



Lining up for the winning putt

## Competitive by nature

Competition is everywhere, but how is it beneficial for children? **Thomas Dodds** learns how the competitive spirit is helping children unlock new skills while having fun

**C**OMPETITION is all around us, it's a key aspect of life. If you look back across your life you will see that it is made up of a series of contests, some of which might have been more successful than others. That first experience comes at a young age, perhaps one that even people don't have vivid memories of.

The first introduction could have been through sports, such as basketball, football or baseball, however it is just as likely that a child's first interaction with a competitive event was at an FEC, with games like bowling, mini-golf, go-karting and laser tag all offering a form of competition to kids.

As an essential part of life, it only makes sense that competition plays such an important role in children's development. Grant Collins, chief sales officer at Zone Laser Tag, explained: "Competition plays a crucial role in childhood development. It teaches kids how to handle challenges, build resilience and develop goal-setting skills. When combined with physical activity, competitive play helps improve motor skills, co-ordination and overall fitness.

"Games like laser tag introduce friendly competition in a way that encourages kids to push their limits while having fun. Laser tag, in particular, attracts kids who may have otherwise preferred to stay on the couch and play a videogame, to get up and be active, as it's the closest form of fun to their digital hobby."

Getting children up and active has always

been important, even with increasing reliance on technology that hasn't changed. Collins continued: "Physically, games like laser tag keep children active, improving their agility, endurance and reflexes. Unlike traditional sports, laser tag is accessible to a wider range of children, including those in wheelchairs, as well as those who may not typically engage in competitive sports."

While bowling doesn't require guests to run around or shoot lasers at targets it does still aid children in developing key skills that are needed throughout life. Cynthia Winterhalter, a member of the board of directors at Switch International Bowling, described some of the benefits, as she said: "Physically, bowling helps improve hand-eye coordination, balance, strength and flexibility.

"At Switch International Bowling, we believe that participation in competitive activities is crucial for children's overall development," She continued. "Engaging in competitive activities helps children build essential life skills like discipline, teamwork, resilience and sportsmanship."

It can also help children to learn to handle life's setbacks. While finishing runner-up to an older sibling in mini-golf or as the losing team in laser tag might be meaningless on the surface, it's one reason, amongst many, as to why competition is so important for kids to be a part of.

"Laser tag provides a platform for children to experience both winning and losing, teaching them to handle success gracefully and cope with disappointment," Chris Epstein, business



Scoring systems in games designed for kids help keep them engaged and entertained by providing a clear sense of progress, accomplishment and a tangible goal to strive for, essentially acting as a built-in reward system that motivates them to continue playing and improve their skills. This is especially important for younger children who may not fully understand the complex mechanics of a game

Mark Hayes, founder and inventor of Luminare golf

development officer at Laserforce, explained: "These experiences build resilience and stress management skills, helping children learn to manage their emotions in a fun and supportive environment. The ability to bounce back from setbacks and remain composed under pressure is a crucial life skill that will serve them well in various aspects of life."

On the whole, activities like mini-golf and bowling are fun and enjoyable. Although when



LOOKING for an  
Entertainment Partner  
that can help take  
your business to the  
Next Level?

- ✓ Our Systems are used in more than 950 locations
- ✓ More than 40,000 players per day
- ✓ 35 years of success
- ✓ Local offices all around the world



Glow In The  
Dark Vest



Step  
Tracking



Touch  
Screen



Magnetic  
Clips



Widest  
Laser

# ZONE

L A S E R —  T A G



Redemption Rewards

Earn tickets as you play,  
with Intercard and more. Just one of  
our new integrations.



Step tracking

Laser Tag is good for you, now you can 'prove it'.  
See steps and calorie burn on your  
scorecards, or membership.



Turn Key

Not just equipment we do arena design,  
decor, interactive devices and lights,  
we can sort your everything.

Contact:

[info@lasertag.com](mailto:info@lasertag.com)

[lasertag.com](http://lasertag.com)



a child doesn't want to do an activity as they aren't engaged, there is sometimes little that can be done to change their mind. One simple way to help engage children is the design, as Conny Berglund, sales and marketing coordinator at City Golf, said: "The design of a game is crucial for a child's experience, as it directly affects their engagement, learning and overall enjoyment when out there on the course."

Rick Johnson, director of marketing at Amusement Products, offered an opinion as to why the design can affect children's engagement, as he explained: "For the very young kids, the joy of experiencing a new reality provided by themed mini-golf allows them to experience something that is close to their children's stories in real life. For that age, the game is more about the atmosphere rather than the skill of the game. As the child advances in age, the skill and competing with family becomes more of the goal and the 'atmosphere' of the themed golf is more of a secondary motivation."

It can also just come down to keeping the kids engaged in activity. You can't expect all kids to understand all the rules, just think how many times you've seen children continually hit the ball in mini-golf before it has come to a full stop. Interactivity that is absent from the older and more traditional courses can be a way to help focus children on an activity.

Mark Hayes, the founder and inventor of Luminate golf, explained: "Scoring systems in games designed for kids help keep them engaged and entertained by providing a clear sense of progress, accomplishment and a tangible goal to strive for, essentially acting as a built-in reward system that motivates them to continue playing and improve their skills. This is especially important for younger children who may not fully understand the complex mechanics of a game but can easily grasp the concept of earning points and reaching higher levels."

The interactivity that the world has been craving can also be achieved with an LED lighting system according to Hayes, who said: "While LED lighting can show off a golf course making it look fantastic and highlighting the game features, we find that kids enjoy when they get the ball in the golf hole and it activates the perimeter lighting that will flash along with the illuminated hole."

"Interactive game play is becoming more popular and making the game play more fun by creating visual and audio effects, this helps kids to enjoy the feeling of a win, even if the win is not from the number of putts but just that they got the ball in the hole."

"This will highlight most people's senses and, especially in kids from all backgrounds, enjoy the feel that they have a win, even if the win is not the number of putts they had taken, but they got the ball in the hole."

Hayes offered his thoughts as to why mini-golf is so popular as he said: "It's a highly accessible, fun and social activity that appeals to people of all ages and skill levels, with the added benefit of being relatively inexpensive. The next generation of mini-golf includes games that use technology, social features and memorable moments to enhance the experience."

While focusing on engaging kid and making a fun environment for them to play and learn is crucial, Johnson suggested that it is still important to make mini-golf courses challenging, as he said: "Dad who plays real golf every week

will not be impressed when he, his six-year-old, and his 14-year-old all score the same on nearly every hole. Too simple means that the course is not competitive and will not motivate the players to come and test their skills again. A competitive course also allows the players to see more clearly where they stand against the other participants."

Activities like bowling or mini-golf are a skill in themselves. They can be an early opportunity to install the belief that practice makes perfect. That's the opinion of Johnson, who explained: "When most start playing mini-golf, they don't even know how to hold a putter. After help from their parents or siblings, they start to learn how to putt the ball straight. Next, they learn how to adjust how hard to hit the putt to keep the ball closer to the hole after they hit it if it does not go in the cup."

He finished: "Lastly, they start to learn how to aim the putt better to get it in the cup. This progression will result in better success and more of a chance to win the game. It isn't unusual for this to be the first chance for a child to learn that practice makes perfect!"

With activities like bowling and laser tag it can be easy to forget that people learn how to play at different speeds and each with their own ability. Bowling is no good if you can't pick the ball up to throw it down the lane towards the pins. Winterhalter explained: "At Switch International Bowling, we offer various adaptations and tools to ensure that children have a rewarding bowling experience."

"Equipment like ball ramps, bumpers, lightweight balls and bowling aids are available to cater to the unique needs of young bowlers."



A group of kids take on the 19th bonus hole



Youngsters learn the rules as parents guide them through an AGS mini-golf course at a Great Wolf Lodge resort

These adaptations make the game more accessible and enjoyable for children, allowing them to focus on learning and improving their skills."

In laser tag the adaptations are slightly different, instead of various aids being available it can be as simple as adding skill-based challenges to make it more beneficial to children, as Epstein explained: "Incorporating challenges that focus on specific skills, such as accuracy or teamwork, can enhance the learning experience. Introducing different game modes, like capture the flag or team deathmatch, can keep the experience fresh and exciting."

While primarily based on having fun and developing skills a competitive environment can also help to improve these skills. Collins said: "Many of our locations run competitive leagues that build upon the basic game play with extra play elements to make it a true sport, with the chance to build up your skills enough to play in national competitions. One location that springs to mind is Megazone Dunedin in New Zealand, who started a sports program in schools alongside Sport Otago, which has got many local primary and junior schools sending their teams to play in an active school league, that has got a lot of kids who have never played sport before to jump in and play."

Kids will always want to have fun, but by pairing it with competition it can create an environment where children are able to develop their skills at the same time. While there won't be a time in life where competition is absent, it certainly won't be as fun as when you were a child learning the rules for the first time or making it up as you went along.



Set phasers to fun