

Bruce Brown - The Role of Parents in Athletics

Bruce is the Director of [ProActive Coaching](#) and is the NAIA Special Presenter of the *Champions of Character* initiative. Bruce has coached athletes in junior high, high school, junior college and college. He's an authentic, engaging and often humorous speaker and the crowd loved him. He began his talk by letting us know that he was here to represent kids - that he was going to share with us what he's heard from kids over the past 35 years - - the things kids **would like to tell us** about how to help their performance and create great memories, but probably won't.

According to Bruce, there are **three times** where we can help our child's performance and create great memories:

1. Before the game
2. During the game
3. After the game

Before the first game

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why do I want my child to play this sport?
- What goals do I have for him/her?
- If there are roles, what role do I want them to play?
- How will I decide if it's a successful season?

Then ask your child the same questions.

- Why are you playing?
- What goals do you have?
- What do you think your role will be on the team?
- What is a successful season?

If your child's answers are the same as yours, then great, support your child. If your child's answers differ from yours, then **drop your goals and accept theirs**.

The reality is that 75% of kids are out of organized sports by age 13 so it is important that parents, as early as possible, do what they can to facilitate their child's growth through athletics.

Bruce also made the point that it is important that kids have a passion. Sports are just one "flavor" of passion. Others might be dance, theater, chess, band, etc. - -and these same lessons apply in those arenas. While my daughter is an athlete, my son's passion is theater and he has a coach (director), teammates (fellow cast members), spectators (audience) and a series of games (performances.) The only thing that's missing is a referee or official.

The next step that needs to happen early in the season is for you, the parent, to "release" your son or daughter to the game and to the coach. "This is your activity, not mine." Bruce made the point that sports (and other passions) are one of the only areas where parents today can safely "release" their kids. You can't release them to their friends, to culture (e.g. movies), to academics. Sports, however, are a great venue for risk-taking. You don't want them to take risks with substances, sex, driving - allow them to take risks in sports.

CAVEAT: Bruce also advocated checking out coaches and organizations before you hand over your kids to them. Make sure your kids are safe emotionally and physically.

Here are the red flags that indicate that you haven't "released" your child:

- You continue to share in the credit when things go well. "We won." No, they won.
- You find yourself trying to resolve all the problems that will inevitably come up during a season. Most of these problems will be relationship problems.
- You catch yourself yelling at an official during the game.
- You try to continue to coach them when they know more about the sport than you do (about 9th grade.)
- They try to avoid you after the game or they're embarrassed by your involvement.

Still signs but less serious:

- You are more nervous before the game than they are
- You're still fretting about the game long after they're over it

During the game

Here are Bruce's recommendations for during the game:

1. **Be there.** However, if you've been to every practice and game since they were four, don't go sometime and see what your athlete wants to bring back to you.
2. **Model appropriate behavior.** Bruce videotaped himself early in his coaching career and found that what he thought of as intensity came off as scary ugly! He reformed. To develop kids who will be poised and confident under pressure, we must model the same.
3. **One instructional voice.** This needs to be the voice of the coach. Kids find it very confusing when they hear multiple people. Encouraging voices are OK.
4. **Focus on the team,** not on your little darling.
5. **Choose one role.** There are four roles - player, coach, spectator and official. Everyone gets to choose one.

After the game

When kids are asked about bad memories from athletics, the most consistent answer is **the car ride home with mom and/or dad after the game.**

Here's how to make that car ride home a positive:

- **Save your analysis.** Don't analyze their play, the officials, their teammates, the coaching, the conditions, etc.
- **Give your athlete time and space.** Kids need time and space to recover. Some need an hour, others a week.
- **Be a confidence builder** and not a confidence cutter. What can you say? Things like
 - I love watching you play.
 - I love watching you be part of a team.
 - I love how you're such a great encourager of your teammates