

10 Ways to Give Back to the Community: A Guide for Sports Teams Ages 6-66

1. Clean Up

Look around your community. Is there litter strewn about your parks or playing fields? Some parts of town might not have parks or playing fields, but they may have junk-filled empty lots that could be reclaimed. Pick a place that could use a clean-up and get your whole team together for a few hours. Invite parents and other members of the community to join you. With rubber gloves and garbage bags for all, clean up a part of town and make it more inviting and accessible to the people in your community.

2. Hold a Charity Fundraiser

Brainstorm with players to name some local charities, then vote to pick one that your team would like to support. Next, come up with a fun and easy fundraiser that engages the community. Hold a car wash, sell raffle tickets to win a prize, or create an “a-thon” event that contributes to your training and invite people in the community to participate also.

Lack of time to organize is not an excuse – instead you can easily get your team to fundraise and participate in a charity running race, walking event, or stair climb that has already been organized (e.g., Run for the Cure, Terry Fox Run, Easter Seals Walk).

3. Thank Officials at the End of the Season

Referees and lines persons have a tough job. They get knocked down and jostled in the heat of play, and yelled at by players, parents and coaches. The truth is that without officials, competition can't take place. Respect and honor the great women and men that make sports play happen and thank them at the end of the season with a card signed by your whole team and a token they can remember you by, like a team photo.

4. Organize a Friendly Match with Another Team

How well does your team know other teams that play the same sport, but in different leagues or levels in your community? Maybe you share the same practice or game facilities or maybe players on your team have friends or siblings that play on other teams, yet your teams never get the chance to meet and compete. Strengthen your team's ties to others in the community and organize a friendly match with a team you don't normally compete with. Let both teams really recognize fun competition without the pressure to win and gain league points. At the same time, maybe you can learn something from one another in terms of skills, attitude, sport strategy, team dynamic, and the cultural fabric of the team.

5. Recognize Parents and Other Volunteers

Community sport would not be possible without the commitment and support of parents and volunteers, including coaches and trainers. Volunteers give their time selflessly. Organize an event after a game or practice or at the end of your season, where you recognize and celebrate the contributions made by sport volunteers. It can be a potluck, or a barbecue or you can

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even hand out certificates or sticker labels that say things like “#1 Coach” or “Proud Soccer Mom”.

6. Discover and Share The History of your Sport

What is the origin of your sport in your community? How old is your league? Your team? Work with your coach to split up the research among teammates. Look on the Internet, interview your league organizers, parents and others in the community to get the big picture about how your sport has been shaped by your community. Put all this together on sheet of paper and make copies to give to your team, your parents and all the people that helped you do your research. Also send a copy to your town mayor.

7. Volunteer as a Team

Identify a non-profit fundraising event that will take place in your community, which needs lots of volunteers, such as a gala, community organizing or sporting event. These events rely on enthusiastic and dependable volunteers that can work together as a team under pressure. Get the whole team together and sign up as volunteers on the day of the event and help make the event go off without a hitch.

8. Appreciate your Spectators

Spectators make a terrific difference at games and can be very supportive when rooting for the home team. Dedicate a game to your audience and show your appreciation. How? Announce an audience dedication at the beginning of the game. Coordinate with your opponent team and at the

end of the game, applaud the audience! If any of your parents or friends work for a big company, see if they can provide any promotional freebies to give away to your audience as a token of appreciation.

9. Hold a Post-Game Social Event

Game time is when officials, spectators, parents, coaches and players from two teams come together in one place. After the competition is over, everybody usually high-tails it home, but why not take advantage of this gathering to create a stronger sense of community around your team? There is no reason why opponents should not also be friends. Periodically host a social event after your game and invite everybody that attended to participate. This can be a barbecue, a bake sale, a picnic, a potluck or even get together at a local restaurant.

10. Be Mentors

Have a discussion with players from your team about what it means to be a good mentor. Determine which players are willing to make this long-term commitment. Your team can advertise players that are willing to be mentors to your league organizers, community planners and to any local agencies that provide services to children and youth. If players are interested in making an even bigger commitment to mentorship, they should contact a Big Brothers or Big Sisters organization in your community and get involved. Extend invitations to these community members to attend your next game!

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