

Do you really want to know what keeps players interested in youth sports? It's having a second family. Your travel team or any sports team should have a family atmosphere. If it doesn't, teams tend to split into groups. I've seen it, I've been a part of it, and it's not really a great feeling.

The teams that I've always enjoyed the most was the ones where I was close with all my teammates. My last travel ball team for example, we liked to do escape rooms for team bonding during tournaments. It also just gave us time to get away from softball for an hour and just have fun with each other. It was like our ritual, and if it wasn't an escape room it was dinner or games or even a potluck. We just always wanted to be together, it was never forced just natural. A simple text in the group chat like, "Hey Jen and I are going to get food if anyone wants to come," an open invite so that girls had the chance to hangout.

Especially in the fall and winter this is imperative. Coaches tend to focus on individuals, so it's up to the players to form a team bond. Having my dad as a coach helped a little too, because if they weren't comfortable coming to him directly with concerns, they would come to me, and I would relay the message so that he could talk to them. It's great knowing your teammate has your back especially with communicating to a coach, whether that coach is a family member or if the teammate is a captain and it's their responsibility to have communication with their coach. I've always been the player to be able to voice personal or team struggles with my coaches, whether it's softball related or not. Coaches can mend or create bonds too.

Summer ball is always more fun when you can do stuff as a team rather than just hanging out with your families. Because the closer the team is, the closer the parents will be too. Most people don't realize this, but parents getting along are just as important as teammates getting along. If you have a parent trying to "brag" about their child to another parent, it's going to create tension that falls onto the players, again I've seen it happen and it is awkward, because your parents are acting more immature than you the child.

Bottom line, if your entire team can't be a family or close, it's going to make for a very very long season.