

## What can you learn from riding the bench?

If you are one of the select few playing sports in high school, it will become abundantly obvious that the main concern of coaches is to win games. Gone are the days of equal playing time, special attention and non-accountability. It is time to compete to win! For that reason, coaches make you train a certain way, follow certain tactics and run set offenses — along with any other coaching strategies — to give their team the best chance of winning.



Another thing coaches do is select who will start the game and who will ride the bench. For the most part, they do this on a merit basis, with the players the coach thinks are better (at those positions) getting most of the playing time. For most high-school sports, if you are on the bench, it means you will get a lot less playing time than those who start, which can be demoralizing.

"There is no better coach than the bench." — Anson Dorrance, UNC women's soccer coach, 22-time NCAA champion

### ***Am I Good Enough?***

If you are consistently on the bench, you might be questioning whether you are good enough to be successful in your chosen sport. However, as you contemplate this question, bear in mind that you are already in an elite group, as 70 percent of youth athletes quit sports by the time they reach high school. The fact that you are still involved shows that you have talent and enjoy being involved in the sport. The simple fact that you made the team proves you have value as a player.



This is also a good time, however, to think about why you play the sport and what you want to get out of it.

### ***Your Options***

You could leave that team and join another team where you think you will have the opportunity to play more, or quit the sport altogether and join the 70 percent of kids above.

However, there are still plenty of opportunities for you to stay on the team and thrive. Knowing that things might not always go your way, but standing up and facing the challenge head on, is where the true opportunity exists. It's a good habit to have as you go through life. It also doesn't matter much to colleges or future



employers if you were the star of the team. What stands out to them is the fact that you participated and learned a multitude of useful skills that have prepared you to get things done. That is the value of being involved in sports. You proved you could make it!

If you do plan to continue competing on that team, set goals. Setting goals is an important part of achieving in sports because they give you guidance as to why you are continuing and how to make it worthwhile.

## ***Play Your Role***

The fact is that players who don't start still have significant roles to play on every single team. Just look at the bench reactions in any college basketball or NBA game to see the emotional role substitutes can play in keeping the team's energy positive and engaged.

On the practice court, these players' contributions are even more pronounced. Their job is to push the starting players to the limit and make them work harder, think more efficiently and execute better as they prepare for game day. The team's success is built on how well every single person involved does their job, in practice as well as games.

If you do your job right as a sub, keeping spirits high and challenging your teammates, the team will do better, your teammates will improve, and you will also improve on the field.

Being in a team environment is also a big contributor to your emotional well-being. You can build bonds and share stories with teammates that lead to meaningful memories long after you have forgotten the scores of games.



## ***Improving Your Play***

In all likelihood, you will eventually get your chance to play for your team. The question is whether you are prepared to grab that chance and show your coach that you have improved and can contribute positively to the cause on the field or court.

This will only happen if you actively seek to improve your game, giving your best in practice as well as putting in extra work in the off-season. Do this, and you will earn yourself more playing time and maybe even that starting spot you want. Your current bench status doesn't determine that you will be second best in your sport or life moving forward. Instead, it is up to you to let it spur you to put in the work to achieve a given success.

You need to honestly answer a hard question: "Am I doing all that I can to improve my game?"

You can learn a lot from riding the bench. Watching the game unfold from the sideline allows you to see things that those who are in the thick of the action cannot see. Use these opportunities to your advantage.



Being a player on the bench doesn't mean you are any less important than the starters to the success of the team. It also doesn't mean you have to be a bench player for the rest of your time on that team or any other team. How much enjoyment and success you have will be determined by how you react and approach the situation. Remember, there is not a professional athlete alive that did not spend time at some point on the

bench. It's up to you to decide what you want to show your coaches, family, teammates, and more importantly yourself, about patience, determination, goal setting, perseverance and character.

Regardless of your time in the games or contributions toward each win, always remember: Where you are today does not determine your future as a player or as an adult. **That is up to you!**