitment and those things you can work at a young age and we're not just talking athletics, we're taking school and music and anything in life, they need to know how to work, they need to know how to make a commitment, they need to know that they've got to sacrifice certain things if they want to be good, they need to know they're accountable for the things they do, the choices they make and they need to be respectful of their parents, their coaches, referees, officials and other players and so, you've got to install that in them younger, because those are the things they need. They don't need to go out and run 20, 40 odd dashes when they're twelve years old. They need to learn those things, how to work and in my opinion is, they need to learn how to play hard until the whistle blows or play 100% and if they do that they're going to be in great condition and as they get older they're going to need more strength and some don't mature as quickly as others so they are going to have to lift and train. Those are core values and I can't tell you what I taught them and I think their mother had a lot more to do with it than I did, but those are the things they need, because when you get into the upper division or when coaches are looking at your kids, as far as recruiting goes, they're looking for kids that play hard, that have a passion. For instance in football, they looking for kids that play sideline to sideline on every play and when they see those kinds of kids, they might not be developed the way they think as this point in their career you think, but they've got what it takes and they can always develop and if they've got the body built and so on. The training is a little overrated when they're young, I think because they need to learn other things.

HSA: That is excellent, excellent advice. If you just look at John Wooden and how he keeps his basketball and the people that interviewed him and if you read his books, its funny every body wants him talk about Xs an Os and all these stuff about basketball but he's the same way, he stress those core values and how to teach you kids to be accountable, how to make sure that they know what a sacrifice means and that if they're going to get anywhere in life they've got to learn to sacrifice, the dedication, it's so true, so I'm glad that you bring that up. Once you get to a point, your skills can only take you so far, when you get to the point when you're the all state or you move on to college, everybody is a top notch, exceptional athlete and who can accomplish a goal and who can sacrifice, those character things really point out and they get players a lot further than some kids might think, so exactly, very good point. As you look back as I said, all of your years in sports and as you had all these kids go through high school sports programs, you've seen a lot, you've noticed a lot. When it comes to things that you stick out in your mind that parents have done, that you've seem to have a harmful effect on the kid's sports career, is there something that stands out that you can maybe hit on and kind of give a warning to?

Dennis Poppinga: Well, yeah, I've seen quite a bit in our youth sports program, where the parents put their child above the team and they put an emphasis on winning more than anything and I can tell you and I was thinking about this today and I have thought about this a lot, if I went back and counted out the wins and losses my kids have had through youth sports to the NFL even, I think they've probably have more losses than they have winning. Winning, of course is great and it's going to create a lot of self confidence and give you a lot of variety, but I don't think that winning is going to help you develop as much as people think and the emphasis that

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parents have on winning and putting their kid above the team, are the two things that I think that really discourage a lot of kids and the kids that understand that they're going to win and they're going to lose and they're going to learn a lot from losing as well as winning, as long as they are putting out the effort, they're giving out 100%, they're working together as a team, they're listening to their coach, they're doing everything in their power to be better, I mean, good things are going to happen. I've seen a lot of parents, they'll take the rules and the policies that are set up and they'll be on a border line of going over those to benefit their child. I've seen a couple of good kids go through the programs and they play college basketball, but somewhere down the line it catches up with them, they have their parents kind of helping them along the way and twisting the rules and putting things out of perspective and they get to a point when they can't deal with situations, because they haven't learnt other things that go along with the winning and how to be dedicated and be committed and make good choices and be respectful of your coach and self, that's my opinion.

HSA: Excellent, excellent, that's good stuff. Self esteem; huge thing for kids especially in sports, I've seen it a lot where a kid has all the ability in the world, just lacks a little bit of self esteem and it just has such a disastrous effect because they just don't have the confidence to compete. How would you say, you developed your kids self esteem without making it become obnoxious or arrogant or just full of themselves?

Dennis Poppinga: Now that's a really difficult thing to put a finger on, but I think a lot of it comes back to the family life they have. I was raised by pretty much in a single parent family so I'm not saying that have to have both parents there, because I know there's a lot these days that don't, but your parents or your parent or whoever is raising you, have to love you number one and they have got to give you some positive feedback from an early age. They're rewarded for good things they do, no matter how small it may be and you've got to put your kids in opportunities to succeed as much as possible. They're going to fail in some things, they're not going to win all their games, they're going to make errors, they're going to get technicals, they're going to get personal fouls, maybe going to be sitting in the grass playing plan with the dandelions when they should be catching a ball that goes over their heads, who knows. But you've got to be positive and you've got to do it at an early age and direct them in a way that they can get some rewards out of things maybe if they're only going to be small but you've got to figure out a way they're going to get some positive feedback and then – I don't know exactly how to tell people to do this, but they've got to find ways where they could develop and get this positive feedback that is going to turn into some confidence because, there's a fine line between having confidence and good self esteem and being cocky and arrogant and trash talking all the time and the higher level you go I can honestly, say you've got to be self confident, it's got to continue to develop each level you go and if you want to be a successful athlete and you have to be humble but on the other side of it you have to realize, that you are competing with kids out there that are better athletes. A lot of the good ones have high self esteem and a lot of confidence and that goes a long way to being successful. so, there's a fine line between it but I think it starts with the parents from an early age, positive re-enforcements, getting them in situations that they can be rewarded and just continuing that and not criticizing to the point that you're going to downgrade them. I've done that and I hate to admit it, but I remember a few times I've take my boys right in front of the coaches or parents and stuff and just chew their butt out because I didn't feel like they were hustling on the rebound or played hard enough during the game or got into foul trouble or whatever and after years later now, I'm saying well that wasn't a good thing. Anyway,

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the coaches are going to do plenty of that, so the parents don't need to do that. That's self confidence, I wish I had a magic wand to figure out how to get that and the only thing I can think, is you've got to have some success somewhere, that's going to build their confidants and somehow parents are going to have to have get their kids is a situation where they can get that reward.

HSA: Yeah, I like that. I'm constantly stressing on just the little things when a kid does wrong when they're six or seven years old out on the t-ball because a parent wants results about wanting them to succeed and have some pretty negative impacts as the kid grows so I like what you say about set up a small wins, positive reinforcement, I cant agree with you more on that. Moving on, at one point, I've heard and you can help me with this, because it seems like I had a conversation once with Casey and maybe its just a myth, maybe I'm remembering something that wasn't even there but, I though he'd mentioned something about getting involved in gymnastic as a young age because it could be beneficial to helping you develop other skills or abilities when it comes to basketball football or other sports later on, is there any truth to that?

Dennis Poppinga: Well, I think so. I've been in the recreation field, we offer programs from pre-school all the way to senior citizens so, in our case, there weren't any organized sports for kids that were three and four years old or even younger. There are programs for tumbling gymnastics even karate, swim lessons, wrestling, those kind of things that you can get them in at an early age and they can start learning how to socialize like they would if they were going to be on a team and they can start to receive instructions from whoever is giving instructions on whatever, tumbling, gymnastics or swim lessons, so they can start learning how to take instructions like a coach would give and then they can start being disciplined, because they can line up this way, they can't run all over and jump off the side of the mat, run around with their friends, they've got to be in a certain line here, that they've got to do certain things at a certain time, so those things I think carry over so much and the other side of it as I was saying, its still have to be fun, they've got to enjoy it, its got to have fun to it. They'll learn to play but they'll start learning all those things that they're going to need as they develop in life and start getting into organized sports and that's an easy way to do it. I guess I'm promoting recreation programs but there are a lot of programs you can get them in, that will give them those kinds of experiences at an early age.

HSA: Now that makes sense, it makes a lot of sense. Are there any other activities out there that parents might not think about first hand that is helpful for their kids to be involved in, that will benefit them later on in life in basketball or any athletic career?

Dennis Poppinga: Well, in basketball it takes a lot of skills and so I think – firstly, my philosophy is, I m a multi sport guy and I think as many different things you can get them into, as far as even dance, I mean it might sound funny, but we have dance classes for younger boys and girls that come in and they just learn basic steps but it gives them some flexibility, they start learning how to get up on their toes, how to move their feet, you've got to have a quick feet in just about all sports. All those things, when I was growing up, I was a clumsy kid for a long time and my boys were the same, it just gives them that opportunity to develop those skill level that are going to carry over in those sports. All those things I mentioned, you can get them into an early age give them some variety I think and again, those are the things you start looking at your kids and going, you know he can. Kelly was the one that had really quick feet, I don't know what it was, he had quick feet, he could mover really good and I just started picking up on that an early age where Brady and Casey they were more physical and they all had good speed. We have a

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Hershey track meet in Wyoming and I think they do it every state around but we offer it at a young age and they do all kinds of different events, so that carry over to me is very important to develop basketball players, football, baseball; I'm a multi sports guy.

HSA: Yeah and it makes sense too. I mean you brought up dancing and immediately the thing I thought about was, a kid, if he's going to learn a dance, he's got to memorize to take this many steps here and this many steps here and later on when he's going to learn an offense on the basketball court, having that experience of having to memories and do that, there or little take aways from the type of stuff so I can see how it can really benefit.

Dennis Poppinga: Exactly I agree with you.

HSA: Well moving on, this is another big one that I was especially curious about, you hear the debate all the time, nature versus nurture, are we born with whatever we're going to be in life and that's our personality or do we gradually just acquire certain things that are around us. When it comes to sports, do you think kids are the majority, they're born with that ability, they were blessed with the talent or do you think its more about who you're around and what skills you're taught and how much time people spend with you in the sporting arena, what are you thoughts on that?.

Dennis Poppinga: I really feel it's a little of both. I mean you can't deny that people who play in a higher level in the NFL in the NBA, major league baseball, they're in the Olympics, they definitely have genetics that have helped them along the way, there's no doubt about it. The nurturing end of it, I think, like we mentioned the dad that brought his kids into the gym early there's a lot of kids that have a passion for sports, for basketball and various things that might not have the natural ability, but they have the desire and so if you can find that in your child and you can nurture it and nurture it so you can develop those skills, you never know. Sometimes, these kids that are late developing, have some skills that you don't realize until they're maybe in middle school, junior high and so, it's a combination of both. Certainly, the kids that are probably the lead athletes, that probably have more natural ability than they have, someone that's developed their skills, so it goes hand in hand. If you have a child that's got some natural abilities and you can see it at an early age and you can help them develop it then more power to you but I think it all goes back to, like I talked about it, if they've got the desire and the passion and the love for a sport, then no matter if they get any natural ability or not, you can certainly develop them into a fine athlete that's going to carry over to other things in their lives when they're out of athletics, to be successful. I'm a firm believer. Again it goes back to the family, I mean you've seen it in the NFL and NBA, you've got great athletes that have more ability that you can image, that don't have the support system or those values and it doesn't last long, they get in and they make poor choices and no matter how much natural ability you have, if you don't make good choices and have good values, you're not going to succeed very long.

HSA: Absolutely. Well, I'll tell you what Dennis, it's been fun and as I've asked you the questions and kind of listen to your responses I had a whole list here of question that I was really curious about what your thoughts were, a guy raising three boys and having each of them get to the NFL, there's something to it, I firmly don't believe that it was luck. Obviously, they were just born with some talent, but this just does not happen very often and I'll tell you what I've come away with if I had to pick some underlying themes. You used words like love, I wrote that one

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down, bonding, I wrote that one down, fun spirited and all the stuff that you try to do with your kids at an early age, you focus more, especially at that young age, it sounds, like you make it fun, keep the stress down, have a purpose – a long term purpose to teach some core values and make it an experience, not a regiment at that young age and just good things will happen, is that correct in any way?

Dennis Poppinga: You pretty well summaries it, I think that very much what's kind of developed over the years without me really sitting down twenty years or thirty years ago, I'm trying to put this all together, it's kind of evolved into that, so I agree you with you.

HSA: Wonderful. Well Dennis, we sure appreciate your time, this has been wonderful information that you've shared with us, can't thank you enough.

Dennis Poppinga: Well you're certainly welcome and I wish all the parents and the young athletes out there the best and enjoy yourself along the journey.

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