Guidelines for the Sidelines

This week’s Champion Parent Note was contributed by Tauno Latvala, Director of CYO Athletics for the Archdiocese of Seattle. Tauno has been a long time trainer for Play Like a Champion Today.

As a varsity baseball coach, an administrator overseeing a youth sports league, and a parent-coach of an elementary soccer team, I have witnessed the role of parents in sports from a variety of perspectives. What I have experienced over the years has crystallized my belief that how we as parents act on the sidelines and in the stands can have a significant impact on the experience of our kids and their teammates.

1. Each of us has specific roles in the experience of youth sports – player, coach, official, and fan. Champions stay focused on their role and perform it to the best of their ability. Tension, issues, and conflict arise when we act outside of our role. In other words, let the players play, the coaches coach, and the parents cheer.

2. A parent can have a positive impact from the sideline! Players should be encouraged to focus on giving their best effort, being the best teammate they can be and having fun. Coaches have committed to the kids on their team - respect the commitment they have made. Coaching from parents on the sideline can be distracting and can undermine the coach’s authority with the team. Indecisiveness and confusion do not lead to maximized performance and experience.

- Referees have been instructed in the basic rules of the sport and the nuances of how to use their judgment to apply them. Constant badgering of the officials often causes our athletes to become more focused on calls instead of persevering through the adversity that is part of sports. Officiating is difficult. EVERY league needs more officials, if you have an interest, sign up and help out!

- Fans should focus their effort on affirming the process of play and the little things that contribute to team enjoyment (enthusiasm, effort, sportsmanship, team play, persistence), not just the outcomes (points, victories) because the outcome is not always something that can be controlled. These affirmations should take place during and after the game.

- Tony DiCicco (Head Coach) and Colleen Hacker, Ph.D. (Sports Psychology Consultant) for the 1999 World Cup Champion Women’s Soccer teams wrote the book “Everything You Need to Successfully Coach Girls” The book builds on the philosophy that affirming youth for doing good things reinforces good behavior, such that our focus should shift from criticism for doing the wrong thing and instead focus on catching them doing it right as described in this parent blog.

3. Finally, and perhaps most important, it is good to find out for yourself specifically what your kids are thinking. Ask them what they want from you on the sidelines and in the stands – what do they want you to contribute to THEIR experience?

What can you do in your league or at your school to remind all fans of their role in the game?

This is a statement that is read aloud by an adult prior to each competition in the Seattle CYO.

“Champions are those that maximize their potential. We need to create the environment in which Champions are made. We will respect and support coaches and officials by remaining in the designated spectator areas. We will remember that youth participate for their enjoyment, not ours. We will remember our role as a fan and applaud good effort by all competitors. We will encourage the athletes to improve their skills, be good teammates and play by the spirit of CYO Athletics.”

Adapted from the Portland CYO/Camp Howard

More Resources on Parent Behavior

- Hear what Sam Snow, Technical Director of US Youth Soccer says about parent behavior on the sidelines.

- Check out Play Like a Champion’s Guidelines for the Sidelines for parents or the 10 Commandments for Sports Parents.

- Read what US Youth Soccer suggests for parent etiquette at games.

10 Commandments for Sport Parents

On the way to the event...

1. Ask your child to set goals for the game a physical goal, a mental goal and a sportsmanship goal.
2. Remind your child (and yourself) to have fun.
3. Say a prayer of thanksgiving with your child for the chance to play.

At the event...

4. Be positive with players, fans, opponents, coaches and officials.
5. Remain calm and in control of your words and actions.
6. Take a deep breath or step away from the game if you grow angry.
7. Applaud good play on both teams.

On the way home...

8. Ask your child, “How do you think the game went?”
9. Point out signs of sportsmanship shown in the game.
10. Express your love for your child regardless of the outcome.