

## Parents and Coaches

Do you remember the first time you saw your children in athletic team uniforms? The first time they competed in a sport? Do you recall the first time they experienced failure in an athletic event? Or the first time they sat on the bench for a majority of a contest, or even for an entire event? How did that make you feel? How did you respond?

I have two children, both of whom compete in sports. One is a high school freshman and the other is a college freshman. They have been involved in several athletic endeavors since they were very young children. Sometimes they played well, sometimes not. Sometimes they were among the stars, other times sat on the bench. Sometimes their coaches communicated expectations clearly, other times not so.

Throughout all these years I have also been a coach. Most of the time I was coaching because it was my job, my chosen profession. Other times I was volunteering to help with my children's teams, though like many parents I don't always have the opportunity or even the inclination to volunteer as one of the team coaches. With graduate school work and also just out of curiosity, I have done some research on parents of youth and scholastic athletes. My informal research---most of us have done that--- the observation of coaches, athletes, officials and parents at our children's athletic events, has allowed me to witness parental involvement and behavior of various kinds.

When we see our children suffer through an unfortunate experience in an athletic event, we tend to feel their pain. As parents, our instincts often are to shield them from harm, to try to nurture them, to protect them and rescue them. Our emotional involvement with our children can lead us to do things that may or may not be the best things to do. Our reactions to what we perceive as unfair treatment are sometimes based on our emotions rather than our objective thought processes.

What kinds of communication do we have with the coaches of our children? Is it our responsibility to develop a relationship with the coach? Is it the coaches' job to establish a relationship with us? Doesn't the coach already have the responsibility of trying to communicate with and relate to the athletes whom they are coaching, teaching, and mentoring? Do we really know what our children want and need, or do we just think we know?

It can be a delicate situation to try to intervene in, if we attempt to speak for our children when we think they aren't getting fair treatment from a coach, or when we feel that the entire team is being mistreated. Our kids don't come home and tell us everything that their coaches tell them, and they don't report on every incident that happens during practice, whether good or bad. As parents, we don't really know the full extent of what is happening with the dynamics of the team and the relationship between the coach and players.

But still we want to have some input. We have all seen parents who are constantly communicating to the coaches of the teams. We sit there and say to ourselves, "What can

he possibly have to tell the coach this time?" Most of us have seen parents acting out their frustrations when they speak to coaches, venting their anger about playing time or perceived favoritism, or even about game strategies. What do those types of behaviors get us? Do they get our kids more playing time? Do the coaches change their strategies or put kids at different positions? Do we, as parents, really know more about how to coach the team than the coaches do? There is a different answer for each of these questions and each separate situation, because each circumstance is unique.

I have had my own experiences with coaches of my children's teams. Sometimes I choose not to ask anything, even if I think the coach is not doing things the way I would do them. All most of us want out of our coaches is to treat our kids with respect and to do the right thing. And we all have our opinions about what the right thing is, don't we? The question is, when we think the coach is not doing the right thing, what are we going to do about it? We can react, either rationally or emotionally, or we can trust that the coach knows what he/she is doing, and can see the error in his/her way.

Therefore, doing nothing is still taking a course of action.