

Game Day - Helpful Tips for Parents

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Parents of young athletes play a vital role in their children's development in sport. Some parents struggle in their efforts to positively influence their children in this sporting environment. Well-intentioned, much of the time, some of their methods employ over-questioning, critical comments and unrealistic demands toward their children. The situations that many young soccer athletes deal with before, during and after games and training sessions could bring a grown adult to tears.

Consider the following story about Mr. John Jones and his 11-year-old daughter Jean as they experience "Game Day".

"Interrogation on Wheels" . . . Pregame

The car door closes. Jean seat belts herself in. John starts the engine. The car begins to move and John starts the interrogation:

"What position is coach going to play you in today?"

"Are you going to start?"

"Take some shots yourself today; you don't have to pass to Mary all the time."

"Be more aggressive on your tackles."

"Don't take any grief from the other team!"

"Work on your mental toughness today."

"Match Mouth" . . . The Game

Mr. Jones and Jean arrive at the field. Jean is gathering her stuff. John locks the doors of the car. He still has a few minutes to walk with Jean to the field and bestow upon her a few more tidbits of advice:

"Don't be lazy this game!"

"Keep your head in the Game."

"Don't forget to ask the coach to put you at forward."

The match begins and Jean is not starting. John's body tenses, his teeth begin to grind and negative **self-talk** (talking to oneself) begins:

"This guy doesn't know what he's doing!"

"I bet he won't let her play forward."

"I should have put her on another team."

Jean finally gets into the game. She is playing left defender. More negative **semi-self-talk** (becoming audible):

"What is he doing?"

"It's clear that he doesn't like her!"

"She can't even kick a ball with her left foot!"

As the game progresses, an opposing player, on Jean's side of the field, receives the ball and dribbles straight at her. John's negative "coaching" comments begin so that Jean can hear them:

"Stop backing up. . . be aggressive. . . step up!"

"Come on. . . get the ball. . . tackle her!"

Jean trips and falls as the opponent dribbles by her. The opponent proceeds to cross the ball and a goal is scored against Jean's team. John is beside himself with rage! He just can't stand it! He throws his arms down vigorously and begins to pace the touchline for a few steps. His negative comments become extremely vocal—he is willing to share them with anyone who will listen!

"Jean. . . Get up. . . what are you doing?!"

"I knew it. . . this coach doesn't have a clue!"

"Hey ref. . . she knocked her down. . . call something for a change!"

"He should have never put her in the back."

"This is ridiculous!"

The game ends and Jean's team loses 1-0. The coach is talking to the team and Mr. John Jones decides that he must talk to the coach RIGHT NOW. . . IMMEDIATELY! It cannot wait! He walks over to where the team is sitting, interrupts the coach in an angry tone, and informs him that he wants to talk to him. Jean is embarrassed. The coach suggests that Mr. Jones step away and wait until he is done speaking to the team. Then he will speak with Mr. Jones privately. John Jones storms off and says, "Forget it!" His anger has reached a pinnacle:

"I can't believe this guy!"

"He has no respect for the parents!"

"I'm taking my daughter off this team!"

Anyone within earshot has heard John's comments. . . including the players.

"Interrogation on Wheels Again". . . Post-Game

Mr. Jones gets into his car and tells Jean to hurry up and get in. Once out of the parking lot, it begins. . .

"Didn't you ask him if you could play forward?"

"He doesn't know what he is doing anyway!"

"What have I told you about diving in on the tackle. . . you have to stay balanced and be aggressive!"

"We are going to another club, where you can play forward!"

Mr. John Jones and his daughter Jean get home. Jean gets out of the car in tears, goes up to her room. . . and decides to quit soccer!

Friendly Advice:

I am sure that you, as parents of a youth soccer player, have witnessed some of this parental behavior. Here are a few ideas on "Game Day" that might help to make a positive difference in your child's development in sport.

Pre-Game

Make a few positive, support comments to your child. . . "I can't wait to see your game today. Have some FUN!"

Help your child get the proper nutrition she needs prior to the competition.

Prior to a game, any good sports psychologist or coach will tell you that it is important for the athlete to get mentally ready for the competition through "positive self-talk". The ride to the game is a good time for this. Some athletes like to listen to music during this time. Some athletes want to talk a bit. . . let your child start the discussion or ask the question if they desire. It is very difficult for your child to mentally prepare for the competition when you are hording all of the time with your questions and advice!

The Game

Cheer on the athletes for both teams. They are trying their best. They are youth players and what you say really does affect them. . . whether you are their parent or not!

Please DO NOT try to coach your child or the other players. The players must focus their attention on the game and, at times, their coach and the referee. There is a lot to think about in the game of soccer. Let them focus.

Post-Game

Good parents and coaches know that immediately after the game it is time for mental, emotional and physical regeneration.

A positive word about their efforts in the game is very helpful and means a lot to your child.

Please don't analyze the game or your child's performance in the game. The coach will do this at the next training session.

Final Thought

Enjoy watching your children play. . . it will be much less stressful on you and, certainly, on them