

“ROLE OF A YOUTH SPORTS PARENT”

From Bruce Brown- Longtime Youth Sports Educator

Please take a moment to read the following concerning our **role as youth sport parents** given by Coach Bruce Brown. I found it to be very insightful and helpful. Bruce has coached for more than 35 years at the JH, HS and College levels and is a friend to our IBSB. Currently, he travels around the country speaking to groups about youth sports <http://www.proactivecoaching.info/>

Ask your kid, “Why do you play sports?” Most kids play because it is FUN, while most parents want their kids to WIN. Remember, it is their experience, not ours. Bruce’s core message: If your kid’s goal (for playing sports) is different from your goal... then throw your goal away and adopt your child's. Sports are the safest place for your kid to take the inevitable risks that adolescents will seek out – so let them go and make their mistakes in sports!

Release your child to their sport (to their coaches/instructors, to the officials, to the game). Red flags that suggest you haven’t released your children to their experiences in sports include:

- If you continue to share in their successes (“we played hard” vs. “the child or team played hard”).
- If you attempt to resolve their problems/issues with teammates and coaches.
- If you continue to coach them on their sport after 9th grade (many kids will resent your input).
- If you catch yourself yelling at an official. Think about this... it is two adults yelling at each other in a public venue over a kid’s game... all while you are trying to teach your kids to “respect authority” (The golden rule: At every game, only 4 roles exist - coach, player, official, or spectator. You should select only one).
- If you make excuses after a loss – e.g., the refs, timekeeper, gym, etc. (remember, 50% of all the teams playing on any given day will lose... so get used to it)
- If your child looks over to YOU when they make a mistake or do something right (rather than staying focused on game and team).
- If you continue to think about the game (long after your child has moved on---if allowed, most kids forget about the game shortly after its conclusion).

After the game, the worst experience for nearly all kids is the dreaded “ride in the car with dad or mom”— don’t replay the game, give them time and space to process the experience themselves. Many parents believe they are encouraging their kids, but mostly we make them nervous and uptight. Bruce relays a story of a young woman who had athletic scholarship offers to several colleges – many from local or nearby schools. The young woman chose a college a thousand miles away from home, so that “dad couldn’t watch me play.” He also relates a story of a high school football star who quit football and switched to lacrosse because “dad didn’t know anything about lacrosse and, therefore, couldn’t criticize my play.”

What makes basketball especially difficult is the subjective nature of many factors related to the game (e.g., the referees’ calls, plays, playing time decisions, etc.). These subjective factors can sometimes cause even the most level-headed person to lose perspective. However, as the adults, we must consistently model appropriate, respectful behavior at youth sporting events – how else can we expect our kids to know how to demonstrate appropriate behavior?!

Every adult in a child’s life has an opportunity to be either a CONFIDENCE BUILDER and DREAM MAKER or a CONFIDENCE CUTTER and DREAM BREAKER. Thirty years from now, your child will still remember which adults were in each category. Keep in mind, children need and desire approval and affirmation more than criticism disguised as advice. Give them more praise than put-downs. John Wooden, legendary basketball coach, believed that young people developed and performed best in environments that focused on the positives. All that needs to be said after any youth sporting event or game is:

**“I love watching you play;
I love watching you be part of a team**