

TOP TEN ISSUES FOR SPORTS PARENTS

By Rick Wolff

Issue No. 10 – The issue is playing time. You have to understand, Mom and Dad, that if your kid goes out for a team – unless the league stipulates that every kid has to play at least a certain portion of the game – there’s no guarantee that your kid is going to play a lot in the game. That’s harsh for the kids, but it’s even harder for the parents, especially if you have high expectations for your athlete. What can you (or your child) do about it? Of course, a meeting with the coach can be helpful, but it doesn’t always solve all the problems of playing time. In fact, one of the life lessons you have to teach your youngster is that being talented just isn’t enough. You have to be able to show and impress the coach with your desire to want to play.

Issue No. 9 – Parental behavior at the games is a key issue. In short, it’s as simple as this: your job is to act like a grown-up at the kid’s games. It’s not you playing in the game; it’s your kid. Your childhood is over and as an adult you must understand that if you go nuts at your kid’s games, the kids will eventually copy and follow your actions and become just as unsportsmanlike as you are.

Issue No. 8 – Sportsmanship, again it’s up to you, the parents to set the record straight. Show the kids that you can enjoy the game, win or lose and still shake the other team’s hands and the same goes for the ref. You know it’s easy to say “Good game” to the ref after your team has won, it’s a lot tougher – and a lot classier – to say “Good game” after your team has lost. Sportsmanship takes real effort and while you can certainly encourage your child to compete as best he or she can, when the game is over, they have to revert to being civil human beings and so do you!

Issue No. 7 – Do your homework on competitive teams. As a parent, if your kid wants to try out for a travel team, it’s your job to check on the team, the coach and what kind of priorities the coach has for the team. That means checking on playing time, coaching strategies, checking with former players on the team, how cuts are made and so forth. Most sports parents only want to see the positive aspects of travel teams and that’s fine, but if you’re smart, you’ll be watchful of things that can easily go wrong. Remember if you don’t look out for your child, who will?

Issue No. 6 – Know how to support and praise your kid, especially when things aren’t going well. A loss is tough enough for a kid; he or she doesn’t need you doing a post-game analysis on them too. The PGA – post-game analysis. Be very careful not to start pointing out to your athlete what they did wrong or need to improve right after the game is over. Kids HATE that and if you do it enough times, your kid will quit rather than endure your post-game grill sessions. Try using the praise sandwich approach whenever you want to give some constructive criticism and watch your words and tone of voice carefully. One other note...adversity is still a great teacher and motivator. Every young

athlete will go through some sort of adversity in their life and it's at that time they'll be more responsive to your instruction and ideas, but the key is – THEY have to come to you – not the other way around!

Issue No. 5 – Be careful of having your child specialize in a sport too early in life. The majority of professional coaches and athletes do not feel that a kid ought to play just one sport when they are growing up. Why? Because playing one sport will lead to burnout by the time they're thirteen or fourteen and even worse that one sport all year round will transform from being fun to being just a job. Bottom line? Let your kid play a variety of sports when they're kids. They don't have to start to even thinking about specialization until they are fifteen or sixteen.

Issue No. 4 – Don't be in a hurry to show them how you used to play the sport. No kid ever wants to have Dad show him or her how "I used to do this..." The truth is your child wants to be their own man or woman and they really aren't that interested in how you performed a certain move or skill. What they really want is to develop their own signature moves.

Issue No. 3 – Get a reality check. The stats don't lie. Very few kids go on to play college sports. Do you think the stats don't apply to your kid? If the odds are that less than 5% of all high school varsity athletes ever go on to play collegiate sport why do so many parents think that their kid is going to be that special one?

Issue No. 2 – Get involved as a coach or assistant coach. Rather than stand on the sidelines at the games and criticize the coaching strategies, if you think you can do better, then offer your services and become either a head coach or assistant coach. Once you find yourself on the die of the fence, you'll discover that coaching is a little tougher than you had thought. And if you can't coach, then get outside and practice with your child. Get involved that way.

Issue No. 1 – Put a smile on your face, let them know they are doing great. Relax. Enjoy the moment. Take a moment and just look at that youngster of yours on the field. Look how they move – how they enjoy chatting with their friends on the team. Sometimes, you might even see them smile because they're enjoying themselves. That's what you should want for your kid. And so take a lesson from that. If they're having fun, you learn from their lead. You have fun too...smile...enjoy the game...give the kids a real pat on the back...and their parents and the coach, too...
If you can master this simple philosophy you'll find that you really enjoy youth sports a lot more.