

“The Role of Parents in Athletics”

From Bruce Brown and Rob Miller of Proactive Coaching

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The Four Roles in Any Athletic Contest

- 1) Spectator
- 2) Coach
- 3) Official
- 4) Participant

- All choices, and we all can only choose ONE. If parents know their role and behave accordingly, kids love having them there. It says a lot if your kids would rather have you stay home than attend their games.

Key points:

Parents must **“release the athlete**, to the team and to the coach.” Once you as a parent have established physical and emotional safety for your child then release your child to that experience. Think about where you can release your kids, where do you want your kids to take risks, where do you want them to fail? “Healthy risks = healthy failures.”

Before the first game, the first performance,

Ask yourself as a parent:

- Why do I want my child to play?
- What will be a successful season?
- What are my goals for my child?
- What do I think their role will be on this team?

Then ask your child the same questions, and just listen to the answers. If the answers are in agreement, then great. If not, drop yours and accept your child’s. The top reasons all kids play are for fun, joy, and friends, not for college scholarship potential.

Red flags that indicate you may not be releasing:

- If you continue to share the credit when things go well
- If you say “we” all the time when talking about your child and/or his/her team
- If you try to solve all the problems that come up in the season
- If you continue to try to coach them, after they stop wanting it (or when they probably know more about it than you do — “lacrosse is booming because kids are attracted to activities their parents know nothing about”)
- If you catch yourself yelling at an official during a game
- If your kids avoid you after a game, or don’t want to talk about it
- If you’re nervous before a game, particularly if you’re more nervous than your child
- If it takes you longer to bounce back after a loss than it does your child
- If your spouse doesn’t like to sit next to you during a game
- If you are taking mental or physical notes about what your child did wrong.
- If you are paying your child for performance or if you are critical of coaches, other players or umpires.

Parents need to **“release them to the coach”**. Parents can talk to the coach in these 3 situations:

1. In case of an injury.
2. To find out what your child can do to improve.
3. If your child is behaving in a way during a sport that you would not allow at home.

Never talk to a coach about: playing time, strategy or other members of the team.

During the game:

- Be there!
- Model appropriate behavior (if you want them to act with poise and confidence, then be poised and confident – they WANT you to act this way)
- Focus on the team and team goals not just your child
- Let the coach be the “one instructional voice” – the same voice they’ve heard all week at practice. Lining up and shouting advice during a performance is not the norm in society: imagine if you did this during your child’s math test
What if your advice is different than the coach’s? This puts your child in a no-win position.
- Know your role (there are only four: player, coach, spectator, or official – what are you?)

After the game:

“What Has Been the Least Enjoyable Part of Your Athletic Experience?”

Most common answer: “In the car with dad after the game.”

Kids don’t want to rehash everything after the game...give them time & space

Parents see this discussion as a way to connect with their kids; kids see it as driving a wedge between teammates (“Why does Ben get all the shots?”) and between player and coach (“You guys were doing great until you went into a zone.”)

Only thing parents should be critical of is any behavior that is unacceptable at home. Conversations should be from a parent-to-child perspective, not parent-to-athlete

Be a confidence builder!

- Every adult in a kid’s life is either a confidence-builder or confidence-cutter (and kids are well aware of who is who). Two things allow kids to work through life confidently: one person within their family who loves them unconditionally, and one person outside the family who believes in them. This person is almost always a teacher or a coach.

For more on this topic, Bruce recommends:

Canadian Sport for Life and “Long Term Athletic Development:”

<http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca/learn-about-canadian-sport-life/ltad-stages>

In Canada, a movement called Canadian Sport for Life has compiled resources from sports science and education fields to promote “Long Term Athletic Development” for lifelong involvement and enjoyment in physical activity. Every national sports organization in Canada has now developed sport-specific LTAD guidelines for their athletes. Their website also has a special section for parents that includes tips which echo Bruce’s guidelines: <http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca/parents/tips-parents>

Proactive Coaching: <http://www.proactivecoaching.info/proactive/>

Bruce’s own website for Proactive Coaching, where you can sign up for newsletters that explore his principles in greater depth and offer new tips and insights (for example, “DIMITT – Determination Is More Important Than Talent”). You can also order books, booklets and DVDs.

SUMMARY

It goes by fast – all kids are saying to parents is “Be a part of the good memories.” See the BIG PICTURE: if they’re making good decisions about academics, friends, drugs & alcohol, sports is just the DESSERT!