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of Middle Tennessee

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strong **communities**.

YOUTH SPORTS

SPORTSMANSHIP & COACHING
TIDBITS FOR
COACHES & PARENTS

Our Mission:

*A worldwide charitable fellowship united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ
for the purpose of helping persons grow in spirit, mind and body. (*

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ATTITUDE

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.

It is more important than the past, than education,
than money, than circumstances, than failures,
than successes, or what other people think or say or do.

It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skills.

It will make or break a company... a church ... a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day
regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past.

We cannot change the way certain people will act.

We cannot change the inevitable.

The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have,
and that is our attitude.

I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me
and 90% how I react to it.

And so it is with you ...
we are in charge of our attitudes.

-Charles Swindoll

Letter to My Football Coach

by: **Larry D. Brooks**, *former young athlete*

Dear Coach:

You won't remember me. It was just a few years back. I was one of those kids that turned out every year for freshman football without the slightest idea of how to play the game. Think hard. I was the tall, skinny kid, a little slower than the others.

Still don't remember? Well, I remember you. I remember how scared I was of you when you'd slap your hands together and yell "Hit!" I remember how you used to laugh at me and guys like me when we'd miss a tackle or get beat one on one in practice.

You see, you never let me play in a game. Once in a while, when you'd be giving a chalk talk to the first string, I'd get to play a couple of downs of scrimmage.

I really admired you. We all did. But now that I'm a little older and a little wiser, I just wanted to let you know that you blew it. I didn't play football after my freshman year. You convinced me that I didn't have what it took, that I wasn't tough enough.

I remember the first day of practice, when you asked for all the linebackers. I wanted to be a linebacker. The first time I tried to tackle someone I got my helmet ripped off. All I had done was lower my head and hit. No technique. No tackle.

You laughed. You told me I ought to be a quarterback, that I tackled like one. All the guys laughed. You were really funny.

Another time, after I became a guard, I missed a block in practice. Of course. The guy side-stepped and I wound up with my facemask in the mud.

"C'mon! You hit like a girl" you said. I wanted to hit. I wanted to tell you how much I wanted to hit. But if I had, you'd have flattened me because you were tough and didn't take any backtalk.

We ran the play again, and I hit the same guy a pretty good shot this time. When I looked at you, you were talking to another coach.

I'm the first to admit that I was pretty bad. Even if I had been coached on technique, I still would have been a lousy football player. I was one of those kids who was a couple years behind my peers in physical maturity and strength.

That's where you messed up. I grew up. By the time I was a senior, I stood 6'5" and weighed 220. I couldn't fly, but I could run pretty well. That non-athletic freshman could now throw a baseball harder than anyone in the state. I was drafted and signed by a major league baseball team.

When my strength started to increase about my junior year, the varsity coaches drove me crazy with requests to try out for football. I told them I didn't like the game.

"But why not? You're a natural!"

"I dunno, Coach, I can't explain it. Football is just not my game."

Looking back I really regret not playing football. It would have been a lot of fun. Maybe I could even have helped the team. But thanks to you, I turned against the game before I ever really got into it. A little coaching, a little encouragement, and who knows? I guess I'll never find out.

You're still out there, I see coaching the frosh and sounding mean. I wonder how many potentially good athletes, kids that are a year or two behind, that you will discourage this year? How many of them will be the butt of your jokes?

How sad. You're in a position to do a lot of boys a lot of good. But I doubt that you will. You'll never give up a chance to look "tough" and sound "tough." You think that's what football's all about.

I know better.

Larry D. Brooks

Letter appeared in *National Federation Press Service*, Volume 36, Number 9, April 1976. Reprinted by permission of the National Federation Press Service.

“THAT’S MY CHILD”

“I was watching some little kids play soccer. These kids were only five or six years old, but they were here playing a real game – a serious game. Two teams, complete with coaches, uniforms, and parents. I didn’t know any of them, so I was able to enjoy the game without the distraction of being anxious about winning or losing. I wished the parents and coaches could have done the same.”

“The teams were pretty evenly matched. I will just call them Team One and Team Two. Nobody scored in the first period. The kids were hilarious. They were clumsy and terribly inefficient. They fell over their own feet, they stumbled over the ball, they kicked at the ball and missed it, but they didn’t seem to care. They were having fun.”

“In the second half, the Team One coach pulled out what must have been his first team and put in the scrubs, except for his best player who now guarded the goal. The game took a dramatic turn. I guess winning is important even when you’re five years old, because the Team Two coach left his best players in, and the Team One scrubs were no match for them. Team Two swarmed around the little guy who was now the Team One goalie. He was an outstanding athlete, but he was no match for three or four who were also very good. Team Two began to score. The Team One goalie gave it everything he had, recklessly throwing his body in front of incoming balls, trying valiantly to stop them.”

“Team Two scored two goals in quick succession. It infuriated the young boy. He became a raging maniac – shouting, running, diving. With all the stamina he could muster, he covered the boy who now had the ball, but that boy kicked it to another boy twenty feet away, and by the time the goalie repositioned himself, it was too late – they scored a third goal.”

“I soon learned who the goalie’s parents were. They were nice, neat-looking people. I could tell that his dad had just come from the office – he still had his suit and tie on. They yelled encouragement to their son. I became totally absorbed, watching the boy on the field and his parents on the sidelines. After the third goal, the little kid changed. He could see it was no use, he couldn’t stop them.”

“He didn’t quit, but he became quite desperate, futility was written all over him. His father changed, too. He had been urging his son to try harder, yelling advice and encouragement. But then he changed. He became anxious. He tried to say that it was okay – to hand in there. He grieved for the pain his son was feeling.”

“After the fourth goal, I knew what was going to happen. I’ve seen it before. The little boy needed help so badly, and there was no help to be had. He retrieved the ball from the net and handed it to the referee, and then he cried. He just stood there while huge tears rolled down both cheeks. He went to his knees and put his fists to his eyes – and he cried the tears of the helpless and brokenhearted.”

“When the boy went to his knees, I saw the father start onto the field. His wife clutched his arm and said, ‘Jim, don’t. You’ll embarrass him.’ But he tore loose from her and ran onto the field. He wasn’t supposed to – the game was still in progress. Suit, tie, dress shoes and all, he charged onto the field, and he picked up his son, and he hugged him and held him and cried with him. I’ve never been so proud of a man in my life.”

“He carried his son off the field, and when he got close to the sidelines I heard him say, ‘Scotty, I’m so proud of you. You were great out there. I want everybody to know that you are my son. ‘Daddy,’ the boy sobbed, ‘I couldn’t stop them. I tried, Daddy, I tried and tried, and they scored on me.’”

“Scotty, it doesn’t matter how many times they scored on you. You’re my son, and I’m proud of you. I want you to go back out there and finish the game. I know you want to quit, but you can’t. And, son, you’re going to get scored on again, but it doesn’t matter. Go on, now.”

“It made a difference – I could tell it did. When you’re all alone, and you’re getting scored on – and you can’t stop them – it means a lot to know that it doesn’t matter to those who love you. The little guy ran back on to the field and they scored two more times but it was okay.”

“I get scored on every day. I try so hard. I recklessly throw my body in every direction. I fume and rage, I struggle with temptation and sin with every ounce of my being – and Satan laughs. And he scores again, and the tears come, and I go to my knees – sinful, convicted, helpless. Any my Father – my Father – rushes right out into the field – right in front of the whole crowd – the whole jeering, laughing world and He picks me up, and He hugs me and He says, ‘I’m so proud of you. You were great out there. I want everybody to know that you are my child, and because I control the outcome of this game, I declare you, ‘The Winner.’”

“‘Be still and know that I am God.’ Psalm 46:10.”

“Remember this story when you start to get discouraged in the daily struggles. May God pull you t\into His lap today and encourage your heard.”

--Author Unknown

86 Ways to Say “Very Good”

The following was first printed in Growing Parent, January 1985 (vol. 13, No. 1).

1. Good for you!
2. Superb
3. You did that very well
4. You've got it made
5. Terrific
6. That's not bad!
7. Couldn't have done it better myself
8. Marvelous!
9. You're really improving
10. Now you've got it figured out!
11. You're on the right track now!
12. You're doing fine
13. Outstanding!
14. That's coming along nicely
15. I know you can do it
16. Good work
17. You figured that out fast
18. I thing you've got it now
19. I'm proud of the way you worked today
20. Tremendous!
21. You certainly did well today
22. Perfect
23. Nice going
24. You've got our brain in gear today
25. Now you've got the hang of it
26. WOW!
27. Wonderful!
28. You're getting better every day
29. You're learning fast
30. You make it look easy
31. That's a good boy/girl
32. That's very much better
33. Super!
34. You did a lot of work today
35. Keep it up!
36. You've got that down pat
37. Congratulations
38. Exactly right!
39. Nice going
40. Excellent!
41. Sensational!
42. You're doing beautifully
43. You've just mastered that!
44. That's really nice.
45. That's the best ever
46. That's great!
47. Way to go!
48. That's the way to do it!
49. That's quite an improvement
50. Good thinking
51. You really are going to town
52. Keep up the good work
53. That's it!
54. That's better
55. You haven't missed a thing
56. Fantastic!
57. You outdid yourself today
58. You're doing a good job
59. That's the right way to do it
60. That's better
61. Right on!
62. Well, look at you go!
63. That's the best you've ever done
64. That's RIGHT!
65. You must have been practicing!
66. Great!
67. Keep working on it - you're getting better
68. You remembered!
69. That kind of work makes me very happy
70. You're really working hard today
71. That's what I call a fine job!
72. I knew you could do it
73. I'm very proud of you
74. One more time and you'll have it
75. Fine!
76. That's good
77. Good job
78. You really make this fun
79. Good remembering
80. Nothing can stop you now
81. You are doing much better today
82. Keep on trying
83. You are really learning a lot
84. You've just about got it
85. I've never seen anyone do it better!
86. You are very good at that

150 Ways to Show Kids You Care

Written by Jolene L. Roehlkepartain. Copyright by Search Institute.

1. Notice them.
2. Smile a lot.
3. Acknowledge them.
4. Learn their names.
5. Seek them out.
6. Remember their birthdays.
7. Ask them about themselves.
8. Look in their eyes when you talk to them.
9. Listen to them.
10. Play with them.
11. Read aloud together.
12. Giggle together.
13. Be nice.
14. Say yes a lot.
15. Tell them their feelings are okay.
16. Set boundaries that keep them safe.
17. Be honest.
18. Be yourself.
19. Listen to their stories.
20. Hug them.
21. Forget your worries sometimes and concentrate only on them.
22. Notice when they're acting differently.
23. Present options when they seek your counsel.
24. Play outside together.
25. Surprise them.
26. Stay with them when they're afraid.
27. Invite them over for juice.
28. Suggest better behaviors when they act out.
29. Feed them when they're hungry.
30. Delight in their discoveries.
31. Share their excitement.
32. Send them a letter or postcard.
33. Follow them when they lead.
34. Notice when they're absent.
35. Call them to say hello.
36. Hide surprises for them to find.
37. Give them space when they need it.
38. Contribute to their collections.
39. Discuss their dreams and nightmares.
40. Laugh at their jokes.
41. Be relaxed.
42. Kneel, squat, or sit so you're at their eye level.
43. Answer their questions.
44. Tell them how terrific they are.
45. Create a tradition with them and keep it.
46. Learn what they have to teach.
47. Use your ears more than your mouth.
48. Make yourself available.
49. Show up at their concerts, games, and events.
50. Find a common interest.
51. Hold hands during a walk.
52. Apologize when you've done something wrong.
53. Listen to their favorite music with them.
54. Keep the promises you make.
55. Wave and smile when you part.
56. Display their artwork in your home.
57. Thank them.
58. Point out what you like about them.
59. Clip magazine pictures or articles that interest them.
60. Give them lots of compliments.
61. Catch them doing something right.
62. Encourage win-win solutions.
63. Give them your undivided attention.
64. Ask for their opinion.
65. Have fun together.
66. Be curious with them.
67. Introduce them to your friends and family.
68. Tell them how much you like being with them.
69. Let them solve most of their own problems.
70. Meet their friends.
71. Meet their parents.
72. Let them tell you how they feel.
73. Help them become an expert at something.
74. Be excited when you see them.
75. Tell them about yourself.
76. Let them act their age.
77. Praise more; criticize less.
78. Be consistent.
79. Admit when you make a mistake.
80. Enjoy your time together.
81. Give them a special nickname.
82. Marvel at what they can do.
83. Tell them how proud you are of them.
84. Pamper them.
85. Unwind together.
86. Be happy.
87. Ask them to help you.
88. Support them.
89. Applaud their successes.
90. Deal with conflicts while they're still small.
91. Chaperone a dance.
92. Tell them stories in which they are the hero.
93. Believe in them.
94. Nurture them with good food, words, and fun.
95. Be Flexible.
96. Delight in their uniqueness.
97. Let them make mistakes.
98. Notice when they grow.
99. Wave and honk when you drive by them.
100. Give them immediate feedback.
101. Empower them to help and be themselves.
102. Expect their best; don't expect perfection.
103. Include them in conversations.
104. Respect them.
105. Join in their adventures.
106. Visit their schools.
107. Help them learn something new.
108. Be understanding when they have a difficult day.
109. Give them good choices.
110. Respect the choices they make.
111. Be silly together.
112. Hang out together.
113. Make time to be with them.
114. Inspire their creativity.
115. Accept them as they are.
116. Become their advocate.
117. Appreciate their individuality.
118. Talk openly with them.
119. Tolerate their interruptions.
120. Trust them.
121. Share a secret.
122. Write a chalk message on their Sidewalk.
123. Create a safe, open environment.
124. Be available.
125. Cheer their accomplishments.
126. Encourage them to help others.
127. Tackle new tasks together.
128. Believe what they say.
129. Help them take a stand and stand with them.
130. Daydream with them.
131. Do what they like to do.
132. Make decisions together.
133. Magnify their magnificence.
134. Build something together.
135. Encourage them to think big.
136. Celebrate their firsts and lasts, such as the first day of school.
137. Go places together.
138. Welcome their suggestions.
139. Visit them when they're sick.
140. Tape record a message for them.
141. Help them learn from mistakes.
142. Be sincere.
143. Introduce them to people of excellence.
144. Tell them what you expect of them.
145. Give them your phone number.
146. Introduce them to new experiences.
147. Share a meal together.
148. Talk directly together.
149. Be spontaneous.
150. Love them, no matter what.

Little Eyes Upon You

There are little eyes upon you
And they're watching night and day.
There are little ears that quickly
Take in every word you say.
There are little hands all eager
To do anything you do;
And a little boy who's dreaming
Of the day he'll be like you.

You're the little fellow's idol,
You're the wisest of the wise.
In his little mind about you
No suspicions ever rise.
He believes in you devoutly,
Holds all that you say and do;
He will say and do, in your way,
When he's grown up like you.

There's a wide-eyed little fellow
Who believes you're always right;
And his eyes are always opened,
And he watched day and night.
You are setting an example
every day in all you do,
For the little boy who's waiting
To grow up to be like you.

NOT JUST A GAME

Coaches can help players – and parents – with more than just learning how to execute a corner kick

by: Noah Liberman

When should a coach be more than a coach? When can a coach help parents nurture a child?

It can happen frequently, experts say, if the coach shows he or she has the insight and sensitivity to influence a child. And it can happen when parents feel confident that a child will respond to the coach. Many issues can come up in a child's life that seem hard for parents to handle on their own.

Social frustrations can affect children of all ages, as can difficulties at school. Younger kids may have trouble obeying parents, or may face more private challenges, like wetting the bed. If a coach is attentive and sensitive to these possibilities, children and their parents can benefit greatly.

Should parents enlist the coach's help in such situations? "If a child is really distressed about something and the coach notices it, it can be wise for parents to clue him in," says Robert Schleser, Ph.D., a professor of sports psychology at the Illinois Institute of Technology. "And if the parents sense that the child is close to the coach, the same holds true."

In this case, Schleser says, the coach can do one of two things: He or she can pay extra attention to seeing that the young athlete gets reinforcement in the sport itself, or the coach can work privately with the child to reinforce confidence and the habits that will affect the child's life on a broader level. "Focus on the aspects of sports that carry over into everyday life, like attention focus, stopping negative thoughts, goal setting, mental rehearsal and imagery. If the coach incorporates these into the sport, the child can carry them into other contexts," Schleser says.

With this goes more general advice: Remember that what you teach a child about his or her sport – aggressiveness or patience, sportsmanship or a win-at-all-cost attitude – can easily carry over onto the child's home and school life. In other words, teach the sport as if you're teaching life, because you are.

If parents or the young athlete do confide in you, and you agree it's wise to discuss a problem with the child, be careful not to betray that trust. Schleser has some advice: "Say to the child, 'Not a problem, we'll work on your free kicks, blocks and tackles and we'll work on this other thing as well.'" It gives the child some motivation to work on difficult problems along with the fun ones. For instance, if the child has a problem that is embarrassing, like bedwetting, and you put it on the same footing as practicing free kicks, it will seem achievable and less intimidating."

As you work with the child, point out the steps: deciding on a goal, committing to some practice, recognizing good results and feeling proud at the effort. Many behavioral problems, from the ability to do homework to procrastination, are a matter of reinforcing certain behaviors to promote positive outcomes and avoiding negative ones. Sports provide an excellent arena to reinforce positive, beneficial behaviors.

When coaches are attuned to this and inspire trust in players and their parents, the benefits will extend well beyond the playing field.

How To Make Your Practice Sessions A More Positive Experience For Everyone

By P.K. Weinberg

Have you ever taken the time to listen to the words you use while you are working with kids? As a youth sports coach, your actions and words serve as a very important model for not only players, but also the other adults that surround your team. In this article, I would like to discuss the idea of how to make your coaching more effective by looking at the ways in which you communicate to your players.

Creating a Positive Environment

The idea here is to try to remove the word “DON’T” from your vocabulary. First, you need to take a “don’t inventory.” See how many times you use the word “don’t” during a practice session, and then set a reasonable goal for yourself to reduce the number of times you use the work “don’t.”

When we tell kids what they should do rather than what they should not do, our practice session begins to sound “better.” Let me give an example:

You are teaching the throw-in, and kids are learning to keep both feet on the ground, but they are still jumping off the ground. You say, “Don’t jump when you throw the ball in!” A better way to say it is, “Keep you feet on the ground when you do a throw-in.”

When a coach gives feedback to kids in this way, it does two things:

1. It makes you sound more positive, hence your kids will model more positive behavior.
2. Kids will learn skills faster and better, because your cue to them is for what the desired outcome (deep your feet on the ground) looks like/is.

Coaching Tips - Sportsmanship

Good Sportsmanship is more than a phrase; it’s an ideal that can be modeled by all adults. Barb F. Meltz, writing in the *Boston Globe*, quoted psychologist David W. Johnson as saying that coaches can teach good sportsmanship by:

- Emphasizing having fun more than winning.
- Stressing skill improvement.
- Rotating positions.
- Playing each player the same amount of time despite ability and the score of the game
- Praising players for good efforts, not just scoring.
- Publicly acknowledging good efforts by opponents

Parents can teach good sportsmanship by:

- Asking a coach what he values in sportsmanship and how he conveys it to players. Let him know he has your support, even if it means pulling your child from a game if she exhibits poor sportsmanship.
- Setting up conduct rules with your child, so he knows what you value as a family. This is especially true if the coach is not as strong on sportsmanship as you would like.
- Making sure your child knows your support for her is not based on her performance, but on who she is as a person.

From: Soccer America September 1995.

Coaching Tips - Sportsmanship Sideline Ethics

According to Len Oliver, USSF A license coach and director of coaching for the DC Stoddert Soccer League in Washington, anyone on any sideline can influence a child's soccer experience positively, by following these simple ideas:

- **The fun lies in being able to play.** Encourage player development and giving a 100 percent performance over winning. Ask, "Did you have fun?" rather than "Did you win?" Winning is not a strong motivation if children are not having fun.
- **Know the game and the laws.** Soccer looks simple but is complex to play, coach and officiate. It is free-flowing and ever-changing and demands constant problem-solving. It is also physically demanding.
- **Support the entire team, not just your child.** Don't give instructions, or get over-involved; applaud good plays by either side.
- **Practice good sportsmanship.** Youngsters learn by example. Win gracefully, not boastfully. Lose without being negative.
- **Let the players play.** Soccer is a player's game; they are being trained to make decisions on the field. Things happen quickly; players do not have time to react to sideline instructions. They do hear encouragement, however, so be positive.
- **Let the coaches coach.** Most coaches are volunteers who provide guidance and supervised fun. They give their time and energy to help your child learn skills and the joys of teamwork. Respect them and their decisions. Remember, their concern is the whole team - not just your child.
- **Let the referees referee.** Most are young and learning. They help teach children about sportsmanship, fair play and the spirit of soccer. Their calls are final. Disputing or disagreeing with a decision never changes it; it just disrupts the players and the game.
- **Get involved with soccer.** Help your child's skills and sportsmanship improve. Take him or her to a game, or watch one on TV. Kick the ball around, even if you have no talent.
- **Be supportive.** Volunteer to help with practices, transportation or administrative tasks. Make sure your child is prompt - this teaches responsibility.
- **Allow your child to be a child.** Young players see soccer as fun. They enjoy learning skills, being on a team and running around. They are building character and self-esteem. You'll see wonderful progress - and help our child to grow - if fun and technique development are your top priorities.

From: Soccer America January 1996.

Coaching Tips - What is a good coach?

What makes a good coach? According to John Bies, president of the Tennessee State Soccer Association, a good coach:

- **Is a good teacher.** He breaks down techniques and tactics into simple segments that players easily understand.
- **Makes learning fun.** Coaches who use drills over and over again without instilling excitement are not doing their job. (In fact, the word "drill" connotes dryness and repetition - try "activity" instead.)
- **Give encouragement and praise** for good play, and correct mistakes in a positive manner.
- **Is a student of the game.** She never has the attitude that she knows everything and cannot learn more.
- **Does not force players** into a system of style of play. Instead, he adjusts his system and style to fit his players' characteristics.
- **Develops players** rather than recruits them.
- **Instills a life-long love** for the game in his/her players.

From: Soccer America

Coaching Tips - The intramural coach

What are the most important ideas for new coaches of young in-house teams to remember? According to Dr. Dan Chandler, Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Association state staff coach and an A license holder, they include:

- **Youngsters want to have fun.** They are not there to make the national team. Make their first experience a pleasant one.
- **Children are already in shape.** Adults - not youngsters - should be running laps and doing calisthenics. Besides, one or two practices a week will not make an unfit child into a fit one. No activity should take place without a ball. Make sure (by stealing if you have to) that there are enough balls for everyone.
- **Adults - teachers, parents, bus drivers** - have been talking to children all day. Don't talk much; get them playing.
- **Every minute wasted is multiplied by the number of players there.** Only on rare occasions should an activity involve lines.
- **Youngsters should not choose up sides.** This is an adult's job - and don't always start with the best ones first.
- **Your players - like everyone else's - will bunch up.** Don't go crazy. It happens, and there's little you can do about it beyond letting them play and get experience.
- **Encourage creativity, clever dribbling, even hot-dogging.** Don't yell at them for not passing.
- **Remember: Soccer is a simple game.** Keep it that way for everyone - yourself included.

From Soccer America (From YPYSA Touchline, c/o Swiftspring, 411 A Caredean Dr., Horsham, PA 19044)

Coaching Tips - How to bolster athletes' self-esteem

Most coaches realize that athletes with high self-esteem perform better than those who do not feel good about themselves. But how can a coach raise a player's self-esteem? According to sports psychologist Dr. Alan Goldberg, he or she can:

- **Say something personal to every player at every practice.** This does not even have to take the form of instruction; simply saying, "Great shirt! Where'd you pick that up?" lets a player know you see him or her as an individual.
- **Criticize the group, but praise the individual.** Singling an individual out for criticism in front of the team seldom works in the long run; however, talking about team weaknesses or problems is often very effective.
- **Give each child an identity on the team.** Even something as simple as being recognized as the team's throw-in specialist is important to a youngster struggling to find his or her place among peers.
- **Make sure that more experienced players spend time practicing with less experienced.** This "partnering" cuts down cliques, helps both players self-esteem and ultimately raises team moral.
- **Engage in clear and honest communication with each player, off the field as well as on.**
- **Stay positive. Nothing good comes from negativity.**
- **Act as a winner, even when feeling bad.** A coach who projects an image as a winner will transmit that feeling to players.

From: Soccer America (for further information, contact Dr. Alan Goldberg at 8 High Meadow Rd. Northampton, MA 01060, tel., (413) 586-6823)

CHARACTERISTICS & TRAITS OF SOCCER AGE GROUPS

BY: COLIN SCHMIDT

Children at each age group have certain traits or characteristics that should influence the coach when planning practices. Here are a few generalizations to keep in mind for your team. The more you can balance activities with the needs and desires of children at different stages in their lives, the more successful you will be as a coach.

Characteristics of 4 and 5 year olds:

Kids at this age do not “play soccer”; they play while at soccer. Practices must be kept active with fun, imaginative games. Each player works with his or her own ball for most of the practice. Coach should exert minimal pressure but strive to provide an environment where kids can experiment and learn.

The concept of team is non-existent at this age. Instead of 3 vs. 3, it is really 1 vs. 5! Practices shouldn't last longer than 45 minutes (60 minutes with good breaks). Focus on dribbling and fundamental movement skills (running, leaping, hopping, bending, stretching, twisting, throwing, catching, and kicking).

In practices players should never wait in a line more than 30 seconds. They should not run laps. The coach should not lecture for long periods of time. Keep players active in the practice. Develop a “flow” in which a flurry of activity is followed by short rests or less demanding activities. Players will learn by copying other players. Kids at this age barely understand rules and boundaries (sidelines). Don't emphasize boundaries in your practices or games. Keep the rules very simple.

Kids need generous praise. Curiosity should be stimulated through games of their own devising. Ask them what they want to do. Let players demonstrate skills or accomplishments. Go with it.

Examples of activities for 4 and 5 year olds:

“Try this”

1. The coach does coordination exercises without ball - - clapping, stretching, twisting, jumping, balancing, skipping. . . and asks players to try. Later, have players come up with ideas for other players to imitate.
2. Same as above but with a ball. (Okay to use hands and feet. Progress to ball movement exercises, toe touches, rolls, etc.)

“Body part dribble”

Players dribble ball with different parts of their body as designated by the coach. Switch quickly between commands. Get players up and down quickly. Use verbal commands first, and then point to the area that you want the player to use. This teaches the players to look up.

“Hit the bear”

Players dribble around and try to hit coaches (or parents). Who can hit the most in 30 seconds?

“Red Light, Green Light”

All players start in a line at one end of the grid, while coach is in the middle. When coach says “green light” players dribble forward. When coach says, “red light” players stop with a foot on the ball. On “yellow light” players move forward slowly. “Reverse” players go backward. After a few rounds, use hand signals instead of verbal commands.

Characteristics of players ages 6 and 7:

Children at this age still have a fragile self-image. They become more concerned what others think. Players are able to cooperate with a partner. Most of practice is done with one ball per person or one ball per pair. Practices should focus on games and simple problem solving. U8’s begin to understand rules and concepts of fairness. Practice should be no longer than 60-75 minutes. Players believe that “if I try hard, then I performed well”, regardless of actual performance. Effort equals performance.

They still only have a limited ability to attend to more than one task at a time. Controlling or dribbling a ball, for example, will take most of the concentration capacity thereby leaving little or no room for making tactical decisions. Players like to “show off” for adults and other players. Use this to your advantage. Players at this age will try to imitate each other.

Examples of Activities for 6 and 7 year Olds:

Note that older players will still benefit from the activities used with younger ages (as above) but will be capable of more types of games and drills.

“Blob Tag”

Players dribble around and stay out of reach of the blob. The blob is two or three players holding hands. Coach can start as blob. The blob grows as players are tagged. Blob has to stay together. Split blob into two if it gets too long.

“Gate Game”

Small gates (cones 2 yards apart) are placed in an area (20 x 20 yards) Players work in pairs. Begin with one ball per player. Pair gets point when each player dribbles through a gate. Can’t go through same gate twice in a row. Next have players use one ball. They get a point when they pass ball to partners through one of the gates.

“Star Wars”

One half of the players place ball on a flat cone. The other half try to knock the ball off the cone by kicking their balls at the targets. Players can not kick the ball off the cone. Let players choose names, play roles.

“Golf”

Players try to hit targets in least amount of kicks.

Characteristics of 8 and 9 year olds:

Motor skills are becoming more refined. A great diversity in maturity and playing ability is apparent. The players have a better sense of reality vs. fiction but still make imaginative games (role playing). Under 10's demonstrate more responsibility (will bring own ball, water, choose shirt, etc.). They are a little more aware of their play or performance.

Players will recognize basic tactical concepts (width, depth, and support). They have more leg strength, which means more power. Passing becomes a real part of the game. Repeating technique (kicking, receiving) is very important but must be done in a dynamic, interactive environment (no drills, no lines).

Explanations must be brief and concise as for all kids. Players are able to work in small groups during practices. Practice activities should focus on small groups working together to solve problems. Coach can also include games with one player one ball and pair activities. Practice lasts 75-90 minutes max.

Not Just a Game

Coaches can help players and parents with more than just learning how to execute a corner kick.

By: Noah Liberman

When should a coach be more than a coach? When can a coach help parents nurture a child?

It can happen frequently, experts say, if the coach shows he or she has the insight and sensitivity to influence a child. And it can happen when parents feel confident that a child will respond to the coach. Many issues can come up in a child's life that seem hard for parents to handle on their own.

Social frustrations can affect children of all ages, as can difficulties at school. Younger kids may have trouble obeying parents, or may face more private challenges, like wetting the bed. If a coach is attentive and sensitive to these possibilities, children and their parents can benefit greatly.

Should parents enlist the coach's help in such situations? "If a child is really distressed about something and the coach notices it, it can be wise for parents to clue him in," says Robert Schleser, Ph.D., a professor of sports psychology at the Illinois Institute of Technology. "And if the parents sense that the child is close to the coach, the same holds true."

In this case, Schleser says, the coach can do one of two things: He or she can pay extra attention to seeing that the young athlete gets reinforcement in the sport itself, or the coach can work privately with the child to reinforce confidence and the habits that will affect the child's life on a broader level. "Focus on the aspects of sports that carry over into everyday life, like attention focus, stopping negative thoughts, goal setting, mental rehearsal and imagery. If the coach incorporates these into the sport, the child can carry them into other contexts," Schleser says.

With this goes more general advice: Remember that what you teach a child about his or her sport – aggressiveness or patience, sportsmanship or win-at-all-costs attitude – can easily carry over into the child's home and school life. In other words, teach the sport as if you're teaching life because you are.

If parents or the young athlete do confide in you, and you agree it's wise to discuss a problem with the child, be careful not to betray that trust. Schleser has some advice: "Say to the child, 'Not a problem, we'll work on your free kicks, blocks and tackles, and we'll work on this other thing as well.'" It gives the child some motivation to work on difficult problems along with the fun ones. For instance, if the child has a problem that is embarrassing, like bedwetting, and you put it on the same footing as practicing free kicks, it will seem achievable and less intimidating."

As you work with the child, point out the steps: deciding on a goal, committing to some practice, recognizing good results and feeling proud at the effort. Many behavioral problems, from the ability to do homework to procrastination, are a matter of reinforcing certain behaviors to promote positive outcomes and avoiding negative ones. Sports provide an excellent arena to reinforce positive, beneficial behaviors.

When coaches are attuned to this and inspire trust in players and their parents, the benefits will extend well beyond the playing field.

It's Time to Look in the Mirror
Coaches must improve their own behavior first

By: Roy Gordon

One of the stated goals of the strategic planning which the NSCAA Board of Directors undertook under the guidance of former president Jay Martin was to “improve on-field behavior and conduct of coaches and players.” As part of the strategy and action plan to accomplish this goal, the board suggested that we needed to “bring awareness of sportsmanship to the conscious level of coaches: and to “create a forum for discussion of ethics and values.” In addition, the board directed the chair of the Ethics Committee to rewrite the NSCAA’s Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Creating a forum for discussion was simple. Making a copy of the NSCAA’s Code of Ethics and Conduct available to the membership simply required a telephone call from me to Mike McFarland to ask him to include it in this issue of the *Journal*. (Please see the Code of Ethics and Conduct revamped). Colleen Hacker, a member of the NSCAA national coaching staff, presented a session at the 1998 Convention in Cincinnati entitled “Competition...Out of Bounds.” The second part of the plan is much more complicated to it requires coaches to do things such as sit on Dr. Hacker’s session, to take the time to read and digest the material presented in the Code of Ethics and Conduct and to take action in their own programs.

Progress in improving the behavior of coaches and players will not come about by simply making an observation of what the other coach is doing. All of us need to look at ourselves in the mirror to assess our own behavior. We can all appreciate the effect that the pressure to win has on us, but what is the excuse for some of the behaviors we continually see from players on the field and coaches on the sidelines?

The media, in their coverage of major events and professional contests from throughout the world of sports, provide us with images of negative and outrageous behaviors from coaches who may be attempting to get the best out of their players by getting “in their face” and verbally abusing them, or who may be “working officials” in an attempt to “get the next call.” Perhaps the coach is simply frustrated by his or her own team’s ineffectiveness, or perhaps the coach is reacting to what he or she perceives as a bad call. However, does the fact that the high profile coach may sometimes act in that manner and may often get away without any sort of sanction give all the rest of us permission to do the same? In my opinion, it is not the right approach for the professionals and other high profile coaches, and it certainly is not the correct approach for the rest of us at the youth, high school or college level either.

Players take their cues from their role models and coaches. Whether we intend it to be that way or not, our players will take note of our demeanor and despite protestations, our actions become the unintended pattern of their own behavior. It is crucial that we as coaches set a standard for our players’ actions both on and off the field, but it is even more important that our own behaviors are consistent with what we are trying to achieve for the young people with whom we work.

In the end, players reflect their coaches expectations and behaviors, doing as we do and not necessarily as we say. So if we are to have an effect on what our players do, we must first look at ourselves to ensure that our own actions are appropriate.

NSCAA Code of Ethics revamped

The NSCAA Board of Directors, at its mid-year meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, voted to approve the following Code of Ethics to be implemented immediately. For additional information, please visit <http://www.nscAA.com>.

CODE OF ETHICS:

1. Soccer is the players' game. The paramount concern of coaches is the holistic development, welfare, enjoyment and safety of their players.
2. Coaches bear responsibility for teaching their players to strive for success while playing fairly, observing the laws of the game and the highest levels of sportsmanship.
3. Coaches shall treat officials with respect and dignity, and shall teach their players to do the same.
4. Our opponents are worthy of being treated with respect. Coaches will model such respect for opponents and expect their players to do likewise.
5. In both victory and defeat, the behavior of a coach shall model grace, dignity and composure.
6. Coaches shall adhere to the highest standards and the regulations of the institutions they represent: clubs, schools, sponsoring organizations and sports governing bodies.
7. Coaches have a responsibility to promote the interests of soccer, including treating media with courtesy, honesty and respect.
8. Coaches shall model inclusive behavior, actively supporting cultural diversity while opposing all types of discrimination, including, but not limited to, racism, and sexism, at all levels of soccer.
9. Coaches are responsible for taking an active role in education about, and prevention and treatment of drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse, both in their own lives and in the lives of their players.
10. Coaches shall refrain from all manner of personal abuse and harassment of others, whether verbal, physical, emotional or sexual, and shall oppose such abuse and harassment at all levels of soccer.
11. Coaches shall respect the declared affiliations of all players, and shall adhere to all guidelines and regulations on recruiting established by the governing bodies having oversight of their teams and leagues.
12. Coaches shall seek to honor those who uphold the highest standards and principles of soccer and shall use appropriate protocol to oppose and eliminate all behavior that brings disrepute to the sport – violence, abuse, dishonesty, disrespect, and violations of the laws of the game and rules governing competition.

MOTIVATING YOUR PLAYERS

For the past five years, I have been making presentations on child development and soccer at national workshops. At the end of each presentation invariably I am asking the question “How do you motivate children?” And the answer is very simply, “You don’t.” You can imagine the looks I get!

How do we get people - in particular, soccer playing children - to do the things we want them to do? How do we get them to make the right plays? To be enthusiastic about practicing? To do their best in a game? And above all, how do we keep them from dropping out of soccer, especially when the USYSA reports a 50% drop-out rate by the time the kids reach the age of thirteen? When the one question is asked, “How do you motivate?” all these questions are posed. Ultimately, how do we influence.

The answers to these questions are the very basis of programs tested in North American Soccer Camps. Our coaching staff is trained to use the concept of four *pathways* to reach that internal motivation.

The first pathway is that everyone needs to feel that people care about them. Someone is interested in them. It is difficult to make a child believe he is cared about when the coach is yelling at him, or when he is overworked by playing six games in one weekend for a tournament. Physiologically, he just can’t cope with it. Or when the coach and mom and dad tell him winning is most important. These things do not communicate “I am interested in you.” The communication of caring is achieved in the simplest of ways. It can be anything. Know each child’s name, recognize that he is only a child, and let him know that his interests come first. Most simply, get to know the child.

The second pathway is that everyone needs to feel he is worth something. He needs to feel recognized. Let him know he is noticed and that his presence on the field is appreciated. This gives a sense of power and control of one’s own destiny. Doing this is very simple. Everyone gets to play. When I play, I feel a sense of power. When I have power, I feel in control. When I am in control, I feel good about who I am. And if playing soccer makes me feel good, I’ll put more into it. This is self-esteem. It develops and grows with our efforts.

The third pathway is the concept of fun. Fun is not only smiling and laughing and enjoying things, but it is achieving as well. It is working with a coach who understands me, understands the game, and understands what I am capable of doing both mentally and physically. When we achieve something, we enjoy it and want to stay with it.

The final pathway is the development of responsible behavior. Give the child something to do that he is capable of doing. When he feels responsible and trusted, he experiences a sense of freedom. He feels he is able to handle the situation himself. He is not dependent. To foster this, give the child some team responsibilities. Let a young player be in charge of picking up cones or lining the field; let him help with practice. Let an older player take part in discussion on how the team will develop; ask for ideas about the methodology of coaching the team. Allow him to learn his specific role on the team.

All four of these points need to be on the clipboard along with the plays, practices, techniques and skills we teach. Using these pathways is a choice, but we cannot afford to ignore their importance; they have very long-lasting effects. And though I have presented them to you individually, all four pathways are interrelated. When I feel responsible, I feel good, and I feel cared for, and I enjoy playing soccer. You are developing the person, his identity, his role.

The next time you ask “How do I motivate these kids?” stop, think about the four pathways, and reevaluate what the kids are actually getting out of the whole experience. Remember, people don’t quit or give up on something when they enjoy, are competent in, and experience achievement in it. When people quit something, such as children quitting soccer, they are saying to us “I don’t get anything out of this, so I’ll go find something else.” In this case, soccer is only the symptom. The game itself can offer no cure. The root of the problem is how we are treating the children in the game, and what they take with them when they leave the field.

By Gary F. Russell, Ed.D.

Dr. Gary Russell was a guest speaker at the USYSA Workshop in San Antonio. Russell is an author and nationally known speaker through his educational services company, the Center for Professional Advancement. His training practices are based on his research and training process, called Belief Systems Theory. He is also founder of the Connecticut based North American Soccer Camps, Inc.

For Coaches and Parents: **Cheshire's Dos and Don'ts**

DON'Ts:

- Don't shout instructions to the player with the ball. The player has enough problems maintaining possession while making quick and difficult decisions about what to do next. He or she must learn to make decisions without your input.
- Don't use such phrases as "boot the ball," "kick it" or "send it." First, you violate rule No.1; second, you encourage panic rather than good decision making, and mindless kicking rather than possession.
- Don't try to control the game from the sidelines. You can't! A soccer coach is not an active participant in the game. Soccer is played, controlled and ultimately coached by the players on the field. Teach players to "coach" themselves.
- Don't try to teach "aggressiveness." In soccer, what is perceived as "aggressive play" merely reflects the confidence a player has in his or her own abilities. Teach the skills that generate confidence; encourage players to believe in themselves. If you do, they will play "aggressively."
- Don't abuse game officials, or show disrespect for opponents. Referees make far fewer mistakes than your players; your opponents are not your enemy. Be aware of the example you set for your players.
- Don't forget rule No. 1.

DO's

- Do offer suggestions to players not currently involved in what is happening on the field. Brief words of advice are helpful to players who have time to consider them (those who are either out of the match or on the field far from the ball).
- Do encourage players to use the skills they are being taught. Encourage and sometimes push players to experiment in scrimmages and games. If this approach costs goals, learn to accept temporary setbacks as the price of progress, and recognize them as opportunities to help players improve. Soccer is best learned through trial and error.
- Do teach players to coach themselves on the field. By the time they find themselves on a full-size field they will be able to hear you anyway. Players must learn to assist each other in making hundreds of split-second decisions each game.
- Do teach players the game's skills, and encourage them to hold the ball long enough to make good decisions about what to do next.

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The Youth Soccer Coach

By: Mike Berticelli

You donate your time for the good of our youth
But you scream and you yell and are often uncouth

The ref is just twelve and still learning the game.
But you call him a jerk and say he's not sane.

The parents are screaming and follow your lead,
As you sprint up the sideline at uncontrollable speed.

You jump as you yell, "Pass, pass the ball!"
You turn red as you bellow, "Ref, make the damn call!"

"You're the left back now, get in your position,
If you don't, we might lose and ruin our tradition!"

Positions are needed so we look like a team,
'Cause they're miniature pros, or so it does seem.

The fullback is bored, he picks at his nose,
While the others run wild and kick with their toes.

You scream for a goal, no matter how it goes in,
The skill doesn't matter, just as long as we win.

The parents go crazy as the ball nears the goal,
Their advice and instruction will soon take their toll.

You see, Junior feels pressure, he's not having much fun,
We tell him to pass, when to shoot and to run.

He came here to play and use his own mind,
'Cause soccer's the most creative game that you'll find.

Imagination is needed on the part of each child,
Solving problems on the field is what makes them go wild.

A week of long practice, while just standing in line,
Waiting to shoot, using one ball at a time.

This just doesn't cut it, and for some it's too late,
Make your practices fun, don't be the coach that they hate.

They come to "play" soccer, not to "work" at the game,
Their excitement is something we don't want to tame.

Maradona has moves that are beyond comprehension,
No coach taught those moves while threatening detention!

He learned from his friends and tried copying others,
While playing in games without coaches and mothers.

Soccer is different, not like baseball at all,
We don't need positions, just give them the ball.

They first must learn skill, it's the meat of the game,
If they can't dribble or shoot, then who should be blame?

Skill must be learned through repeated trials,
If motivation is present you will see them run miles.

Fun games are the answer to encourage repetition,
They laugh and they scream and enjoy competition.

Without the skill to dribble past an opponent at will,
Your players may win, but their growth may stand still.

I dream of the day when the panels just cheer,
And losing the game doesn't bring out a tear.

When practice is fun, not dull and so boring,
And playing the game means more than just scoring.

I know you mean well and donate your time,
But bury your ego and try something sublime.

Call all the parents and ask for their aid,
You're teaching their kids and not getting paid.

Your goal's to develop a youngster with skill,
Not a team that must win or some fancy new drill!

Players are not judged by their wins and their losses
Instead they are judged by their shots, heads and crosses!

Scholarships are given to players with great names,
Not those on youth teams who never lost games.

A pro player gets paid 'cause his skills are real fine,
Not because his team never lost when he was just nine.

It's time to bring soccer to new heights in this nation,
The future's in players, not a coaching citation.

Let's start to say "dribble" and stop yelling "pass"!
You'll then see our players go to the head of the class.

I hope you're concerned, but not really offended,
It's the need for more skill that I have defended.

You're giving your all, from the good of the heart,
Why not make sure the kids get the right start?

SECRETS OF HELPING YOUR PLAYERS GET AHEAD Without Twisting Their Legs

by **Karl Dewazien** Director of Coaching, Cal-North

Our soccer environment bounces parents/coaches between two contradictory messages. They are told:

Our players are at a competitive disadvantage. They are playing in a global game but they are not as well-trained or skilled as the Europeans or South Americans. The message: Our players must be continually pushed to try harder and perform.

Our players are under too much pressure. They are being pushed beyond their abilities. The toll: Chronic stress, even found in young players...epidemic eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia) in girls (and sometimes boys).

Trap: Although today's coaches/parents want their players to both succeed and be happy, most simply do not know how to help them.

WHAT PLAYERS REALLY NEED

To become competent and effective in this difficult youth sport world, players must build high levels of self-confidence. This requires...

Achievement: The ability to cope and master the basic fundamentals. To learn and improve.

Acceptance: The belief in one's intrinsic value, apart from one's abilities. Because players are especially prone to discouragement in this game requiring decision making and skill, they have a special need for unconditional acceptance.

Balance: The knowledge that the parent/coach's affection doesn't rise and fall with the latest game result. When players come to realize that it is not necessary to achieve something to be loved, they are freed from the pressure to perform.

Confident players are ones who are able to explore, to learn and to improve even if they sometimes fail. Over the long run, this confidence will make them happier and more successful.

HOW TO BUILD CONFIDENCE IN A PLAYER

The best way to build confidence is to recognize and appreciate each player's strengths - including potential strengths that the player may not even be aware of.

GUIDELINES:

Be specific in your praise. If you tell players, "You are great", they may easily discount the praise. The more precisely you can describe what you like about something they did, the more you will enhance both your credibility and their self-confidence.

Be realistic in your encouragement. Some players find it difficult to accept even genuine praise. They are quick to reject unrealistic, wildly positive compliments. Avoid superlatives and absolutes (best, quickest, always, etc.) along with predictions of amazing accomplishments.

Tell how a positive behavior helped you or another player. Again, be specific. Example: When I played my daily routine was: 100 juggles with instep, thigh and head after breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Avoid using negative labels and calling your players names. Although it is important to correct problem behavior in players, don't turn a mistake into a fault. Also, make your training session recreate that excitement and action found in league games.

Players who are given negative labels - lazy, selfish, clumsy, slow, etc. - often accept the description as true. The most damaging labels are those that include genetic elements. These labels imply that there is no hope for improvement.

Listen to observations of people outside the team. An opposing coach/parent often spots talent in a child to which we may be oblivious.

Be honest about obstacle. Discuss problems openly, but also explain why you think your player can overcome them. Offer your assistance, but only if the player wants it.

Point out your player's potential, but present your ideas as suggestions - not demands. Parent/coach must respect a player's freedom of choice, even if they think he is wasting valuable time.

Players naturally want to do more, be more and gain the approval of their parents/coaches. If you convey your expectations in a positive and specific fashion, your players will usually react positively.

IT'S TIME TO GIVE THE GAME BACK TO THE KIDS

by: Peter Lederman

It was pilgrimage. It was an early morning ritual that was played out through all the available weekends of my childhood. Get up as soon as I awoke. Wash quick. Eat quick. Grab my glove and a ball, or a football or a basketball and quietly slip out the door with a mumbled "I'm going to Mickey's or Phil's" or maybe to anybody's; just out to play ball. On the best and easiest of Saturday mornings there was no one else awake in the house to have to talk to.

I simply walked or rode my bike to the next player's house, I tapped on the window of his bedroom or the kitchen door quietly so that he and only he would know the time was ripe. If all went well. He also slipped quietly into the early sunshine of our day with his glove, a roll or candy in his hand or mouth and now there were two of us.

Once in a while, at someone's house, because of too loud a tap or an insomniac parent, that kid was forced to wash better, eat better and explain what he was up to. It was tense and awkward and we longed to be quickly out the door, but finally we would escape. These scenes repeated till our numbers were strong and we pilgrims gathered at the field, the sacred center of our childhood; then the games would begin.

I remember no individual game, no event or championship. I remember only that the flow of action, of mixing it up or arguing or imagining was continuous. It lasted for weekends, for years. It was precious, it was up to us to finish it or the game could possibly be damaged or, at worst, broken up. If we lost our ball we'd chip in, scrounge change or turn I bottles to get another. We make our own teams and invented our own games.

We were an order, a brethren. If perchance an outsider kid came into that sacred center we could be vicious in closing ranks and expelling him. If a parent chanced by we would pose harmlessly, impatient, with pleading faces asking that we be allowed to continue. The worst, most humiliating fate to befall any of us was to be yanked prematurely out of our game by our mothers. That is my memory, my sense of the privacy of my youth and the was I learned to play ball and learned the lessons of life.

I won't even bother to compare for you the way my son has been forced to play his ball games, to learn life's lessons, but only to relate the obvious. On Saturday morning I wake him, hurry him, feed him and remind him to take all his equipment. I pick up his teammate after a few words with my adult counterpart, go to his field, and watch or coach his game in a crowd of my peers. We watch every single moment of our kids' efforts, intruding ourselves in the very fabric of their play. We interfere in the game with our shouts and then review their performance like critics in the *New York Times* or callers to a sport talk show.

Yes it's nice to share these times with your kid. At least we hope and believe that it's true from both sides of the coin. But we are stealing something wondrous and precious from them - the simple right to play, unfettered and unwatched in the privacy of their own youth.

Someday there will be a game and only the children will show up.

From: Kwik Goal Youth Scent - Editor's note: Peter Lederman, coach of the Hewlet (N.Y.) Baby Blues, U-11 Girls team, for the third time around, is trying to organize and encourage with as invisible a hand as possible. The article appeared in the December issue of the Long Island YSA Newsletter.

DREAM BIG

If there were ever a time to dare to make a difference, to embark on something worth doing, it is now. Not for any grand cause, necessarily, but for something that tugs at your heart, something that's your aspiration. Something that's your dream. You owe it to yourself to make your days here count.

Have fun...dig deep...stretch. Dream big. Know though that things worth doing seldom come easy. There will be times when you want to turn around, pack it up, and call it quits. Those times tell you that you are pushing yourself. That you are not afraid to learn by trying and working.

Persist. Believe in the incredible power of the human mind. Of doing something that makes a difference. Of working hard. Of laughing and hoping. Of lasting friends.

The start of something that brings the hope of something great. Anything is possible. There is only one you and you will pass this way only once.

Do it right: DREAM BIG.

EMPHASIS SHOULD BE ON SPORTSMANSHIP, NOT WINNING AT ALL COST

By: Rubel Shelly

The defense typically offered for expensive athletic programs and facilities in our nation's high schools is wearing thin. We use terms like fair play, team spirit, and sportsmanship. Too often we learn of illegal recruiting, anabolic steroids and blood-doping.

Florida, Tulane, Memphis State, Vanderbilt - all have had their names in print in connection with investigations into their athletic programs. Some, such as Vanderbilt, have taken decisive and firm action. Some, such as Florida, have been peevish about their problems.

Several years ago my wife and I stopped attending high school basketball games. We both once played the game, I later refereed it, and we still think it to be an excellent game.

Deciding that we would dust off an old pleasure, she and I went to see a game in which our friends' daughter was playing. Before the half, we both remembered why we had stopped going to the games.

As the upshot of a disputed call, eight technical fouls were assessed and a coach ejected from the game. Then the partisan parents and students begin their catcalls, started booing every move by opposing players, and stood up to scream at the officials.

Our culture has this terrible motto to the effect that "winning is everything." Really? Whatever became of the dictum "It's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game?"

It is unrealistic to think or teach our children that only first place finishers are worthy. Since most of us will never hold first place and those who do will have it for so brief a time, that mindset will produce low self-esteem for many. It will also push people to unethical behavior, cheating, and poor sportsmanship.

I can't pull for certain athletes to win because of their poor grace when they lose. Tantrums, smashing rackets, hurling bats, creaming at officials, fights - these are indefensible actions which we tolerate. We shouldn't.

Writers use brutal terms to describe athletics: bombed, blitzed, devastated, flattened.

Coaches exhort their players to see sport as a battlefield: fight, brawl, hit - even kill

Parents push too hard and teach their children to see what should be a fun experience as a life - or death ordeal.

We all love winners. And student-athletes should be encouraged to develop skills and work towards winning. But they are students first, and they should not be deprived of their education in order to compete in athletics. That experience should be a part of an educational process in which they learn honesty is more important than being first.

John Thompson runs a class basketball program at Georgetown University. He and his star center, Patric Ewing, were counting big of an NCAA championship in 1985. In the final game of the tournament, they fell to Villanova. Thompson, Ewing, and colleagues showed real class during the awards ceremony. They stood and applauded as the trophy they wanted was awarded to another team. No excuses. No sour grapes about officiating. No sulking.

The ability to suffer defeat gracefully and to give honest praise to one's competitor reveals more about character than a toothy grin, raised index finger, and on-camera "We're Number One!"

(Shelly is an alumnus of Vanderbilt)

Coaching Tips - from the Pros

A kid's coach wrote to college luminaries for advice. Here it is.

My first practice as a coach of my son's second grade basketball team turned me into a basket case. It was three years ago, but I remember it vividly. I began by gathering my son, Cole, and the rest of the team around me. I started to share some words of wisdom.

Immediately eyes wandered. Attention spans snapped. In a minute, Parker was pinching Nick. Bobby needed to go to the bathroom, and Mac was asking when we were going to play basketball. The rest of the practice was chaos. I survived that first season, but just barely.

Then my brother Bernie gave me an idea: He told me to write to the best basketball coaches in the country and ask how they would adapt their coaching styles if they found themselves in my shoes.

So I wrote to 26 college and six NBA coaches, I asked them three things: 1) What advice do you have for a new coach? 2) What lessons would you want the kids to take away from their first experience with basketball? 3) What practice plans would you suggest to a coach who has limited time and facilities?

Nineteen college coaches (but no NBA coaches responded). They sent me hand written notes and typed letters. One called me on the phone. Several sent me playbooks. Jim Boeheim of Syracuse included a poem.

These tips helped make my second season a great success. My team improved with each game and played for the league championship. What's more, we had fun.

"The coach makes for a positive or negative experience for these youngsters," wrote coach Roy Williams of Kansas. "Success means all the kids feel good about themselves when the last game is over and they all play next year"

Here's more of the wisdom I received:

ATTITUDE

More than anything, the coaches' advice helped me shape my coaching philosophy. That was key, because the more I thought about why I was coaching and what I wanted the team to accomplish, the more everything else fell into place.

What basic premise did I learn from these individuals who live and die by their win-loss records? Simply this: *Forget about winning.*

"Be a teacher," wrote Louisville's Denny Crum. "Teach fundamentals like shooting, passing, and dribbling. Don't worry about winning." Crum's advice was typical. "Work hard. Motivate by emphasizing positives, not by exposing negatives." Advised Rick Pitino of Kentucky.

"Be fair. Have close to equal playing time for each player. "Teach fundamentals," said Mike Krzyzewski, whose Duke teams have gone to seven Final Fours in 10 years.

Boeheim wrote, "Patience and fundamentals are key, even at our level." And Marsha Sharp, the women's coach at Texas Tech, suggested a sort of golden rule of coaching: "Always treat every player as you would want someone to treat your own child."

Along with fairness and fundamentals, the most prevalent advice was to keep it fun. "Make the experience fun for all of the kids and make sure they all get to play the game," wrote Cincinnati's Bob Huggins.

"Don't make the game of basketball complicated," wrote John Thompson of Georgetown. "It is a simple game, and it is fun to play." And from Williams: "Be yourself." Don't worry about *x's* and *o's*. Teach them to shoot. Don't teach 'the play.' Let them play."

***Rick Pitino:** *"Make the game fun so they want to play more."*

GOALS

Just how well should eight-year olds be able to play? Considering how far removed from my situation these coaching experts really are, they certainly know kids.

“Getting young players to play together as a team is a challenge in itself.” Wrote North Carolina’s Dean Smith, the winningest active NCAA Division I coach.

“It’s not enough to make one basket a week,” added Leon Barmore, the women’s coach at Louisiana Tech. “Lower the basket and use smaller balls. Put them in a position to have success so they can enjoy the game.” “They won’t care who wins; make sure you and the parents don’t,” advised Williams. “The main thing for them is the Gatorade and eating after the game (probably pizza).”

Still, there were some lessons to be taught: teamwork, giving you best effort, and learning the right way to win or lose.

“Regardless of what they become in life.” Wrote Dale Brown of Louisiana State “to be successful they must work with others in harmony.” Added Thompson, “I would hope that all your kids have a new appreciation of the importance and the enjoyment of working together as a team.

Others suggested lessons for kids:

- “Play hard and together and remember that there is no excuse for lack of effort.” - Rick Majerus of Utah
- “Root for your team when you are on the bench.” - Mike Krzyzewski
- “Learn to be unselfish and put the team first.” - Pat Summitt, the women’s coach at Tennessee
- “Doing your best is the most important thing about sports.” - Denny Crum
- “Learn how to win graciously and lose with dignity.” - Bob Huggins
- “It’s a game. It’s Fun!” - Nolan Richardson of Arkansas

**Dean Smith, “I would stress teamwork and the importance of including teammates.”*

REALITY

Virtually all these coaches stress teaching fundamentals. Fine, I thought, but how do you teach kids fundamentals? How do you keep practice from becoming a free-for-all?

Krzyzewski sent me this practice outline:

1. *Stretching*
2. *Speed dribbling*
3. *Defending when you man b\has the ball. Defending when you man doesn’t have the ball - play “keep away.”*
4. *Making layups - 2 balls 2 lines - vary position. Shoot layups at full speed.*
5. *Passing on the move - anticipate where your teammate will be.*
6. *Shooting in pairs*
7. *Scrimmage - match pairs of close-to equal abilities.*

Note how Coach K balances fun things, such as keep-away, with fundamentals. “The knowledge of ‘court balance’ or keeping all five players from running to the ball is more important than running set plays,” he added.

Other coaches suggested good drills.

Huggins told me to teach each child how to throw and catch basic passes (chest, bounce, and baseball) and how to jump-stop (two feet) and 1-2 count-stop (first one foot, then the other). Later, he added, “when you teach them about pivoting, have them pretend their toe is nailed to the floor.”

Huggins also sent diagrams of three basic moves for getting open for a pass (the V, the jam, and the up-and-out) and explained. “Always break up and out to meet the pass.”

Thompson listed free throw, rebounding, and footwork drills along with the aforementioned basics. Majerus emphasized ball handling. “The right and left hands are equally important,” he said.

“Do the same things every day,” suggested Crum. “Basketball is a game of habits.”

To be honest, when I wrote to these coaches, I didn’t expect many to respond. The fact that so many of them did made me confident and enthusiastic about coaching. Now I look back on my second season as one of the best experiences of my life.

**John Thompson, “Don’t make the game of basketball complicated.”*

SHOULD YOU COACH GIRLS AND BOYS DIFFERENTLY?

When I found out I would be coaching the co-ed team on which my son played last year, I wrote some women's coaches and asked that question.

"No! A rebound is a rebound and a shot is a shot," responded Rene Portland of Penn State. "Run the program the same way."

The boys and girls on my team played the same game by the same rules. In an article in *US Soccer* magazine, national team staff coach Jan Smisek wrote, "Coaches need to operate under the premise that the demands of the game are dictated by the game, not by the gender of the athlete."

My experts seemed to agree, but they also said that females tend to be more sensitive. A gender stereotype? Perhaps, but it influences their coaching styles.

"I think you have to compliment girls more," said Leon Barmore, who coached a boys' high school team for 10 years before going to Louisiana Tech. "If I had 10 things to say to girls, I would say something positive nine of those 10 times. With the boys it would be more like six or seven times."

Added 1984 women's Olympic team coach Pat Summitt of Tennessee: "A positive approach in teaching and correcting tends, in general, to be most effective."

That's good advice for coaching *any* child. –C.S.

COACHING TIPS – COACHING GIRLS

Coaches of female athletes have certain special tasks. According to Jack M. Levine, M.D., writing in the Long Island Junior Soccer League publication *Kickoff*, these include:

- **Encouraging all family members**, including males, to come to games. Family support is particularly important during adolescence, when many girls drop out of sports.
- **Reading and learning about the psychological development of girls.** This is particularly true of male coaches.
- **Not tolerating sexist remarks** from parents, coaches, referees, spectators and friends. Coaches of females must speak up when they hear such comments.
- **Being a good role model.** A female coach can be an excellent example for young girls to aspire to, while a male coach should exemplify the non-aggressive, non-threatening behavior all adolescents should experience while growing up.

From: Soccer America

What Is A Youth Coach?

By Manny Sanchez, State Director of Coaching and Player Development

Being a youth soccer coach comes with many responsibilities that need to be taken very seriously. People find themselves in the role of a coach for numerous reasons. Some have played soccer and love to be around the game as much as possible. Others have played the game when they were young and want to give back to the sport. But a more common path to the coaching ranks in Tennessee, is being volunteered or drafted to coach because their kids are playing. No doubt this is a common occurrence, especially since soccer is the fastest growing youth sport in America, with a shortage of coaches.

Many of these parent coaches who have never played the game begin to fall in love with the sport as a result. The fact that they have not played makes it more difficult, but not impossible, to teach an unfamiliar sport. In order for the coaching experience to be positive, coaches should develop their own philosophy of coaching and thoroughly understand the roles and responsibilities of a coach.

Developing one's coaching philosophy is very important. Every coaching philosophy should be geared towards player development. This starts with activities that focus on the involvement of all players with a ball to insure that everyone has fun. These activities should also be geared to creating success which will lead to enjoyment. When the players are having fun they will learn more. Coaches must establish a good learning environment and give positive feedback to players. The coach needs to be enthusiastic and excited about coaching. The players will feed on the coach's enthusiasm.

One of the most controversial aspects of player development is how success should be measured.

TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON OUR YOUNG SOCCER PLAYERS

I often wonder how much fun our young soccer players are having, not only at practice, but on the soccer field on match days. My main concern is really with our young players of 15 and under. After 15, I feel we are dealing with the more serious soccer players who have been involved in the game long enough to know whether or not this game is for them. But whether we agree or disagree, organized competitive soccer is here for players as young as five and six years of age, so we coaches have to deal with it as best we can.

However, my point is not whether or not these youngsters should be playing such matches, but how they are coached and the type of pressure both parents and coaches are putting on these young kids. As I said, it's here so let's deal with it as best we can.

Recently I seem to find myself more entertained by the screaming, hysterical parent on the sideline rather than the game itself! That's a shame, but true. We've all seen it, I know – parents jumping up and down shouting out instructions to their kid. "Kick the ball", "Chase the ball", all stuff we coaches cringe at when it is screamed at the kids. I've even seen parents run along the sideline with their kid while he's trying his best to get the ball under control and the parent is again screaming, "Go, go." Can you imagine the panic these poor kids get into once the ball comes their way? If it was me, I don't think I'd ever want the ball!

This type of action can be witnessed most weekends at most soccer games. Parents scream abuse at the referee if he makes a decision not in their favor. Not only is this leading to a shortage in referees (who wants to get abused constantly for an hour?), but also, the players see parents arguing over the decisions, so feel it is the right thing to do.

As coaches, we need to try to educate our parents more about the game as well as let them know that this type of behavior just will not do. Game days should be an enjoyable experience for all involved. Parents should be reminded to encourage all players in a calm manner, not in the life or death way they shout at the kids now. We are dealing with youngsters who are learning about the game. They need to be allowed to learn the complications of the game for themselves rather than have ten different sets of instructions screamed at them, which are usually different than those of the coaches. These youngsters are going to be so burned out and so pressured into pleasing Mom and Dad that it will become a total nightmare to them every time practice and game days come around. And who can blame them? I know youngsters who don't even want to play the game! But his or her brother or sister plays, so they are expected to, or Johnny down the road plays so you should too.

Parents need to be taught how to be a spectator in this sport or we will have no youngsters playing the game. Just look at the faces on some of these youngsters playing the game. You tell me if they are having an enjoyable experience?

Unfortunately, at times I find myself as amazed at some of our coaches' behavior at practice and game days. Some youngsters are terrorized into making moves on the field and to do certain things in practice. Some are being over-coached too early on and not left alone to develop their own natural abilities. You see, some coaches who are not happy unless they can hear their own voice echoing around the soccer fields, the blood vessels about to burst in their neck. Maybe that's the way it is in other sports. You see the basketball coach running up and down the side throwing his arms up in the air in disgust, or the baseball coach squaring up to the umpire while having a nose fight.

Well, I'm sorry, but that's not the way soccer is. We do not need to emulate this type of person and go out on a Saturday or Sunday and pretend we are one of these people. We need to remember we are dealing with youngsters who want to learn the game. If we don't introduce these youngsters to this great game the right way, they will be turned off and play either another sport or become another victim of the world of computer games.

Brett Mosen, USSF National A License Coach

From: Between the Touchlines, Winter 1993-94

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

By Rick Wolff

Hey Coach, this column is directed at you!

Look, just between you and me, we need to get a few priorities straight about coaching youngsters in youth league sports. Just in case you missed some of the basic fundamental philosophies about coaching kids, let me take a little time here to refresh your memory about why you've volunteered to coach – and even more important, about why kids sign up to play youth sports in the first place.

1. First and foremost, let all the kids on your team play a lot.

This rule might appear to be fairly obvious, but let's be honest: How many times have you orchestrated your lineup so that only the more talented kids get the most playing time?

Do you think the other kids aren't aware that they're being cheated out of quality playing time? Do you think their parents don't also know what's going on?

C'mon, Coach, let's go back to the real world. The truth is, while it's wonderful if your team wins a lot of games, and perhaps even the league championship, what the kids on your roster want to do is play in the games. They don't want to be relegated to the role of a cheerleader who only sees action when the score is lopsided.

2. Be sensitive to every youngster's wishes and dreams.

Suppose a kid on your team isn't a terribly good athlete but is dying to play shortstop. Do you let him? Of course you do! You don't have to play him there for every inning of every game, but who are you to squash his dreams of playing shortstop? Let him try it and give him the satisfaction of at least putting forth his best effort.

I can hear your protests: "But putting a weak player at shortstop isn't fair to the other kids on the team. After all, they want to win!"

Nonsense. The entire purpose of youth league sports is to allow kids the freedom to choose and chase after their dreams, and to see how well (or poorly) they fare at their endeavors. Trust me on this, Coach, nobody was ever offered a pro contract or a college scholarship because his or her fifth grade Little League team won the town championship.

3. If you want to have a real impact as a coach, make yourself into an active and solid role model.

This means doing and saying the right things. All the time. No cursing. No yelling at the refs. No yelling at your players. No sarcasm with the kids. No moodiness or pointing fingers if the team loses or has a bad game.

Everybody knows how difficult it is to find good role models in sports today. So rather than be part of the problem, why not be part of the solution?

Remember, in sports not all coaches are created equally. So make a pact with yourself to be one of those rare coaches who really does stand for all the right themes in sports. Become one of those unusual individuals who truly has a major positive impact on the lives of young athletes.

Some friendly advice:

- When your emotions run high on the sidelines, take a deep breath and remind yourself that they're only kids out there playing a kids' game.
- To make a difference in a young athlete's life, give him the courage and confidence to chase his dreams. That's what he really needs from you, Coach.
- Be there for the kids. Encourage them, help them and praise them. You'll be rewarded with much more than just wins.

Sports psychology expert Rick Wolff is the father of three children and the author of Good Sports, The Concerned Parent's Guide to Competitive Youth Sports (Sagamore, 1-800-327-5557). You can send questions to him at Parents' Guide, P.O. Box 5574, New York, NY 10185-5574.

Ten Guiding Principles for Youth Coaches and Parents

Following are principles adopted at the Union of European Football Association Youth Conference held in spring of 1995 in Norway. The working group drew up a list of 10 important guiding principles for coaches and parents. They appeared in the AFCAT (Association of Football Coaches and Teachers) newsletter, *Catalyst*.

No. 1: Children's football (soccer) means playing and playing means fun.

For young players, children's football means their first contact with the organized game. Do not forget that it has to involve fun and pleasure and not hard work. It has to be an integral part of their young lives. The first impression is a signpost to the child's further development. So, let them have fun, let them play and pay less attention to the results. The best outcome you can get in children's football is to have happy, delighted children who play together with their friends and can learn something.

No. 2: For children, being together with their friends is most important.

Children in the past used to meet their friends in parks or in the fields in the neighborhood. They spent their free time there and often played football. So adults must not lose sight of the fact that an important aspect of football is for children being together with friends. We must watch over that friendship as it helps promote the human spirit. Therefore, try to have their friends and schoolmates playing in their teams as much as possible.

No. 3: Everyone should be included as much as possible.

Nobody can improve by sitting on the sidelines, and nobody can say which children will later qualify for adult football. Today's "child star" seldom becomes tomorrow's professional. So let them play equally long and give them all the chance to play different positions.

No. 4: Teach children both to win and to lose.

An old adage says, "Only by knowing how to lose will you know how to win." So adults should always set the example. If adults show good sportsmanship in such situations, children can be trusted to do likewise.

No. 5: More practice – less matches.

As a rule, you should seek to teach players rather than put them under pressure by playing competitively. Too many games can harm a child's physical and social development. Norway has a rule that U-10 children should not play more than 20 games a year and U-12's at most 25 games.

No. 6: Children's football should be varied and versatile.

A multi-sport upbringing will be helpful in teaching the fundamental capacities for football and providing a well balanced physical education. Attention must be given to forming the body as a whole with general training methods and providing basic standards of sports hygiene and sports nourishment.

No. 7: Let us try to offer children "pleasurable football."

For all participants, children's football must be a positive experience giving young players, above all, the joy of the game.

No. 8: The games are for children, not adults.

Parents and relatives should show interest in their youngsters' football life. They should go to their training and games, strengthen the young players' self-confidence and support the club in its work. Adults should never forget that it is the child who is playing and not them.

No. 9: Show respect for the opponent and the referee.

From the very beginning, a child must be taught a healthy respect for opponents and referees in the spirit of fair play. Adults must always provide the good example.

No. 10: Get children the correct equipment.

There is no point in buying too expensive equipment (shoes, shin guards, etc.) for growing children, as they won't be able to use them after a few months. Cheaper models are often just as good. So, set up regular "equipment exchanges" where used equipment can be passed on to other children.

From: Soccer Journal, March/April 1996

CHILDREN'S HEARTS

One morning, a small boy woke up and started his day. He got dressed by himself, put on his own shoes and even started brushing his teeth without being asked! He was having a great time – there was water on the floor, mirror and counter – but he was brushing those teeth himself! It was a hectic morning and when the boy's mother came in and saw the water, she scolded him for the mess ... and the boy's heart crumbled a little bit.

The small boy bounced downstairs, determined to have a good day. He saw the cereal and milk on the table and decided to fix his own bowl. But the milk carton was a bit heavy, and the milk spilled onto the table. The boy's father was trying to read the paper and when he saw what happened, he told the boy he was clumsy. The boy's heart crumbled some more.

It was the first day of school for the boy. When he boarded the school bus, the driver told him his socks looked silly. Needless to say, the boy's heart crumbled. When he went to class, the boy realized he forgot his milk money. When he told the teacher he forgot, she threw up her hands in exasperation and said he'd just have to skip milk time today. The boy's heart was all crumbled up.

Tomorrow is a new day for the boy. When tomorrow came, the boy went to brush his teeth. When his mother came in, she gave him some towels and asked him to please wipe up the counter when he was finished and showed him a special place for his toothbrush and paste. The small boy's heart unwrinkled a little bit. When the boy went downstairs for breakfast, the milk spilled again. The boy's father gave him a sponge to wipe up the mess and poured some milk into a manageable pitcher for the boy. The boy's heart felt better.

When the boy got on the school bus, the driver told him what neat pants he had on. The little boy's heart was starting to smooth out! Today was only the second day of school and the boy remembered his lunch but forgot his milk money again. The teacher told him everyone forgets things sometimes and she would find a way to help him remember. The boy's heart felt pretty good.

But the boy's heart wasn't as smooth as it used to be. It still had some creases and wrinkles from being all crumpled up. It takes a long time to smooth those wrinkles. For each negative a child hears, it takes five positives to smooth out that wrinkle. So, you see, parents, educators, and all adults a child comes in contact with play an enormous role in keeping each child's very special heart smooth and free of wrinkles.

The British writer John Ruskin said, "To make your children capable of honesty is the beginning of education." It's a lesson that's taught young. The following from Sports Illustrated is about an honest kid who gains the rewards of truth-telling on the ball field.

Organized youth baseball is all too often ruined by pushy parents and overbearing coaches. But here's a story to restore one's faith.

At a T-ball game in Wellington, Florida, last year, first baseman Tanner Munsey, 7, fielded a ground ball and tried to tag a runner going from first base to second. The umpire, Laura Benson, called the runner out, but Tanner immediately approached her and said, "Ma'am, I didn't tag the runner." Benson awarded the runner second base and Tanner's coach gave him the game ball for his honesty.

In a game two weeks later, with Benson again umpiring and Tanner playing shortstop, a similar play occurred. This time, Benson thought Tanner had missed the tag on a runner going to third, and she called the runner safe. Tanner glanced at Benson and, without saying a word, flipped the ball to the catcher and returned to his position. Benson sensed something was wrong. "Did you tag the runner?" she asked Tanner.

"Yes" he replied.

Benson then called the runner out. The opposing coaches protested until she explained what had happened two weeks earlier. Says Benson, "If a kid is that honest, I have to give it to him. T-ball is supposed to be for the kids.

A PRAYER FOR CHILDREN

By Ina Hughes

PETE

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who didn't like to play basketball. He didn't even like to watch basketball games. He enjoyed going to basketball games - he just didn't like to watch them. When the final free throw was being taken in the last half-second with the score tied, his father would turn white as a sheet with little beads of perspiration standing out across his forehead. But this little boy would look under the seats for more empty Coke cups to squash.

He had a very fine basketball with a net in the backyard. He loved to go to the school gym and squeak his shoes across the court, and every once in awhile, he passed the time of night away at his homework desk by wadding up spitballs and hook-shooting them into the trash can.

But he didn't like basketball.

One day, his mother was at the grocery store and all he heard about was whose son was on what team at the YMCA. There were car-pool plans and extra practice schedules, and the whole world seemed to buzz with basketball talk. She even saw this one little fellow, couldn't have been more than six years old, walking along beside his mother in tube socks that came up to his chin, and hightop shoes with laces so long, they trailed behind him like a fuse on a land mine. His glitter-gold undershirt, trimmed in black, said he was a Panther. A basketball, which he carried like a lead balloon, kept falling out of his arms and rolling down the aisles, knocking over boxes of cake mix and getting lodged under grocery carts. His mother patted him proudly on the head, explaining that he was the center forward, a real little winner and he loved playing three afternoons a week and on Saturdays.

You can imagine how this nonbasketball-player's mother felt. After she had loaded her cart with baking soda, vinegar, and red foot coloring for the volcano her son was building in the sandbox, she went straight home to talk to him about this basketball thing. She found him stretched out in his beanbag, watching *The Flintstones*.

"How would you like to join a basketball team?" "Shhh!" Pebbles and Bam Bam were feeding Dino rock soup. "I saw some of your friends' mothers today, and everybody is playing basketball." "Mmmmm? Huh?" "Basketball. Would you like to play?" "Mmmm?" Shrug. "Good," So it was settled. Or so she thought.

Things went pretty well at first. He came home from school on Mondays and Wednesdays and, mumbling under his breath, went upstairs and put his purple boxer shorts with the crotch that hung down below his knees, climbed obediently into the back of the station wagon, and polished off a dozen Fig Newtons on the way to basketball.

Out on the courts, he spent most of the time playing imaginary games of ticktacktoe with his feet or counting the iron beams in the rafters. He was great at climbing the goal pole, hopping on one foot all the way across the top bleacher without falling and cracking open his skull - and he was terrific at imitating the buzzer.

Then came the first Saturday game. "I'm not going," he said. "Not going? You have to go. You're a part of the team. Everybody goes. You can't be a winner if you don't even go."

"I don't care. I am not going. All week, I work, work, work. I go to school and piano and basketball. Saturday is for fun. Saturday is my day off!"

A Prayer for Children by Ina Hughes, Pete (continued)

“Basketball is fun.”

“I’m glad you like it. *You* go to basketball, and I’ll get Dad to take me out to the meat-cutting plant to get me a cow’s heart for my science project and then help me fix the wheels on my go-cart. That’s what I want to do.”

But his mother, being bigger than he, won, and they set off for basketball. On the way, they stopped by the meat department to ask about the cow’s heart, and there he waged a final campaign against her by going off and hiding in the shopping center. But a nine-year-old in a shiny purple undershirt, his skinny goose-pimpled legs sticking out from behind a mailbox, is not hard to find.

It was quite a game. His mother screamed until she was hoarse, and nearly fainted when her son, her son! had the jump ball in the final seconds. She didn’t even seem to mind that the reason he got the ball was because he had been stuffing the silver wrapping off a stick of gum back in the cover to make a fake piece to give his sister, then suddenly looked up and saw this big kid dribbling down the court, heading straight toward him with no plans of slowing down. His reflexes served him well, and he raised his hands, which happened to hit the ball.

Well, anyway, it was a fantastically exciting game, and all that day she kept telling him, “Good game. Great save.”

Later that night, he asked her, “By the way, who won?”

“Who won! Why *you* won. Your team won all because of you and the way you stopped the team from scoring that last point. Aren’t you proud?”

His face fell.

“Well,” he said, “not exactly. I don’t really care about winning in basketball, and that guy Jamie, the one who would have scored if he hadn’t run into me loves to win. He said his dad had two bucks on his winning and being the top scorer. Last week, Jamie cried when his team lost. I think the ones who want to win so much and who want to get the ball so much should win. And those of us who don’t care should let them. I wish Jamie had scored.”

Finally Mom got it.

The shoestrings were taken out of his basketball shoes and used to hang his model helicopter from the ceiling. The purple under shirt was stuffed with newspaper and became the scarecrow in the children’s theater rendition of *The Wizard of Oz*. The last time his mother saw the basketball, it was part of the volcano. Every once in a while, she rants and raves about nobody playing with the expensive basketball they bought for him, but it really doesn’t matter that much because she knows – she’s absolutely positive – that basketball or not, she’s got herself a winner.

DEAR MOM AND DAD

Dear Mom and Dad:

I hope that you won't get mad at me for writing this letter, but you always told me never to keep anything back that ought to be brought out into the open. So here goes.

Remember the other morning when my team was playing and both of you were sitting and watching. Well, I hope that you won't get mad at me, but *you* kind of *embarrassed me*. Remember when I went after the puck in front of the net trying to score and fell? I could hear you *yelling* at the goalie for getting in my way and tripping me. It wasn't his fault, that is what he is supposed to do. Then do you remember *yelling* at me to get on the other side of the blue line. The coach told me to cover my man, and I couldn't if I listened to you, and while I tried to decide they scored against us. Then you *yelled at me* for being in the wrong place. You shouldn't have jumped all over the coach for pulling me off the ice. He is a pretty good coach, and a good guy, and he knows what he is doing. Besides *he is just a volunteer* coming down at all hours of the day helping us kids, just because he loves sports. And, then neither of you spoke to me the whole way home, I guess you were pretty sore at me for not getting a goal. *I tried awfully hard*, but I guess I am a crummy hockey player. But, *I love the game*, it is lots of fun being with the other kids and learning to compete. It is a good sport, but how can I learn if you don't show me a good example. And, anyhow I thought I was *playing hockey for fun*, to have a good time, and to learn good sportsmanship. I don't know that you were going to get so upset, because I couldn't become a star.

Love,
Your son

Letter appeared in *You and Your Child in Hockey*. Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation and Ontario Hockey Council. 1975. Pp. 27-28. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

SOCCER MOM 101

Tips from a pro on how to survive a youth soccer avalanche.

By: Anne Woodworth

The term “soccer mom” is a household catch phrase that everyone seems to use these days. The dedication to becoming a quality soccer mom, however, takes much more than a minivan and a folding chair.

Whether your child remains a recreational player or goes on to the Olympics or the U.S. national team, there are some basic guidelines that soccer moms and dads should follow. *Kick!* Recently sat down with Ann Woodworth, whose son Alexi and Greg Lallas have become soccer icons, to ask about her secrets to success. Anne, a writer by trade, penned the introduction to the Soccer Moms Handbook, published in 1997.

KEEP IN MIND THAT THE CHILD IS THE ONE PLAYING, NOT THE ADULT.

Woodworth says one of the most difficult things for parents to remember is that their child should be playing the sport because they want to, not because the parent thinks it’s the right thing to do. “The most important message to get across to the child is that soccer is important to the parent because it’s important to the child.”

LET THE CHILD MAKE HIS OWN DECISIONS ABOUT HIS INVOLVEMENT.

Support, not pressure, should be the emphasis from parents as children get older and develop their skills, Woodworth says. But if the child is old enough to decide that soccer is not the way they want to be spending their time, parents should ultimately let that decision stand. “When they are really young and decide that they don’t want to play, the parent should find out the underlying reason for it,” Woodworth says, “There should be a very clear explanation for why they don’t want to play. But as they get older and are able to make up their own minds, you have to respect that and let them make their own decisions, and then support those decisions.”

BE WILLING TO BE FLEXIBLE

When a child plays any sport, it means a commitment from the parents as well. Woodworth says the best way to combat the time constraints is for parents to learn to incorporate time for the whole family. “There have to be some sacrifices,” Woodworth says. “If soccer is what makes the child happier than anything in the world, it’s pretty clear what gets sacrificed. That means some family time, and a creative parent is going to find time for that. It may mean that you take a picnic dinner to a game, or eat later at night.”

SET A POSITIVE EXAMPLE

Among youth sports, soccer parents seem to have a notorious reputation for yelling at coaches from the sidelines. Don’t be one of those parents, Woodworth advises. “By behaving that way, you’re only showing your child what not to do.”

TOP 10 THINGS PARENTS DON'T GET ABOUT KIDS AND SPORTS

Kids advice for moms and dads: Lighten up!

Sports Illustrated for Kids' Sports Parents

You may not want to hear this but . . . most kids have a lot to say about their parents' involvement in their sports lives, especially what they don't like about it. Here is our Top 10 list of kids' advice for parents, gleaned from comments by *Sports Illustrated for Kids* readers.

- 10. During car rides to games or practice, kids don't want you to tell them how to do this or that. "I am not stupid," said one 12-year-old. "I know how to play the sport I play."
- 9. Kids can get psyched for a game without you help. "I hate when parents say, 'Are you ready? We're going to win,' like they're playing," said one kid.
- 8. It's your duty as a parent to sit quietly and watch your kids do wonderful things. Kids get bummed out when you miss games or yak it up too much with friends in the stands. "We're sweating and playing the game, and they're busy socializing," complained one girl.
- 7. If you don't know what you're talking about, kids don't want you to talk. Typical comments: "Parents think they know the rules, but they don't." "My mom asks annoying questions." And "I hate when my mom tells me to do things even when she doesn't know the first thing about sports."
- 6. Even if you do know what you're talking about, kids don't want you to talk (unless you're the coach). "I hate when parents tell us to do the exact opposite of what the coaches say," said one child. Added another, "If your parent isn't the coach, he or she shouldn't try to be one."
- 5. Kids wish you would practice what you preach about sportsmanship. "My mom always wants me to be a good sport, but a lot of the time she blames the loss on the ref," claimed one kid. "Arguing with the refs is not only embarrassing, but it takes up time," said another.
- 4. Kids often can't hear you yelling when they're concentrating on the game. Sometimes, they can. Either way, they don't like it. "Parents yell advice you don't hear because you're so into playing the game. Afterward they say, 'Why didn't you listen to me?'" complained one child. Said others: "I feel embarrassed when my parents yell so loud that the whole town can hear," and "They yell and scream and look like dorks."
- 3. After they lose, kids don't want to be told it doesn't matter. Typical reactions: "I hate when we get knocked out of the playoffs and my parents say, 'You'll get them next time!'" and "When parents try to cheer you up after a loss, all they do is remind you of the score."
- 2. After they lose, kids don't want to be told that it does matter. "Parents take losses harder than we do," wrote one boy. Advised one girl: "You win some, you lose some, no big deal! Get over it!"
- 1. Kids just want to have fun. Parents just don't get this, kids say. Many kids say they would rather play on a losing team than sit on the bench on a winning one. Some would like to skip practice once in a while. "The thing that bugs me the most is that my parents take it too seriously," summed up one child. "They act like it's school."

Tips for Parents

The following article appeared in "Soccer America's" Youth Soccer Letter, Dan Woog, Exec. Youth Dir.

Jim Bzdak coaches a U-12 boys team in Keene, New Hampshire. Over the past dozen years he has found a great deal of confusion among parents of players of that age regarding proper parental roles. So he hands out information to the parents. He outlines his coaching philosophy (youngsters have the right to have fun; they should learn how to make their own decisions on the field, at full speed; players should give their best at all times, and be proud of themselves regardless of the score), then offers these guidelines for parents:

Your child's commitment to soccer is only as strong as your own commitment. Players will be on time and ready to play only if you are as enthusiastic about soccer as your child is.

Give all the POSITIVE support you can.

Let your child know if he is doing well; if you don't think he is practice with him at home.

Always be positive at games ("great pass", "nice run", etc...). Avoid inflammatory statements.

Take your child to college and high school games so he can learn from older players.

Attempt always to relieve the pressure of competition, not increase it.

Never abuse a referee or question his calls. Teach your child to accept her decisions.

Never enter the field unless there is an injury to your child, play has been stopped, and you have been summoned.

Do not provoke the other team's players or parents.

Be a gracious winner and a good loser. Encourage handshaking at the end of every game.

Do not openly criticize coaches. In the case of severe differences, follow the league's appeal procedures.

Do not converse with your child during a game.

TIPS FOR PARENTS – HOW PARENTS CAN HELP CHILDREN SUCCEED

Tom Mackar, head coach at Mentor (Ohio) High School, offers these tips for parents who want to help their children succeed in soccer:

- **Don't overanalyze the game, or your child's performance.** The true "winner" in soccer is the player who leaves the field with a sense of pride in doing the best he or she is capable of doing, regardless of the outcome. The final score should not be the sole guide of your child's happiness and satisfaction with soccer. If you ask, "What did you enjoy about today's game?" you'll be surprised at the variety of answers you'll receive. Most children like the fact that soccer is fun. The running, kicking, falling (and friendship) keep them coming back for more. Make sure your number one priority is your child's enjoyment of the game.
- **Compliment the effort your child shows.** Avoid using words like "great" or "super"; these place huge burdens on youngsters. A better compliment is: "I enjoyed watching you play today. You looked like you were having fun," or "It makes me happy to watch you guys play in the mud!"
- **Learn about soccer.** Play with your child in the yard. Get books and videos about the game. Attend a coaching clinic.

Volunteer to be an assistant coach. Finally, relax and remember: That's your little kid out there, not Pele. Not yet.

(For further information, contact: Mentor Soccer Club, P.O. Box 721, Mentor, OH 44060)

From: Soccer America

Parental support in sports must be of positive nature

By **Gerald Kaforey, Ph.D.** and sports psychologist at Baptist Sports Medicine

A few years back when my father was still coaching in Ohio, I would try to attend his games when I was home. No one season in particular was any different than the rest; he had a great team, great coaching staff and support from the community. However, trouble was near and it came from a lady with flaming red hair and a raspy voice that would make some blues singers jealous. She had a bad reputation for being overly critical toward her son, players and coaches.

I remember one game in particular, at the end of the first half, the game was tied 12-12 and her son had not played. By the start of the third quarter, the mother was screaming and pacing the sidelines demanding that her son get into the game. By the middle of the fourth quarter, the game was still close and this child was not going to play unless someone got hurt. Well, that did not keep this mother from cursing at the coaches, at other fans who asked her to stop and at league representatives who asked her to leave. Sadly, this was not the first time this happened, nor the last. Who suffers from this type of behavior? Unfortunately, the young children who just want to play on a team and have fun.

Not all parents who have children playing competitive sports act in such a distasteful manner. However, there are a few out there. Are you one? It is well documented in research that sports in America is a reflection of our society. So what type of message are we sending our children when this type of behavior is displayed at sporting events? As a society, should we condone behavior that is counterproductive to the overall purpose of sports? What can we do to make change? Here are some helpful ideas that can make playing and watching sports enjoyable for all.

Winning is the only thing – What lurks throughout sports and is virtually a given with elite young athletes is what we call the “winning is the only thing” attitude. Although this notion is an accepted model for young athletes thrown into the melting pot of professional sports, this notion has no place in youth sports. The premise behind youth participation is education and personal development. This “attitude” places conditions on its participants and they become defined by their win-loss record. In our society winners are afforded prestige and honor while losers are often ridiculed.

Parental breakdowns – You do not have to look very long or very hard to see and hear of an incident similar to the one previously written. The more adults keep providing support to their children in such ways as fees, equipment and coaches, the more they expect a payoff in return. They push and they pressure their children to succeed where they had failed. They live vicariously through their children. “When he wins, we all win” said one father who had made many financial investments to assure his child gets the best money can buy in tennis.

High Expectations – For parents and coaches who aspirations are national rankings, college careers and large professional contracts, youth sports become a way of life and not fun and games. Families are selling their homes, taking out a second mortgage to finance the dream of becoming the next Michael Jordan or Martina Hingis. In fact, only 1/10 of the population in sports will reach the professional level, meaning you have a better chance at getting struck by lightning or winning the lottery. This does not compare to the added pressure and stress placed on the young athlete to succeed, to win, to be number one.

Solutions – What can be done to help cure some of these problems? A good beginning is to remember that youth sports exist and was created to meet the needs of one group, children.

Keep it positive – Studies of participation in youth programs cited having fun as the number one reason children enjoy playing sports. When sports become less fun, their enthusiasm is decreased and dropout rates increase. How can we make their experiences fun? Simply by keeping the experience fun, simply by keeping the experience positive, encouraging and making it enjoyable. Instead of criticizing or embarrassing your child for things they did wrong, give positive affirmations on the things they did right. Explain to them what they could have done differently to improve their level of skill, then encourage their effort in trying. Help them by praising the progress you see and the steps they take top get there. Cheer for the TEAM, not against the other team.

Enjoy yourself – There are few things in life more enjoyable than watching your child or grandchild having fun playing sports. Remember that this may not last forever so enjoy it while you can.

WHEN WINNING IS EVERYTHING TO A CHILD

By **Lawrence Kutner**

The New York Times News Service

For many children, the fundamental message from watching the Olympics and other elite athletic competitions has little to do with dedication, grace, sacrifice, talent and sportsmanship. Rather, they learn that winning is all important.

“We find that children believe that if you win, you’re worthy, but if you lose, you’re not worthy,” said Dr. Daniel Gould, a professor of exercise and sports science at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, who works with world-class athletes and children. “They pick up the subtle message that outcome is the only thing that counts.”

It’s easy to see from some recent events why they come to that conclusion. The figure skater Tonya Harding, emphasizing her dream of winning an Olympic gold medal, used litigation to help keep her slot on the U.S. Olympic team after people close to her admitted to having been involved in an attack on Nancy Kerrigan, her rival. The winner of the Olympic men’s downhill ski race received acclaim, while the fourth-place finisher was virtually ignored, even though he was only 26 one-hundredths of a second out of first place.

The head coach of Temple University’s basketball team threatened and nearly came to blows with his counterpart from the University of Massachusetts after Temple lost to UMass by one point last Sunday. And the Buffalo Bills were often branded as failures after losing the Super Bowl for the fourth straight year, as if the achievements that took them repeatedly to that championship were inconsequential.

Sports psychologists and coaches are growing increasingly concerned about how children integrate such messages into their lives, both on and off the field. The issue is not whether winning is important, they said, but how it fits in with other values embraced by sports and fair competition.

“We know from studies that children don’t automatically develop good sportsmanship,” Gould said. “It has to be taught to them specifically.”

He and others who work with young athletes emphasize that helping a child focus on issues other than winning cannot only make a sport more enjoyable, but also improve performance.

“I’m very concerned when I see a youngster who takes winning or losing too seriously,” said Dr. Jane R. Littmann, a child and adolescent psychologist at the William S. Hall Psychiatric Institute in Columbia, South Carolina, who also competed in the 1990 world fencing championships. “Those are the children who are likely to ‘choke’ under pressure.”

Dr. Bruce C. Ogilvie, a professor emeritus at San Jose State University in California and a pioneer in the field of sports psychology, said: “We have to be careful in our country about ever attacking winning. It’s a deeply embedded ethic in our culture.”

Still, he said he worries that the importance of winning is often carried too far. He said he spoke recently with a talented athlete who said she’d had thoughts of suicide since a knee injury had left her no longer able to compete.

Dr. Ronald E. Smith, a professor of psychology at the University of Washington, said he works with 10-year-old figure skaters “who already have ulcers from the pressure they’re feeling.” He added, “The sense that if you don’t finish first you’re a failure, is a terribly destructive outlook that takes the joy out of participating in sports.”

Such thinking can also affect other important areas of children’s lives, such as school performance. A child who is trying to master algebra or Spanish may give up when it becomes clear that he won’t be at the top of his class. The improvement in his skills is not enough to get him to keep up his efforts.

“I see a lot of children who would rather come across as not caring than risk competing if they might lose,” Littmann said. “They equate not winning with humiliation, be it in sports, schoolwork or personal relationships.”

TIPS FOR PARENTS – HOW TO BE A WINNING PARENT

Youth soccer parents are often chastised for their over-involvement in their children's games. But they're given few guides on how to help their youngsters develop a healthy attitude toward sports.

Dr. Alan Goldberg, a sports psychologist, has developed a "Parent and Coach's Guide for Winning in the Youth Sports Games." Among his tips:

- **Teach your child never to view his opponent as the "bad guy."** Instead, talk to and make friends with the parents of your child's opponent. Root for great performances and good plays by both sides, not just for the winner.
- **Encourage your child to compete against himself.** The ultimate goal of sports is to challenge oneself and continually improve – but judging improvement by winning and losing is an unfair and inaccurate measure. If a child plays his best and loses, help him feel like a winner – and when he or his team performs below potential but wins, do not gloat.
- **Be supportive but do not coach.** Provide encouragement, empathy and transportation; help with fundraisers – but leave the coaching and instruction to the coach.
- **Help make the sport fun for your child.** If your child does not enjoy what she is doing, investigate why. Is it the coaching? The pressure? Is it you? Keep in mind that in a competitive program, there should still be room for fun.
- **Remember whose goal the game is.** If your child is playing soccer to please you, he is in it for the wrong reason. Avoid pressuring him with your expectations, or using guilt or bribery to keep him involved.
- **Your child is not her performance – love her unconditionally!** Do not equate her self-worth with her game totals. If your daughter lets in a goal or messes an easy shot, do not respond with disgust, anger or withdrawal of love.
- **Remember the importance of self-esteem.** Athletes of all ages and levels perform in direct relationship to how they feel about themselves. Do not assault your child's self-esteem by degrading, embarrassing or humiliating him.
- **Give the gift of failure.** The most successful athletes are willing to take more risks than others (and therefore fail more frequently); they also use their failures as a positive source of motivation and improvement. Teach your child to handle setbacks and mistakes positively, and you'll give him the key to a lifetime of success.
- **Challenge – don't threaten.** Using fear as a motivator takes the fun out of performance, and seldom produces long-term results. A challenge, on the other hand, sends the powerful message, "I think you can do it!"
- **Stress process (skill acquisition, mastery, fun), not outcome.** Help your child get her focus off how important the contest is and onto the process at hand. Supportive parents stress the game itself, not the final score.
- **Avoid comparisons and respect developmental differences.** Comparisons are useless, inaccurate and destructive because each child matures differently. Worrying about how another athlete is doing interferes with a child's attempt to "stay within" herself.
- **Teach your child to have a perspective on soccer.** Help him develop realistic expectations about himself, his ability and his goals – without robbing him of his dreams.

*(For further information, contact: Competitive Advantage, 8 High Meadow Rd., Northampton, MA 01060, tel: 413-586-6823)
From: Soccer America*

TIPS FOR PARENTS – EXPECTATIONS *(from Soccer America December 1995)*

Every once in a while, soccer parents need a little reminder of what their role is – and is not. Soccer parents should:

- **Be positive with their children.** This means letting them know they are accomplishing something simply by being part of a team – whether they are stars, starters or reserves.
- **Not offer excuses for them if they are not starring or starting.** Instead, encourage them to work hard and do their best.
- **Not put down coaches or other players.** To berate a coach is to undermine an important adult role model. Parents who complain raise children who complain.
- **Encourage athletes to follow rules** on and off the field.
- **Insist that schoolwork comes before soccer.** Do not let youngsters say they are "too tired" to do homework; instead, help them organize their time more efficiently.
- **Not live their life vicariously through their athlete.** Youth sports are for young athletes only!
- **Cheer positively.** Your child's teammates and opponents are young amateurs, not professionals. Treat them accordingly.
- **Help youngsters to improve their self-image by believing in themselves.** Do not compare and contrast athletes with other family members. Treat each child as an individual.
- **Encourage youngsters to play** because they love soccer, not to get into college or earn a scholarship. Soccer scholarships are rare. The best way to play college soccer is to grow up loving the game
- **Let the coach coach,** no matter how much you disagree with him or her. One of the lessons soccer teaches youngsters is how to get along with all kinds of people.

Keys to peak parental performance

Youth soccer clubs are always looking for ways to rein in parental enthusiasm without dampening it. The Stone Mountain (Ga.) Youth Soccer Association recently distributed a clear, concise set of standards addressing that delicate balance:

- Let the coaches coach. This includes goal-setting and psyching up your child for practice and post game critiques. Having more than one “coach” confuses children.
- Do not bribe or offer incentives. Leave motivation to the coach. Offering money for scoring goals, for example, distracts your child from concentrating properly in practices and games.
- Support your child unconditionally. Do not withdraw love when your child performs poorly.
- Support all players on the team. Your child’s teammates are not the enemy. When they are playing better than your child, she has a wonderful opportunity to learn.
- Support the program. Get involved by volunteering, helping with fundraisers, car pooling, or however else you can.
- Encourage your child to talk with the coaches. “Taking responsibility”- whether about playing difficulties or missing an upcoming match – is a big part of soccer.
- Understand and display appropriate game behavior. When you cheer appropriately, you help your child focus on the parts of the game he can control (positioning, decision-making, skills, etc.) If he begins focusing on elements he can’t control (field conditions, the referee, the weather, etc.), he will not play up to his ability.
- Monitor your child at home. Be sure she is eating and sleeping properly.
- Help your child keep priorities straight. A youngster needs help balancing schoolwork, friendships, and other commitments besides soccer. But having made a commitment to soccer, she also needs help fulfilling her obligation to her team.
- Pass the reality test. If your child’s team loses but he played his best, help him see this as a “win”. Remind him to focus on the process, not the end result. Fun and satisfaction should come from “striving to win”. Conversely, do not let him be satisfied with “winning” if it comes from inadequate preparation and performance.
- Keep soccer in its proper perspective. The game should not be larger than your life. If your child’s performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Keep your own goals and needs separate from your child’s. Remember that your relationship with your child will continue long after her competitive soccer days end.

From: Soccer America, February 21, 2000

Tips For Parents: When your child is great

Your son or daughter is the star of the youth soccer team – congratulations! And watch out. Being the father or mother of an excellent player carries burdens as well as privileges. If your child is a great player keep in mind:

- Her success is not your own. You are not the one who puts the ball in the net (or keeps it out). You are not the one who trains every day or runs hard for 90 minutes. Be proud of her accomplishments – but don't confuse them with yours.
- Things change. The stars on the U-11 team are not necessarily the same boys or girls that earn kudos at U-19. Players develop at different rates – not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. Teams go through similar stages. Teammates move and new players replace them. Injuries occur. Even rule changes can affect players (remember what happened when the backpass rule came in for keepers?). The athletes on top of the heap today are not guaranteed to always be there.
- You can help your youngster adapt by helping him to be well-rounded. This applies to the soccer field. (working on defense as well as offense; becoming adept at different positions) and off it (learning other games; discovering other talents). The less focused on one position or one interest a child is, the easier it is to overcome inevitable disappointments.
- Don't undermine the coach or the team. It is wonderful that your daughter has attended advanced camps, has benefited from high level training, and plays on an outside team with top players. However, that does not give her the right to criticize, second-guess or not listen to a coach that might not be as knowledgeable as others, or to put down teammates who may be less skillful. In fact, if she is as good a player as you think she is, she should find a way to bring out the best in all those around her.
- Understand that all great youth players do not earn a college scholarship. The myth of college money is one of the most dangerous trends in youth soccer. Children should not play youth soccer because their parents expect the sport to play for higher education. There are simply not that many scholarships – let alone full rides – around; besides, putting that much pressure on a young player perverts all that is good about both soccer and education.
- Shut up. If your child is an excellent player, chances are the people who understand soccer already know it – and those who don't understand soccer don't care. The game belongs on the soccer field – not the supermarket line, golf course or boardroom.

From: Soccer America, November 15, 1999

TIPS FOR PARENTS – THINK TWICE ABOUT...

According to David Hilgrove, editor of *Shots on Goal*, many soccer parents don't – how shall we put this? – know as much as they think they do. For example:

- **If you think most referees stink**, are out of shape, lack proper training – yet you yourself have never signed up to officiate – you should sign up or shut up.
- **If you claim to love the game**, yet criticize individuals publicly, denigrate volunteers' contributions and badmouth other coaches and administrators, then you're not really a fan. Your ego's too big for the game.
- **If you are an administrator** who has ever made a decision based on prejudice, bias, anger or a desire to get even, you should resign now. You're normal, but not fair. Children deserve better.
- **If you hate children from other teams** simply because they beat your team, you need to take a serious look at your opponent's perception of you when your side wins.
- **If you react at games as if your child never does anything wrong**, could not possibly have fouled or retaliated, you are not spending enough time with your child off the field. All children can react negatively, yet all are still loveable.
- **If you have attended every tryout, practice and match** of your child's, but haven't spoken with him or her about it, perhaps you should. Perhaps your child would like to enjoy one game without you pacing the sidelines, telling her things she already knows.
- **If you brag to anyone who listens about your child's** upcoming college scholarship – even if it's eight years away – be prepared to miss some pretty important moments in your child's life. Setting goals is one thing; becoming obsessive and living your athletic life through your child is another altogether.
- **If you buy most of your soccer products from mail order houses**, don't ask your local soccer store to support your club, league or community. Why should they?
- **If you have bought your child four pairs of \$100 shoes**, paid his \$400 team fee and \$375 camp tuition, watched him lose his \$75 ball and spent countless other dollars on his soccer career, you owe it to him to let him wash his own uniform, pack his own \$85 travel bag, and ride his bicycle to practice (every once in a while). How will he learn to come back from two goals down if you do everything for him?

(From Shots on Goal, P.O. Box 1385, Midlothian, VA 23113)

From: Soccer America, December 1992

TIPS FOR PARENTS – EASE UP ON REFS

Finding good referees for youth soccer is a national problem. One reason is because of the abuse the men (and women and, especially, youngsters) in black (and other colors) take from "adults."

According to Victor Matheson, Minnesota Youth Soccer Association state youth referee administrator, "adults" should:

- **Pick on someone their own size.** "Think about the psychological damage done when a grown adult berates a 12-year-old linesperson," he writes. "It should be clear to any reasonable adult that verbal abuse of any kind, especially to persons 20-30 years younger, is cruel and completely inappropriate. These young referees are children, and like everyone else, make mistakes. They do not make bad calls on purpose; they need to learn from their mistakes through experience."
- **Remember that what goes around, comes around.** Every referee who suffers abuse and quits lowers the pool of candidates to officiate upcoming matches.
- **Put their money where their mouth is.** "Try becoming a referee yourself," Matheson suggests. "I became a referee because I was fed up with what I thought was incompetence by those officiating my youth games. I quickly learned that refereeing is much more difficult than I could have imagined by observing from the sidelines."
- **Think about the saying, "If you can't say anything nice..."** After a match, what do you expect a referee to do? The game is over, the decisions, right or wrong, have already been made. It is better simply to get in the car, buy your kids Dairy Queen, and cool down at home. Problems with the referee are best handled by the coach or team manager."
- **Call it both ways.** Be as quick to congratulate a good performance by the official as to condemn a bad one.
- **Act their age.** "Ultimately, your presence on the field is a privilege, not a right. Unfortunately, too often players act more maturely than their coaches and parents. Until spectators learn to behave like adults, they can expect officiating to remain dominated by raw, inexperienced referees who have not yet been frightened away, and a few thick-skinned individuals who manage to survive."

From: Soccer America

TIPS FOR OFFICIALS CAN WORK FOR COACHES, TOO

The editorial team of Referee magazine (May, 1995) published a list of personal performance principles to guide referees that need to be maintained over and above knowledge of the rules and one's mechanics. Come to think of it, they are important for coaches to understand also:

- **Be competitive:** Players give maximum effort; so should you – every game. Tell yourself, “I’m not going to let this game get away from me. I am better than that.” You are hired to make the calls that control the game. Make them.
- **Have your head on right:** Don’t think or act as if your uniform grants you immunity from having to take a little criticism, which goes with the territory. Plan on it. Effective officials know how much to take before responding. Knowing where to draw that fine line is critical.
- **Don’t set up a showdown:** If a coach is on your back, but not enough to warrant a penalty, stay away from him. That is especially true during timeouts and other breaks in the action. Standing near an unhappy coach just to show him who is boss will do nothing but lead to further tension and acrimony. Some officials develop irritating habits. Don’t be one of them.
- **Get into the flow of the game:** Each game is different. Good officials can feel that difference. Concentrate on the reaction of players. Take note if the tempo of the game changes. A ragged game requires a different type of officiating from a smooth one.
- **Never bark:** You don’t like to be shouted at, so apply the same philosophy when dealing with others. Be firm when necessary, but use a normal, relaxed voice. That approach works wonders in helping you reduce the pressure. Shouting indicates a loss of control of both yourself and the game you’re working.
- **Show confidence:** Cockiness has no place in officiating. You want to exude confidence. Your presence should command respect from the participants. As in any walk of life, appearance, manner and voice help determine how or if you are accepted. Try to present the proper image.
- **Forget the fans:** As a group, fans tend to exhibit three characteristics: Ignorance of the rules, highly emotional partisanship and delight in antagonizing officials. Accepting that will help you ignore the fans and concentrate on the job at hand (unless, of course fans interrupt the game or prevent you from being able to do your job).
- **Answer reasonable questions:** Treat coaches and players courteously. If they ask you a question reasonably, answer it in a polite way. If they get your ear saying, “Hey ref, I want to ask you something,” and then begin to tell you off, interrupt and remind them of the reason for the discussion. Be firm, but relaxed.
- **Choose your words wisely:** Don’t threaten a coach or player; if you do, that will put them on the defensive. More importantly, if you threaten, you’ve placed yourself on the spot. If you judge that a situation is serious enough to warrant a threat, then it’s serious enough to penalize without invoking a threat.
- **Stay cool:** One of your goals is to establish a calm environment for the game. Nervous, edgy officials are easily spotted by coaches and players alike. Avidly chewing gum, pacing around or displaying a wide range of inappropriate emotions prior to or during a contest will make you appear to be vulnerable to the pressure.

From: Soccer Journal, April 1996

Praise works better than criticism

By: Ernest V. Falke

I've got (basketball) in my blood. After 13 years of coaching my children, I have only one regret. I wish I knew then what I know now. The following are tips which have worked well for my players and me:

- Praise a player who does something right. Try to emphasize the goals you are teaching (e.g. "Great block, Lisa")
- Critique a player's performance when he/she is a substitute or at half-time in a positive manner. Tell him/her what you want done, not what he/she should not do. Do not yell advice to your players during the game; it only distracts them and often increases their fear of trying something new.
- Emphasize sportsmanship. Everyone will enjoy the game more and form closer relationships with teammates and opponents.
- Say something positive about each player during each practice.
- "Walk the walk." Set positive standards and follow them yourself. Do not be sarcastic, derisive or verbally abusive at any time.
- Meet with parents before the season to explain your rules about parental behavior.
- Include skilled teenage youth players in your practice sessions. Teenagers can provide role models for the young player to emulate.
- Once in a while mix players and coaches together when you scrimmage. This is an excellent opportunity to emphasize an important point. The coach with the ball might say "Tiffany, quick, run into space" and then pass the ball to Tiffany when she makes the run. This rewards Tiffany for making the run and reinforces the coaching point about using space.
- Show young players something to do, let them do it awhile, and then stop them and provide a single coaching point. Lengthy explanations are not as effective.
- Require that each player have their own basketball and that it is brought to every practice. You cannot learn to play a musical instrument unless you have the instrument. Likewise, you must have a (basketball) to learn to play (basketball).

Editor's note: Coach Falke's reminders originally appeared in the Montgomery, (Va.) Soccer, Inc., Newsletter, March 1996.

Soccer Journal November/December 1996

TEN TIPS TO BE A BETTER SOCCER PARENT

1. Soccer is a team sport
2. Our children are on the team, not us.
3. If you think your child is better than the other children on the team, congratulations – you probably fall into the majority of soccer parents. However, this is largely irrelevant (see #1 above)
4. If you want your child to improve his/her skills and performance, then leave it to the coaches. The parents' jobs are to: pay, drive and offer positive support.
5. If you think you can offer good advice to one of the coaches, then see the team manager and arrange to take the coaching certification exam. If you want to coach from the touchlines without coming to team practices, team meetings, team camps, coaches clinics or coaches meetings, keep the thought to yourself until you can watch soccer on TV.
6. Although coaching advice from parents is generally not appreciated, communication is very important. If anything at all is bothering your child, let the coach know as soon as possible so that he/she has an opportunity to adjust if possible to make your child's experience more rewarding and enjoyable. If you really want to destroy a team, tell everyone...but the coach about your problem. Talk about it and complain about it with the other parents all season and never let the one person who can fix it know there is a concern.
7. If you think you can offer good advice to a game official...(see #5 above)
8. A soccer match is not won or lost by any child (see #1 above)
9. To play well during the season, our children must come together as a team and support, communicate with and trust each other. The coaches and children will accomplish this if we don't undermine their efforts. However, if you disagree with the foregoing statements, undermining can be accomplished by using any of the following tactics: criticizing the efforts of your child, telling your child he/she is the most/least important and best/worst player on the team, telling your child that another child on the team is lousy or has deficiencies, yelling negative comments during practices or games, criticizing the decisions or strategies of the coaches, claiming that victory or defeat was the responsibility of any child.
10. Follow the rules and use good judgement and everyone will have a great season

Note: This letter appeared as an anonymous "letter to the editor" in a youth hockey magazine. A few words were changed to make it appropriate for soccer

Touchline 29, Spring 2000

Parent's soccer guide covers all bases

The book, "Goal! The Ultimate Guide for Soccer Moms and Dads," is a welcome addition to the youth soccer library. Clearly written by soccer mom and competitive runner Gloria Averbuch and Ashley Michael Hammond, a native of England who now coaches and owns a soccer camp, "Goal! Succeeds in demystifying the game at the same time conveying its joys and wonders to parents. It is attractively packaged too, filled with interesting graphics and appropriate photographs in its 240 pages. The following excerpt is reprinted with permission.

They Play to have Fun

Soccer becomes part of your life. You stand around in all kinds of weather, cheering when your child scores a goal, moaning when she loses the ball. Perhaps you've watched your child artfully dribble down the field and wondered how she developed that skill. At some point you may even be asked to volunteer or coach. Whether or not you decide to help out, it's important to know the best way that children learn soccer skills and tactics. Armed with the knowledge, you'll be able to choose good soccer programs and understand your child's needs as she learns the sport.

"They play to have fun" is the omnipresent motto of Ashley's Soccer Camp in Montclair, N.J. It appears on T-shirts and registration forms, and it's painted on the company's vehicles. This simple phrase should be the guiding philosophy of youth soccer.

Belief in this motto is the reason behind the Games Based Approach to teaching soccer. With the Games Based Approach, all aspects of the sport, from basic skills to more technical moves and strategies, are taught in the context of fun, yet instructive, games. Players practice skills with creative exercises. For example, in Sharks and Fishes players with the ball (fish) try to elude those without (sharks). This fun exercise teaches dribbling, turning and shielding.

The Games Based Approach differs from the more conventional method of instruction, characterized by lining up and standing around, which relies on repetitive drills. Groups of players standing around waiting to take a turn is a sure sign of this type of instruction.

When you drop your child off at practice, she will invariably sprint to join the action. Children do not come to be talked to or stand around; they show up to move and play. In addition, children learn best in a non-threatening environment, both physically and emotionally. The games they play should not expose them to criticism, ridicule, the use of exercise as punishment, or unnecessary individual work, which puts them on display to their peers.

Games Based Approach style training facilitates maximum participation. The beauty of this high activity level is not only that it satisfies the needs and desires of the children for maximum participation, but also that the constant movement mimics the fast pace of competition.

The Games Based Approach does not eliminate more conventional instruction. There is also the need for tactical instruction, particularly for those with a higher level of skill. While it may appear as if the more tactical aspects of the game are sacrificed by focusing on games, in fact there is always a blend of conventional and creative education. A creative coach can imbue the tactical lessons with a sense of fun.

For example, a conventional lesson for teaching defensive tactics would be to line up half the team in two opposing lines attackers facing defenders – while the rest of the team looks on. The coach then gives explanations about where players should move and position themselves, after which the players attempt to carry out the instructions. In the Games Based Approach, the entire team would be divided into three groups to play a variety of keepaway games, custom-designed to stress relevant points such as proper positioning and when to tackle.

Honing basic motor skills

In addition to the Games Based Approach, there is another crucial element in an ideal youth soccer education; the learning hierarchy. Children learn soccer most easily when they are taught in a logical, sequential fashion. It is essential that the skills are taught in a proper order, and at an appropriate age or skill level. For example, a 6-year old should not be taught how to do a complicated move. Instead, he needs to concentrate on basic motor skills, such as running, jumping, hopping and moving around with others. Disrupting this order will result only frustration and lack of success.

The learning hierarchy consists of six levels, and encompasses an entire soccer education: motor skills; ball control; ball distribution ; self-positional awareness; positional awareness of the team; total player. While a soccer program may not have this exact learning hierarchy, a good program will at least follow its spirit. A good soccer coach should have structured training plan for the entire season. With this plan in place, she will recognize that each session should have one, or maybe two, focus points.

The Games Based Approach to soccer does not eliminate competition. Rather, it stresses non-competitive skill acquisition, at times, with activities that produce a winner and a loser. Parents know that their children enjoy a challenge. They use this technique of self-competition all the time (“see how fast you can clean your room”). This type of self-competition sparks children’s drive. That is why the Games Based Approach presents competition in a positive format.

But the basic reality of winning and losing must eventually be dealt with directly. Children can gain a sense of winning or losing in practice, particularly if it is used judiciously. An education in winning and losing is important, because it is what happens in a soccer game and in life.

As you witness your child’s soccer education, you become aware of personal skills that soccer helps her develop, such as cooperation, camaraderie, decision-making, leadership and dealing with criticism. The real test of success is how your child deals with the difficult challenges – trying to master a hard skill or losing a game, for example. A supportive soccer program should provide a secure atmosphere of learning.

(Reprinted from “Goal! The Ultimate Guide for Soccer Moms and Dads.” Copyrighted 1999 by Gloria Averbuch and Ashley Michael Hammond. Permission granted by Rodale Press, Inc. Emmaus, PA 18098. Available where- ever books are sold, or directly from the publisher at 800-848-4735. Website: www.rodalestore.com.)

My kid is going to make it to the big leagues!

It's quite clear that my child has special qualities that shine above the rest. I'm not just saying that because he's my child, he really is talented! He will probably make the big leagues some day. I'm a normal parent and my bias is natural but I understand that my bias is not always confirmed in reality. As parents, we try to provide opportunities and challenges for our children that will allow them to learn, progress and achieve. In our society achievement is a primary goal. We read book after book to them when they are little, drive them to practice at age ten and pay for their SAT prep courses so they'll achieve high scores on their exams in high school. To most middle class Americans this is standard fare. You have also seen the parent who goes overboard and make their two month old review flash cards. This is the parents who's goal is helping their children's chances of getting into a good college, and ultimately being successful in life.

Yes, many children need guidance, but the result can often backfire if the child's needs and motivations are not recognized. If you push an adult's motivation on a child, the child will eventually resist. You see, its not the child's choice to invest and therefore the motivation is low. We have seen parents try to advance their children's sport career by changing teams or manipulating the coach. Is this a parent's need to live vicariously through their child or does the 8 year old need a coach with better technical skills? My advice to parents is to proceed with caution, as the results can be destructive. I am seeing this phenomenon regularly around the country, witnessing the destructive process of selecting a travel T-ball for 6 year olds. I routinely field calls from parents of 5 year olds looking for advanced training. Recently a prominent Youth soccer administrator was threatened because a parent wanted special treatment for his supposedly, talented child. Why this phenomenon? Because we as parents want the best for our children, but there are some sound scientific principles we can all use as healthy guidelines to provide opportunities for success.

Pushing kids equals kids pushing back

You have seen children who have been told what to do their whole lives. From 8 to 15 they appear talented and motivated. They comply with heavy parental influence until they are 16 and then with dramatic defiance, quit the sport they have loved all their lives. It's a common occurrence and many parents are baffled at their children's choice Every year children leave sport environments in staggering numbers. Why such a high drop out rate? One-third of all participants drop out because of the following factors: 1) constant criticism or disapproval, 2) over competitive emphasis from adults, 3) little playing time, 4) an environment of fear, and 5) inappropriate full game structure. The key here is that the child has not learned to internalize motivation like we talked above, and this is a key to constant development and enjoyable participation. There have been great strides in training theory, technical analysis and nutrition. The results have been beneficial to everyone. The Youth Soccer world has overwhelmingly accepted the principle of small sided games that allow for development and enjoyment on the technical side of coaching. The family unit is also a contributing factors in a child's development. It's has always been a factor of success in school, sport and community and is now a hot issue in the soccer community.

Helping a Child's motivation; playing in the zone

You have heard of the concept of flow or playing in the zone. Musicians, athletes and scientists all report profound feelings of engagement when they are in the Zone. This is a strong motivation but the key to get in the Zone is for the player to feel in control and ready for the demands of the task. Children will come to activities that are challenging and enjoyable. In some cases, young athletes are doing huge amounts of work but only if the demands are right for them. The key is the work must be internally rewarding. Internally rewarding means that they have the knowledge, goals and skills to make personal choices and regulate effort. When these choices are removed by an overbearing coach or parent the joy of playing is removed as well

You have heard this before, players dribbling the ball, making perfect moves. Players talk about this great feeling, playing without pressure, skilled and strong. It's called playing in the Zone. Players talk about the zone in similar ways;

"I was mentally clear, my body pumped and I felt like a wizard"

"Physically everything came to a peak my play just flowed."

"It was fun and felt good"

"I was in the zone, I wasn't thinking of anything "

"I was completely focused, like my body and mind were in perfect harmony"

You have probably experienced this feeling yourself, while you were driving from Seattle to Spokane. Have you ever been driving and thought, “I don’t remember passing that store”, because driving is easy for veterans and when you have a routine task your mind can engage in pleasant thoughts, putting you in the Zone. The key for our children is for parents and coaches to try and set the conditions for players to play in the zone daily. This is a difficult task but new scientific research indicates that we can teach and recreate the conditions for playing in the Zone. This is a really important concept for everyone, especially children. When people feel skilled and in control, they are motivated to continue that particular activity. This is how human motivation works. If children are matched to the right level of skill and focused upon the task they will have some degree of control and competence. If the skill is too difficult the child chokes; too easy a skill and they are bored. Playing in the Zone does something important, it gives motivational control to the child. That’s what we want, to help players to maximize intrinsic motivation.

The Athlete Family: the Keys to Success

Have you ever totaled up the cost of all your kids soccer experiences? The fees, travel, meals, equipment and time really add up. If you wanted a return on that investment then get yourself a broker and play the stock market. If the rationale for investing your time and money is for the health and the development for your child then the logical extension is to make the home environment conducive to success as well. Healthy development for young athletes requires the family to function at high levels. When we sample and do research with successful people, we find similar patterns in their learning. Yes families from music, politics, art, science and education all have similar patterns of function. Successful athletes usually have family support systems that are complex. Complex, means their families are stable. Stable families are found in both single parent as well as traditional family systems. A stable home is one that allows the child to be safe, disciplined, cared for supported and loved. The child needs to feel wanted and encouraged while in the home. But wait, the athletic family is also a family that encourages curiosity and allows the child to seek out and experience new challenges. Further it is a family that discusses values of achievement, support and progression. The child is encouraged to risk with the blessing of the athletic family. This allows the child to test, play and explore without fear of punishment or failure. The complex home life allows the child to experience control and encouragement in a family safe environment. Having experienced this feeling, the child is then encouraged to test their outside experiences to match their skill, and experience Flow (playing in the Zone) outside the home in activities of their own choice. This is where you hear stories from great athletes talking about training and playing as a profound source of joy. Read the stories of Wayne Gretzky, and Mia Hamm and you will recognize the contribution of stable and encouraging families.

When Good Parents Go Bad

Perhaps the most common pathway to destruction of a young player is to assume they want the same goals as their parents. Do you remember what the number one motivational factor is for children? It’s not winning or gaining a scholarship, it’s to be with their friends and have fun. The family can run into problems when the parent’s authority crosses over by defining their children’s motivations. The parent unconsciously usurps control and motivation away from the child. It backfires. You see this often as soon as the game is over and parent begins to coach a child in the car on the drive home. “You should have shot lower”, explains the father. The child’s head lists to the side and their eyes roll back and they can’t wait to get out of the car, “I know Daddy.” This interchange may seem harmless but think about the child’s motivation. If they receive enough adult criticism they will lose control and motivation and the pathway to quitting is established. This is not allowing the child to play in the Zone.

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