

Do's and Don'ts for Parents of Athletes

As a parent of a young athlete, it's your job to foster a positive environment for a positive environment for your child – and that takes discipline on your part. Here's a quick checklist to help you do just that:

1. Avoid the P.G.A. (Post Game Analysis). Within minutes following the end of the game, players are usually in the family car heading home. It's during the ride home that some well-meaning parents provide a postgame analysis of what the youngster did well, or not so well, during the game.
 - “Why didn't you shoot more when you were open?”
 - “You need to move more on offense so your teammates will pass the ball to you.”
 - “You need to adjust your stance...”
 - “It looked like the other team's defense had you flustered a bit.”
 - “Your time at the split was slow...what happened?”
 - “You didn't hustle on defense much today: were you tired?”
 - “Didn't you see that so-and-so was open all the time?”

From the parent's perspective, these observations seem like very valid points to discuss. “Besides”, says the concerned parent, “it's important to go over what my child did in the game while the game is still fresh in his or her mind.” The problem is that these P.G.A.'s can quickly ruin the fun for your athlete. After all, who wants to be analyzed or criticized moments after leaving the court (and if friends are in the car, it can be even more demoralizing)? That's the coach's job. Mom and Dad, give your youngster a break – save your “constructive criticism” for later on in the evening or the next day and bring them up in a two-way conversation about the game – or better yet, not at all. After the game is the time to be positive and brief.

2. Don't position yourself as the “perfect example”. “Here, let me show you how I used to play the game.” Have you ever said something like that to your child? Did you notice them roll their eyes, as in “Oh-uh, here we go again”. Relax. If you're like most parents, you want to help teach your child the basics through the benefit of your own experiences. But how do you do that without sounding like a know-it-all old-timer? In the mind of most children, there's a fine line between teaching them the basic skills and trying to show off. Always remember that you're supposed to be there for your son or daughter – not the other way around. Next time, wait until your child comes to you and asks for guidance. That's the most effective approach for you and the child.

3. Avoid screaming or yelling inappropriately from the sidelines or stands at games. If you have to make noise, make sure you are offering praise and support. There's not a young player on the playing surface who wants to hear their parent yelling at the officials, the coach, other players, or worse yet, themselves. Set a good example for other adults by praising good plays on the opposing team as well. In other words, somebody has to be the grown-up at these games – it might as well be you!
4. No need to provide a “play by play” broadcast from the stands. Ever hear a parent literally directing every play on the court? Okay, Johnny, bring the ball up...now, find the open man...that's right, pass it to Mark...Mark, take the shot! Max, be sure to get in position for the rebound!” You get the idea. Drop the play-by-play. Just let the kids play. They really don't need your instruction while they're playing and enjoying the game. And, it can make it difficult for your child's coach to direct the game. After all that is the coach's job, right?
5. Don't take the game more seriously than your child. Your job, as the parent, is to provide positive support for your child; regardless of how well they play or who wins. Whether they score the winning basket, goal or touchdown; or they end up on the wrong end of a lopsided score; give them a sincere pat on the back. Your child is going to monitor your reactions to their performances. If they see your mood go sour after a bad game, they're going to pick up on that and react in a similar fashion. Teach them to maintain an even balance in the face of victory or defeat, and both of you will benefit.