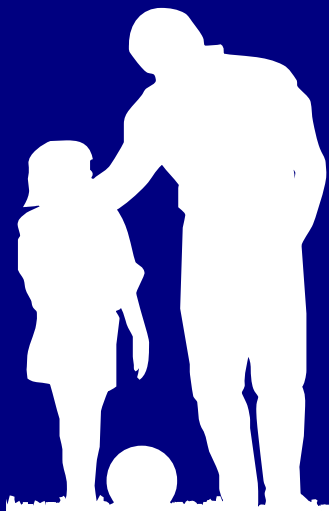


Volume 1. The Coach Development Series

Mobilzie Parent Support

**How To Get Parents
Off Their Coach's Backs And Into Their Corner**



DAVID CANNING EPPERSON, PH.D.

Mobilize Parent Support

**How to Get Parents
Off Their Coach's Backs And Into Their Corner**

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Alliance Publications
Sugar Land, Texas

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The Opportunity Expanding Sports Collection

This is one in a series in the Opportunity Expanding Sports Collection. Each volume addresses issues related to the challenges of creating opportunity expanding team communities. These booklets are aimed at accomplishing three objectives:

- To inspire you to reflect on whether your current way of playing your sports parenting role is having the desired results.
- To provoke discussion between you, athletes, coaches, and other parents about how you can work together to create an opportunity expanding team community.
- To challenge you to consider taking actions that will lead to the pay-offs you seek from your investment in your children's life in sports.

Most parents have not yet considered the full range of benefits to their children and their families from their sports programs. They have not been challenged to expand their consciousness, values, attitudes and skills so that they can become Savvy Sports Parents. In the main, parents have not been inspired to:

- Engage in self-assessment to discover the level of development of their ability to manage the inevitable frustration and anger that arises in the normal course of athletic competition.
- Explore alternative solutions to common challenges in their team community that take attention off individual performance and place it instead upon achieving benefits for everyone - parents, athletes and coaches
- Complete an analysis of those factors that interfere with their own ability to become deeply involved in what they are doing in their team community,
- Develop a plan of action for facilitating the dreams of their sports mates - the parents, athletes and coaches on their children's team.
- Develop a design for a team community that can open up opportuni-

ties for parents, athletes and coaches to be inspired, empowered and unified through their relationships with one another and by commonly overlooked growth-enhancing features of the sports scene.

- Develop a plan for promoting mutual support among parents, athletes and coaches in their team community.
- Identify those features of today’s team communities that need “fixing” and take actions to repair the “defects.”
- Develop strategies for initiating reforms in school and youth sports that will enhance the sports experiences of everyone who follows.

It is necessary for those with a vision of contentious-free and opportunity expanding sports to discover strategies that inspire parents to invest in equipping themselves to become involved citizens in their team communities. These outcomes will only occur when the consciousness of parents is awakened about what they need to do to prepare themselves to become Savvy Sports Parents.

This collection of booklets has been prepared to help parents:

- A. Understand And Seek Solutions To Today’s Youth Sports Challenges** (The Sports Challenges Series)
- B. Maximize Possibilities For Athletes, Coaches, Parents, Teams, Schools, Families and Communities** (The Sports Possibilities Series)
- C. Develop The Habits Of A Savvy Sports Parent** (The Parent Development Series)
- D. Support The Professional Development Of Coaches And Sports Administrators** (The Coach Development Series)
- E. Promote The Development Of One’s Own Children And Their Teammates** (The Athlete Development Series)
- F. Actively Contribute To Team Development** (The Team Development Series)
- G. Become Activists In The Enhancement Of School And Youth Sports** (The Sports Enhancement Series)
- H. Develop an Opportunity Expanding Perspective On School and Youth Sports** (The New Perspectives Series)

The values and principles of an opportunity expanding vision of sports guide the analysis and recommendations found in this collection. By gaining an appreciation of how you can contribute to the enrichment of school and youth sports you will be better equipped to be a contributing citizen in your children’s team communities.

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1

Approaches to Sports Parenting

Some parents choose to make themselves unavailable to participate in their children's sports programs. They are absent from practices and games; they do not volunteer to transport the team to games; they do not provide refreshments for the teams after competitions, keep score, keep statistics, assist with the coaching, or help with fundraising. Nor are they available to meet with the coach to receive a report on their children's progress. Opportunities always exist for parents to become a positive force in the lives of their children and the team community. Many of us find it unfortunate, if not tragic, when parents are unable or unwilling to become a part of their children's sports communities. Not surprisingly, many coaches like it that way. When parents are "no shows" it relieves coaches from having to deal with their diverse expectations and demands.

We know that there are an increasing number of coaches who find it difficult to please parents. Parents often feel that their children are not getting enough playing time, the coach is not using the players in the most effective manner, the coach is not employing the right strategy, or the coach is not producing enough wins.

Because there appear to be more and more parents who are making life difficult for their children's coaches, many coaches are relieved when parents choose not to become active in their children's sports programs. This situation is unfortunate because it is not only possible, but it is also desirable, for parents to learn to become constructive contributors to a youth sports program. Most parents are willing to become contributors to their children's sports programs if they are provided opportunities to develop collaborative relationships with their children's coaches.

What is the appropriate role for parents in creating a highly effective team community? Let's explore some alternative ways that parents typically chose to relate to their children's sports programs. Parents need to arrive at a decision as to how to play their sports parenting role in ways that allow them to help create a team community that is empowering to all participants: athletes, coaches, and parents.

In evaluating the most effective ways parents can relate to their children's sports program I have found it useful to assess three major

types of sports parents:

Reactive Parents

These are parents who, for whatever reason, do not feel the need to be involved. They do not volunteer to assist the coach, their children, or the team. They are infrequently, if ever, negative. They seldom cause problems for the coach. Their distinguishing characteristic is their lack of involvement in their children's life in sports.

Proactive Parents

These are parents who make themselves available to assist the coach in any way he or she might like. They have the need to be involved, to feel helpful and to stay close to their children. This group seldom, if ever, creates any problems for the coach, because they will back off if the coach does not express a need for their assistance. Their distinguishing characteristic is that they are good team players. They want to be there for their children, for the coach, and for the team.

Intrusive Parents

These are parents who insist on being intimately involved in the management of the program. They have a strong need to make a difference. This is the group that presents the coach with the greatest challenge. Their distinguishing characteristic is it that they want to shape their children's sports experiences.

How can parents know which approach is best for them, their children, the coach and the team community? Which approach is most likely to result in the creation of a good sports experience? In addition, how can coaches develop the skills needed to capitalize on each parent's unique approach to sport in ways that will maximize their contributions to the creation of an opportunity expanding team community? In order to answer these questions it will be useful to explore in greater detail the three major approaches parents take to connecting to their children's sports programs.

Approaches to Sports Parenting

Reactive Approaches

- **“The No Show”** The parent who is never available for anything. She says “Too busy.”
- **“The Just-do-it”** The parent who endorses what the coach is doing and allows her to shape the direction of the program by herself. He says, “Do it your way.”
- **“The Place Holder”** The parent who communicates to the coach that she is there for the coach if she is needed, but does not take specific initiatives to contribute to the program. She says “I’m here for you if you need me.”
- **“The At-a-Boy”** The parent who is always there to praise the coach and athletes, but takes no initiatives himself until asked. He says “Good job, Coach.”

Proactive Approaches

- **“The Send-me-in-coach”** The parent who always finds a way to position herself so that the coach will invite her to take on an assignment. She says “Give me something to do, Coach.”
- **“The Problem Solver”** The parent who is always available to help the coach assess how best to solve a problem that the team encounters. She says, “Let’s figure out how to do this.”
- **“The Assistant Coach”** The parent who is always available to assist the coach on the playing field. He says, “I’m available if you need help with coaching the child.”

Intrusive Approaches

- **“The Kibitzer”** The parent who always has advice for the coach. He says “Have you considered?”.
- **“The Judge”** The parent who is always ready to evaluate the

performances of athletes and the team. She says, “We need to improve.”

- **“The Executive”** The parent who is always ready to take charge and make decisions, whether or not she is asked. She says, “Here’s how we should do it.”
- **“Self-seeker”** The parent who is always in pursuit of benefits for his child, uninterested in the welfare of anyone he perceives to be standing between his sports dreams for his child. He says, “You must be fair to my child.”

Each of these types of parents requires different responses on the part of the team community. All of their voices need to be heard. However, in a collaborative team community it is important to urge all parents to become proactive. Reactive and Intrusive parents present problems for the coach and the community. Provisions need to be made to urge all parents to commit to a proactive role in the sports community.

2

Managing Uninvolved Parents

Sport has great potential to empower athletes, strengthen families, and help build communities. Reactive parents, those who fail to take initiatives to invest in their children's life in sports, can diminish the power of sport to inspire, empower, and unify. While coaches are ambivalent about parent apathy, they should make every effort to get parents involved in the life of the team. It is important for all parents to take an active role in creating a supportive team community.

While it is true that there are very heavy demands in the lives of some parents that make it difficult for them to get involved in the life of the team community, every parent needs to make some type of investment in helping the team achieve its chosen mission. The base of support for a team is diminished when parents do not take ownership by making an investment in time and effort. Without every parent's support it is difficult for the team community to realize its full potential.

It is important, however, to accommodate the unique situations of each family as coaches attempt to move parents from being reactive to becoming proactive in their relationship to the team. Let's take a look at each of the reactive types of parents to see if we can identify ways that they can be brought into the fold.

It is desirable to begin with the assumption that reactive parents are interested in doing their part, but have not figured out how to connect with the team community. While that may not always be the case, by assuming this position the coach is demonstrating respect for those who they are attempting to get more involved in the team community.

The No Show

Quite often "no shows," who do not volunteer to be available for participation in the life of the team, often constitute a very significant proportion of team parents. These parents report that they are just "too busy" to make an investment in their children's lives in sports. They sometimes take a "You just don't understand" attitude about the demands

that exist in their lives and display little interest in acknowledging the competing demands that exist in the lives of the coach and other parents. Sometimes that means that they have no interest in sports. It can mean that they do not have a clue as to how to make a contribution to the team community. Or it can mean that they are reclusive individuals who shy away from group activities because they lack the confidence to be able to contribute. Sometimes their lives are just so chaotic that they are unable to take on even one more responsibility. And there are parents in this group who assume a “Let George do it” attitude and refuse to do anything until it is required of them. For the “No Shows” it is essential that the team community use a “hard sell” to get them involved and to adopt procedures that recognize and support any efforts these parents make to invest in their child’s team communities. The “hard sell” may include scheduling mandatory meetings during the season if they want their children to be eligible to participate on the team. Or it might include an active recruiting effort by volunteer proactive parents to get these parents to their first meeting.

After that, however, it is essential that activities be put into place that make it rewarding and fun for parents to participate in the life of the team. The best way to make it attractive to be active in the team community is to create a mutually supportive parent community where they are able to share the concerns all parents have when their children are involved in sports. Parents are the best ones to plan activities for themselves that achieve that end.

The Just-do-it.

Probably the largest group of reactive parents is the “Just-do-it” group who endorse what the coaches are doing and allow them to shape the direction of the program by themselves. These are the parents who consider that they have “contracted” with the coach to provide a sports education for their children. They consider themselves to be clients of the coach and have bought into the tradition of not interfering with the coach’s work. They feel they are being “good sports parents” by not being intrusive. Coaches further this non-interference rationalization by making it either explicit or implicit that they do not want to have to deal with parents. This “conspiracy” against active parents involvement serves both the interests of these parents and coaches who want to avoid parent problems. “The Just-do-it” parents are able to absolve themselves of any responsibility for contributing to the well being of the team community while the coaches are able to avoid having to deal with

parents. It is important to note that these parents are conformist who can become candidates to take on a more proactive role in their children's sports communities. If they understand that the coach wants them to play a more active role many of them can be mobilized to assume citizenship responsibilities in their children's sports communities. Often times these are compliant individuals who are waiting to be told what is expected of them. Expectations for parent involvement can be easily communicated at the beginning of the season when team guidelines are being established.

The Place Holder

There are parents who communicate to the coach that they are there for the coach if they are needed, but they do not take specific initiatives to contribute to the program. Autocratic coaches like these parents because they can be dealt with on the coach's terms. The good news is that since many of these "place holders" are nurturing moms and dads, they are easy to mobilize to form a mutually supportive team community. To play a supportive role allows them to feel both needed and fulfilled. In forming a team community these supportive parents can be counted upon to fulfill their responsibilities.

The At-a-Boy

There are parents who are always there to praise the coach and athletes, but who take no initiatives to be helpful unless they are asked. They believe that it is their role to be positive and supportive, but feel they have not been given permission to go beyond being a cheerleader. Typically, these parents are simply waiting to be asked to do more. The team community can maintain an upbeat climate by taking full advantage of parents who are blessed with a positive predisposition.

Some of the reactive parents are good candidates for becoming proactive if the expectations are communicated to them clearly and early. Of course, there will always be parents who because of personal circumstances or temperament present their children's team communities with a real challenge. There are parents whose work and child care schedule makes it truly impossible to become an active member of their children's sports communities. There are individuals who suffer from restrictive physical and psychological illnesses who will find it impossible to become contributors. However, the vast majority of families can provide at least one parent who can become active in the team community. The

process of maintaining a vital sports community does not require dozens of hours.

3

Managing the Most Difficult Parents

As I travel around the country talking with athletes, coaches, and parents about creating opportunity expanding team communities, one of the first questions that is raised is how to handle their most intrusive parents. They often refer to these parents as Jerks, Psychos or other uncomplimentary names. My first response to questions about how to handle the most difficult parents is to answer it to with another question. “Why do you think they are responding the way they do?” Until we are able to understand what it is that is provoking the conduct it will be difficult to arrive at strategies for managing their intrusions.

The most difficult parents to manage I am calling *Self-Seekers*. They are typically in pursuit of benefits for their own children, uninterested in the welfare of anyone who they perceive to be standing between them and their sports dreams for their children. Some of these parents may be disturbed souls who have developed an abrasive personal style that causes everyone to be viewed as adversaries who obstruct their straight pathway toward their goals. A parent who has developed this type of personality pattern can command great amounts of the coach’s and parent leaders’ time when they hit a bump on the road to promoting their child’s athletic careers. Unfortunately, they seldom have solicited their children’s consent to be their advocates. And many times it is only the parent who is upset, not their children, because they may very well not embrace their parent’s ambitions for them. It is the parent’s dream that is being shattered, not their children’s.

For these difficult parents, who fortunately constitute a very small percentage of sports parents, no rational case can be made by coaches or parent leaders to justify their decisions. These are the parents who are prone to threaten suits against the coach and the program unless their version of justice and opportunity is used to serve the interests of their children.

When a person who embraces this style of relating to the community shows up at the gym door they can become a very disruptive force, for they have little or no interest in the welfare of anyone other

than themselves. Their children are viewed as extensions of them, therefore any discomfort to which their children are subjected is experienced by parents as a challenge. They feel it is their responsibility to protect their children from any challenges they might face. It is all about them, not about their children and certainly not about the team community. They present the greatest challenge to the coaches and their fellow parents. Their hard-charging ways are often sensed by the athletes on the team as well, thus making the athletes inhospitable to them and sometimes to their children.

In my experience, most parents typically respond well to encouragement to satisfy their needs through constructive roles in the team community. The spoilsports may not have the capacity to yield to the social pressure that the other parents apply to keep them from being a continuing source of irritation. The hard cold facts are that there may be times when these egocentric parents will have to be denied access to their children's team community. There are also times when it will be necessary to deny their children access to the program, that is when these troubled parents are unable to adapt to the standards of the team community. These are infrequent, but not rare circumstances. These *Self-Seekers*, who are most often impervious to influence from either the coach or the other parents, cannot be allowed to consume large amounts of time addressing their concerns. Procedures need to be put into place by the parents, coaches and athletes acting together, so that when parents begin to allow their self-interest to dominate the team's agenda that they can be excluded from participation in the daily life of the team community.

All parents, including *Self-Seekers*, deserve due process. It is necessary that a procedure be put in place in the team community for reviewing cases where an individual has become a distraction to the team. Therefore, it is imperative that at the beginning of the season a community meeting be convened to establish standards of conduct for parents, athletes, and coaches. Clearly documented procedures need to be put into place for managing disruptive conduct from whomever it comes. It is typically not effective when these guidelines are created and issued by the coach. For these guidelines to be effective with intrusive parents it is essential that they be created and enforced by the entire team community. Enforcement of guidelines for parents is most effective when it grows out of jointly established community expectations and norms, rather than from a code of conduct posted on the gym wall. Parents, especially intrusive ones, need to take ownership of the guidelines for good sports before they can be expected to follow them with enthusiasm. Realistically, however, the *Self-Seekers*, who are typically insensitive to anyone

else's agenda, may not be able to be reached with *any* community-initiated actions. Sadly, they may be lost causes. It is possible that no other solution will work other than to exclude Self Seekers from participation in the team community. An opportunity expanding team community needs to have the option of excluding parents, if they are to create a constructive collaborative climate. But that is not the usually case for the other meddlesome parents, for they typically are able to respond to social pressures and rational appeals, whereas the Self-Seekers sometimes are not.

I fear that my analysis of the most difficult parents will leave the impression that I favor excluding parents if they raise objections to program policies and practices. To the contrary, a vital team community has a lively exchange of views about what values should be emphasized and what policies and practices should be adopted. What I have concluded is that unless parents can operate in a collaborative community by demonstrating respect, civility, and responsibility, they may need to be invited to seek other outlets for the children.

4

Getting Intrusive Parents In Your Corner

While there are some difficult parents whose behavior is so disruptive that they have to be excluded from participation in the sports community, there are other types of parental intrusiveness that can be brought under control. These types of intrusive parents are capable of being influenced by the norms and expectations of the team community and they typically respond rationally to initiatives to modify their style of relating to the community.

There are three types of intrusive parents whose personal styles can be used to advantage by the coaches and parent leaders: the Executive, the Judge, and the Kibitzer.

The Executive

Executives are always ready to take charge and make decisions whether or not they have been asked. They are intent on wresting control from anyone who has it. Many of them are masters of control, some of whom are CEO's, managers, or supervisors for their companies where they are accustomed to having everything they say taken seriously by their underlings. They often treat the coach as they would treat one of their employees. These Executives, however, are not resistant to reason, but simply are irrepressible "control freaks" who are used to getting their way.

Executives have a high need to be in control of situations in which they are invested. By having children in the program executives are by definition invested. They fear that any failures will reflect badly on them. These are generally very competent individuals who are high achievers in their own right, typically in leadership roles wherever they find themselves. They have the capacity to make significant contributions to their children's team communities if they are given a role that fits their personal style.

Executives can become a challenge in the community when they

fail to be responsive to the desires of other parents who also have a strong need to control. They can also be terribly threatening to coaches when they take on leadership responsibilities that have not been assigned to them, or when they push their way onto the coaches' turf.

The best defense against these parents is to involve them intimately in the creation of your program's guidelines and in organizing parents to perform leadership functions. These executive-types will feel they are in positions to protect their investment and will be getting the types of feedback they need to sustain their focus, when the program takes advantage of their need for control. Their commitment to organizational structure can provide the program with order and energize the efforts of the parent community, such as in fund raising, travel planning etc.. In this way they can be co-opted by the community to its advantage. If they go overboard with their control it may be necessary for another parent, not the coach, to have a discussion with them about their leadership style. The person chosen for the assignment to have this conversation with the overzealous Executive needs to be a peer, that is, someone at a similar achievement level. Executive types typically respond well to rational appeals.

The Judge

There are other intrusive parents who I refer to as Judges. They are always eager to evaluate the performances of athletes, the coach and the team. These are individuals who hold high standards for themselves and for everyone around them. They often have children who also are extremely achievement-oriented, who demand much from themselves and from their teammates. Parents who maintain a judgmental attitude while participating in their children's sports programs can have a damaging influence on the climate of the team community. They can bring down the morale of athletes who are privy to their evaluations; they can put a lot of pressure on the coaches; and they can anger other team parents by suggesting that their children are not performing up to the Judge's standards. They are typically well meaning people who simply have a difficult time repressing their need to have the team be successful.

No matter how well the team performs they always seem to find something with which to find fault. The game they play with everyone in their lives, not just members of the sports community, is "Isn't it awful." They try the patience of everyone, not simply the coach. Fortunately, judges are not mean spirited and they respond to information that the coach or other parents supply them after they have filed their concerns.

Most important to this type of parent is that they feel someone has listened to their concerns and understand “where they are coming from.” They need to be provided with an opportunity to first of all express their concerns, and secondly to receive a respectful and considered hearing. One strategy that can be used to manage all types of difficult parents is to schedule periodic open forums where the coach and parent leaders make themselves available to address concerns parents might have. If these are regularly scheduled rather than convened only when there is a crisis, many potential problems can be headed off. The coaches and the parent leaders can help the parents better understand why they have made the choices they have. While this procedure will not eliminate challenges from intrusive parents it will provide a constructive context in which they are addressed. This procedure will also allow coaches and parent leaders to invite parents who have an issue to these regularly scheduled sessions when a problem arises. This allows for a cooling off period that permits the aggrieved parent to formulate his position so that it is less emotional and hence less disruptive to the team community. It is difficult to move Judges off of their achievement concerns by focusing attention on a broader range of benefits of participation in the program. There are times when it is impossible to satisfy their demands for success. After every effort has been made to satisfy their obsessive needs for achievement it is sometimes necessary to invite these Judges to seek satisfaction elsewhere. This should be done as a last resort.

The Kibitzer

Kibitzers always have opinions that they have a compulsive need to share with the coach and the other parents. They can become disruptive if they allow their enthusiasm for their own expertise to impose their version of the game on the coach and their children’s team communities. Again these good intentioned parents think they are doing the coach and the program a favor by sharing their “superior wisdom,” when in fact, they are intruding uninvited onto the coach’s turf.

On nearly every team there are parents who seem to have never had an unspoken thought. They have an irrepressible need to share their opinions with whoever is within earshot. Typically these pronouncements are not damning, vicious, or hurtful to the efforts of the team. Most of the time kibitzers are not even expecting you to act on their observations. However, there are times when these folks choose to share their thoughts with the coach and the team leaders that, in their enthusiasm for their observations, present some challenges to the coach

and the rest of the team community.

These various types of intrusive parents can lead to significant challenges, not only for the coach but for the parent community as well. They cause problems, not because they are mean spirited people who are trying to sabotage the program, but instead because they possess personal styles, that if left unfettered, can be extremely disruptive to efforts to create good sports communities.

Every parent, whatever reputation they bring into the team community, deserves an opportunity to contribute to the community, whether they are intrusive, proactive, or reactive. Most all problems with parents can be avoided by forming a collaborative community of athletes, coaches, and parents. When these three groups are involved in shared decision-making, on a face-to-face basis, the adults in the deliberative group are typically on their best behavior. In addition, commitments made publicly have a much better chance of being kept than those made in private. Difficult parents of the type described here are typically easily mobilized in the service of the community's mission when they are given a significant role in contributing to the program.

5

Helping Sports Parents Use Common Sense: An Alternative to Coaching in an Orphanage

Many coaches prefer not to have any dealings with parents at all. Some announce at the beginning of the season that they only want to deal with the athletes, not their parents. However, there are some coaches who invite parents to become active participants in their team communities while clearly defining the boundaries of their roles. There are only a very few coaches who welcome parents as full fledged citizens in their team communities, with the rights and responsibilities to participate in creating a mutually supportive team community, where parents, athletes and coaches work together to make the season truly memorable.

While coaches differ in the level of interest they display in parent involvement in the life a their team communities, there are some rather universal guidelines that nearly all of them would like to have parents follow. I have identified some of these guidelines:

1. To encourage their children to live by team rules
2. To understand the rules of their children's chosen sport
3. To appreciate the intricacies of coaching strategies
4. To make sure their children appear on time for practices and competitions
5. To avoid "babying" their children when they experience an injury
6. To refrain from demonstrating excessive concern when their child is injured during a competition - let the coach work with the athletes when an injury occurs
7. To show their enthusiasm for the team during competitions, but to maintain their cool
8. To never criticize an official
9. To avoid taunting the opponent's parents, athletes or coaches
10. To support their children, but avoid promoting them with the coach
11. To be relaxed so that they can enjoy their children in competition without letting their anxiety interfere with their children's focus

upon their performance

12. To model good sportsmanship
13. To get along with the other parents
14. To let the coach do the coaching – to avoid teaching them techniques that are in competition with the techniques the coach is teaching
15. To support all the children on the team, not just their own
16. To be an advocate for the sport by helping secure the financial support the team needs to be competitive
17. To be available to assist the coach with those administrative tasks they assume
18. To monitor and control the conduct of any parents who lose their cool during competition
19. To avoid organizing parents in opposition to team policies or coaching practices
20. To avoid shouting instructions to their children from the bleachers
21. To direct any concerns they might have about the team to the coach, preferably by way of their children, avoiding going over the coach's head to file a complaint
22. To avoid criticizing any of the players in the presence of any member of the team, parent, athlete, coach even their own children.

Few coaches would disagree with the above twenty-two guiding principles. And it seems clear that most parents would also agree that these are reasonable guidelines for parent conduct. Why then do so many coaches report that the parents of their athletes often fail to follow these guidelines?

- Have they forgotten how to behave?
- Are they emotionally immature?
- Do they get caught up in the excitement of the competition and simply lose control of their senses?
- Are they basically insensitive people who care little or nothing about how they are impacting others around them?
- Are they mentally unstable people who get defensive when things do not go their way?
- Have they never been inspired to reflect on the motivation behind their actions?

I am convinced that there are three major reasons that they do not follow the common sense guidelines summarized above.

- They have never been challenged to reflect on how parents can be most effective in providing support for their children and their team communities
- They have not been provided with opportunities to develop the skills that are required to live by these guidelines
- They have failed to establish agreements with the other parents, and the athletes and coaches in their team communities that establish how they can best create a mutually supportive team community, one that will inspire, empower and unify the team, school or club, family and community.

If coaches are to be successful in getting parents to use common sense to guide their conduct it will be necessary to set up opportunities for parents to be challenged to reflect on what conduct is most constructive and to develop the skills that are necessary to live by common sense guidelines. In addition, coaches will need to create procedures for establishing dialogue among parents, athletes and coaches that will lead to agreements as to how everyone can conduct themselves so that they are able to create mutually supportive team communities.

Why not simply post these common sense rules I identified earlier and fairly and consistently enforce them? If the coach takes this “My way or the highway” shortcut there will very likely be several undesirable results. First, an unnecessary wedge will be created between the coach and the parents. The parents will be given the message that the team belongs to the coach and that they do not have any responsibility for having a successful season, other than to obey the coach’s rules. Secondly, it is well documented that when any group establishes its own guidelines they are much more likely to adhere to them. And thirdly, the process of collectively establishing guidelines promotes a level of mutual understanding that establishes a climate that inspires parents, athletes and coaches to show more respect and to display greater consideration for one another. In this collaborative process parents gain a better understanding of one another, of what their children want to get out of their sports experiences, and what the coach aspires to accomplish. Not only are team relationships better, but also when a collaborative approach is employed many more opportunities are provided parents, athletes and

coaches to enjoy one another, to be supported, protected and empowered by one another and for everyone to learn important things about themselves. That seems to be a pretty good payoff from making a modest investment in collaborating on establishing guidelines for their relationships.

Coaches have choices. They can coach at an orphanage. They can become a dictator and demand that parents follow their rules. Or they can establish a collaborative team environment where parents, athletes and coaches agree to work together to establish a mutually supportive team community.

Mobilize Parent Support

How to Get Parents Off Their Coach's Backs And Into Their Corner

"We know that there are an increasing number of coaches who find it difficult to please parents. Parents often feel that their children are not getting enough playing time, the coach is not using the players in the most effective manner, the coach is not employing the right strategy, or the coach is not producing enough wins. Because there appear to be more and more parents who are making life difficult for their children's coaches, many coaches are relieved when parents choose not to become active in their children's sports programs. This situation is unfortunate because it is not only possible, but it is also desirable, for parents to learn to become constructive contributors to a youth sports program.."



DAVID CANNING EPPERSON, PH.D.

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