

How to Ease the Anxiety of Tryouts

By Marty Schupak, [Youth Sports Club](#)

Imagine you are being called upon for the first time in your life to perform a sport to the best of your ability. In addition, you have to do this in front of 6-12 men holding clipboards.

Not the most relaxing atmosphere. For better or for worse this is what coaches do for the day that is known as tryouts. The anxiety of these tryouts can affect the performance of some young players. Many times it is not only the players that are anxious, but the parents too. Often, they can be worse than their kids.

I'm involved in youth [baseball](#) so I see it from this one sport. I am also in touch with numerous sports league commissioners around the country and hear how most of them approach these tryout days.

In our baseball league, on tryout days, parents accompany their kids and register them for the tryouts. The league board member running the tryouts will usually take four kids at a time on the field. He will then hit grounders to each one, showing the player's infield skills, before moving on to the next skill. This system continues in the outfield and then hitting, running and pitching. While this is happening, the coaches and their assistants are usually on the third-base line [rating each skill](#) on a number system.

Remember that the fear of failure is an athlete's worst enemy. One of the things the players trying out should be told is that they will be judged only on their successes and not from anything they do wrong. Isn't this true? If a player gets five swings and hits two over the fence but misses the other three, the coaches will usually judge or rate the player on the balls hit over the fence.

We also speak to the parents and explain the same thing. A lot of times the anxiety the kids bring to tryouts can be traced back to the parent. Even at the earliest age, parents are anticipating such things as their kid being the starting point guard or, even further down the road, a [scholarship athlete](#)

Short warm-ups for each group also help. When one group is on the field another coach can lead the "on deck" group with some running and stretching that help the players to relax.

And remember that laughter is one of the best medicines for tense, performance-type situations. Many coaches will argue that in sports tryouts, they are actually looking to see how they handle stress. I'm not sure if this is the best theory, especially in youth sports when we are trying to keep kids involved and not drive them away. I like the idea of trying to get the young players as relaxed as possible.

A good friend of mine who oversees a very competitive [basketball](#) program also likes to have players trying out to be in a relaxed atmosphere, giving them the best chance to be successful. He will get the players together and will tell them that hustle and [rebounding](#) are how the coaches rate players in their tryouts, and not to be concerned too much about missing outside shots or a lay up. Right away, this takes the pressure off the player about making all their shots.

No matter the sport, there are going to be players who get anxious on the thought of tryouts. Coaches and leagues need to accommodate--but not baby--young athletes so they can show their skills. As they get older, they'll learn that there is positive and negative anxiety and how to cope with tryouts as well as games. But with young age groups, let's make the tryouts a good experience for the player so they continue to play sports.