

Fielding A and B Teams

Parents sometimes inquire about the criteria used to determine when teams will be split between “A” and “B” team strengths. CYO allows for the splitting of A/B teams in grades 6, 7, and 8. It does not require or even encourage the splitting. Each season, we determine the best solution for each grade. In some grades we field both A and B teams, while in others we field only B teams.

As St. Mark Athletic Director and as Vice-Chairman of the CYO Athletic Advisory Board, I spend a great deal of time working with CYO, both at the higher level long-term planning stages and at the ground-level rules implementation stages. I have a good understanding of what CYO is trying to accomplish, all of which is rooted in our Catholic faith, and is centered around the young athlete and what is best for them.

While competition is part of any sports program, for CYO the emphasis goes way beyond that as we look to bring faith into sports, all while focusing on the young athlete and their personal development, *and most importantly on them having fun and developing their faith through sports.*

The young person, not the athletic activity, is the focus of CYO athletics.

I hope this document adds some clarity as to how I decide where we will and will not field A teams.

It's not about one kid or one group of kids

When considering team placement (A or B), and how best to split up teams, we look at the overall composition of the athletes being split. It's not enough to be able to identify the “better” players or the “smarter” players or the “more talented” players. We have a good system for evaluating players fairly to determine the “better” players. That's not enough. We must consider the strength of the best players in the grade and compare that to the best players across the CYO league. If we field a team of our “best” players, how will they compare to the other “best” teams? We have a good awareness of the talent level of the true A teams in the CYO program. St Mark has been blessed to have many successful A teams over the years – as evidenced by the victory banners hanging in the gym.

Way beyond winning!

What does an A team look like?

It's clearly not cut and dry, and there is judgment involved in making this decision. I look to the parents, coaches and commissioners to offer their input, but at the end of the day it's my decision to make.

Some of the criteria include:

- 1) Do any of the kids have year-round experience in their sport – are they on travel teams, do they take private lessons? Are there truly high-level players that can lead an A team to success? Often times, successful A teams have a number of these types of players. This is not the only or even the most important factor, but the presence of these types of players greatly improves the chances of a team being fielded as an A team.
- 2) How have the teams performed in previous years? CYO now splits A/B starting in 6th grade. Looking at how the kids did in 5th grade can tell us a lot. Did they win a lot and compete well – or did they struggle? Of course, there are often new kids entering the program so we need to consider that. And of course, kids develop a lot each year.
- 3) How many kids do we have in the grade? Larger groups of kids naturally suggest there may be enough highly skilled players to field an A team, but this is certainly not always the case.

What's best for the entire St Mark program?

I have learned over the years that fielding weak A teams hurts our program. As we look at the value of splitting "A" and "B" players up into separate teams, we look at how well the "A" team might do in the "A" CYO divisions. We MUST also consider what the "B" teams will then look like, and how well they are likely to do in the "B" division. By separating all of the "A" players, are we left with "B" teams that can do well? That's not to say we will "hold-back" a true A team, we never have and never will, even if doing so left a very weak B team. CYO does allow a team to be classified as C and we will designate a team as such when necessary. Having said that, we will not field a weak A team to the detriment of the entire program.

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Fielding weak A teams isn't fair to the CYO program

When we field an A team, we must have confidence that they will compete well against other A teams. It's not productive to put a team into the A bracket that isn't really an A team. That's not to say that all A teams will have a great season – obviously some will finish at the top of their brackets and some at the bottom. We would not consider it a failure for one of our teams to have a losing season – provided we accurately identified that team as belonging in the A division. It can be very unproductive to place an A team that we know is not an A team. In this case, we are left with other schools looking down on our kids, questioning why they are in the wrong bracket. That's not good for our kids and it's not good for our program. It's very frustrating for both sides when a team gets crushed on the court – something much more likely to occur when fielding a weak A team. This isn't fun for our kids and it isn't fun for the true A team kids and coaches who came to the gym expecting a reasonable competition.

My kid is better than your kid

Some parents will claim that it is unfair for their “better” child to have to play with the “lesser” athletes in their class. They will say things like, “Once again the girls are being put at a disadvantage. We have some very strong athletes in our grade and they should be able to maximize their talents.” As if their kid can't “maximize their talent” participating on a B team?

To those parents I say, it is probably best if you take your child somewhere else to play sports. St Mark is not for you. I don't want my “lesser” child playing with yours. And by the way, my children are often among the “better” athletes in their grade. To have them looked down on because they didn't make the A team is wrong. Another option, and one I would highly recommend, is to teach your kid to get along and have fun with all the kids in their class - - even those that might not be as athletically talented as your kid.

CYO athletics is supposed to be about kids having fun as they develop whatever sports abilities they have. Certainly there are times when identifying an A team supports that effort – NEVER was it meant to be used for false glorification of slightly above-average players.

Way beyond winning!

Making the High School team

Parents sometimes feel that their kid playing on a B team somehow hurts their chances of making the high school teams. I have seen some very talented A-team players fail to make the high school teams. Simply being on the A team does not add to your child's chances of making the high school team. Personal training, hard work and exceptional athletic ability, coupled with great high-school tryouts determine high school team placements.

I have heard from several parents with regrets at pushing so hard for their kid to make the A team in grade school, only to be disappointed when they didn't make the high school team. All that worry, anxiety and conflict in grade school for nothing. Those parents would offer this advice: relax and let your kid enjoy their grade school sports experience without the added pressure and conflict that comes with pushing for the A team experience.

*My kid won't develop playing on a B team –
or the B coach isn't as good as the A coach*

Your kid's athletic development is determined much more by his/her personal commitment than any other factor. No coach can turn your kid into an exceptional athlete during the CYO season. Do they work year-round to develop their skills? Do they play year-round on outside teams? Do they use a personal trainer? The hard fact is that competing at the high-school level requires much more than just playing with the best kids in your class during grade school.

Way beyond winning!

My kid wants to play with their "friends"

This is perhaps the saddest of arguments for fielding an A team. The logic goes something like this, "This is supposed to be the years of the girls having fun and playing with their friends." As if the only friends this child has in school are those with above-average athletic skills? As if they can't have fun playing with those dreaded "b" players? Why is it these kids can't have fun playing with other kids who maybe aren't the most athletic kids in the class? What if this kid took a leadership role on the B team and just happened to have fun doing that? Is that not possible? I will note here that I never get this complaint from truly A player's parents. This argument always comes from a parent who has confused their child being a "better" player in their grade as somehow defining them as a true A player.

Please pray for your kids happiness in sports

I hope I have added some clarity around the A/B process. As always, I will work hard to volunteer my time for the sports program as long as Fr. John asks me to do so. In doing so, I will always make decisions that I see best for ALL the kids in the program, both the true A kids and all the others.

I'm always happy to answer any questions, but if you'd like a meeting to call me an idiot, please use that time to pray for your child's happiness in sports and in life.

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