

The Role of Parents in High School Athletics

What follows are excerpts from a book titled, Teaching Character Through Sport. The author, Bruce Brown (a.k.a., Coach Brown), is an athletic director/coach with 30 years of experience at all levels through collegiate. He says, "Athletes want adults to be part of the inherently fun aspects of sport, but in order to ensure a positive athletic experience, parents must remember that the children's needs come first. Seventy percent of young people are done with competition in sport by the age of twelve. Parents need to keep a proper perspective regarding their child's performance."

At the end of each season, Coach Brown asked his athletes questions about their sport experience. From their answers he developed the following suggestions for before, during and after games:

BEFORE THE GAME

Parents and children ought to ask themselves:

- Why do I want to play? **Parents:** Why do I want my child to play?
- What will be a successful season?
- What do I hope to gain from the experience?
- What will be my roll on the team? **Parents:** What will be my child's role on the team?

Assuming the child is not expressing unethical values, if the parents' responses differ from their child's, the parents need to change their own attitudes and accept those of their child. That being said, **parents have every right to be concerned with their child's behavior, mental and physical treatment, and with the methods used for their child's improvement.**

Parents need to acknowledge to their child that all successes, failures, and typical problems in team sports are the child's; "It is your thing". This should not be done with friends, academics, movies, weekend decisions etc.; it should and needs be done with athletics. If young athletes are to develop emotionally, they need to solve their own problems during games. It makes sports more fun and meaningful.

RED FLAGS THAT PARENTS HAVE NOT ACKNOWLEDGED THIS

- Living athletic dreams through the child
- Taking credit when their child does well (i.e., I taught her how to shoot that 3 point shot)
- Difficulty bouncing back when the child's team suffers a defeat
- Making mental notes during a game to give their child advice at the game's conclusion
- Verbally critical of an official
- A child avoids his parents after a game or is embarrassed about their involvement.

DURING THE GAME

- There are four roles during a game: spectator, competitor, official, and coach. Accept the appropriate role. Even if a referee is making poor calls, a parent does not have the right to 'interact' with a game official. It is the coach's job to interact, and respectfully so, with a referee. When a parent criticizes a referee, he is implicitly teaching that challenging legitimate authority is acceptable.
- Model appropriate behavior – be poised and confident. A child should draw confidence, assurance and poise from his parents' behavior as spectators.
- A child only needs one instructional voice offering advice. That voice should be the coach's.

AFTER THE GAME

- Coach Brown asked players what their best and worst moments were of the season. Many athletes named "after the game" and specifically, "in the car with my parents" as their worst moments.
- Given the nature of team sports, athletes must rely on relationships to succeed. Questioning a child's, coach's, other player's actions and strategy or playing time hinders team relationships.

- Children should be allowed space after a game until they are receptive to interaction. Uninvited conversations about the game occurring after its conclusion are often resented by the athlete.

*** Inappropriate areas of parental concern that should **never** be discussed with the coach are playing time, team strategy, and team members (provided these members are not jeopardizing their child’s behavior and mental and physical treatment).

SUMMARY OF A PARENT’S ROLE

- Attend as many games as possible
 - Model appropriate behavior, poise, and confidence
 - Relieve competitive pressure, do not increase it
 - Accept the judgment of the officials and remain in control
 - View the game with team goals in mind
 - Do everything possible to make the athletic experience a positive one
 - Dignify mistakes made by athletes who are giving their best
 - Be an encourager – keep both victory and defeat in perspective
 - Accept the goals and roles of your child
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