

Lessons From the Movie, The Sandlot

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What makes for a great swimming race?

A fast start. Great entry. Explosive breakout. Correct stroke rate. Balanced splits. It is important to learn about, rehearse and refine all aspects of a race. It takes patience, persistence, focus, execution, correction, repetition, more correction and more repetition for each to become refined and part of one's race habits.

It all matters. They all play a role in a race. But how about also relaxing, trusting and having fun?

In the movie The Sandlot, the new kid, Scotty Smalls, is invited to play baseball with the other kids in the neighborhood; in The Sandlot. Smalls is excited but nervous since he never played ball nor had he learned how to catch or throw a baseball. When the first fly ball is hit his way, he stumbles trying to make the catch and then he runs the ball to the infield because he does not know how to throw it.

The best player in the group, Benny Rodriguez, is the one who invited Smalls to play with them. Benny takes a moment to reassure him. Benny is surprised when Smalls tells him he does not know how to throw a ball. Smalls is about to leave The Sandlot since he figures he cannot play well enough.

Benny says to him, "You think too much. I bet you get all A's in school." (Not that that is a bad thing but it is a suitable comment in this scene – in this teachable moment).

Benny says, "Man, this is baseball. You gotta stop thinking. Just have fun."

Benny then goes on to say, "I mean, if you were having fun, you would've caught that ball. You ever have a paper route?"

Smalls says, "I helped a guy once."

Benny continues trying to teach him. "Okay, well, chuck it the way you would a paper. When your arm gets here (Benny gestures) just let it go. Just let it go. It's that easy."

Smalls then asks, "How do I catch it?"

Benny: "Just stand there and stick your glove out in the air. I'll take care of it"

Learning to catch and throw, like learning to master swimming strokes and race strategy probably are a little more involved than that scene may suggest, but how about the idea of just trusting the moment and having fun with the activity; with the process and the doing?

Parents – keep nurturing your children's growth, keep supporting them in their positive endeavors (such as swimming) and keep teaching them valuable life lessons. But when it comes to sport specific skills and even the interpersonal dynamics of making friends and becoming part of a team, perhaps we can learn from the examples of Benny Rodriguez, Scotty Smalls and the kids from "The Sandlot". Perhaps young people need and benefit from having their own space in which to learn, have fun, make friends, feel like part of something special, connect with people their own age and find ownership for their endeavors. We can all learn about helping young people by remembering how Benny Rodriguez helped Scotty Smalls play ball and feel like he belonged with the kids in The Sandlot.