

GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP FOR PARENTS BY OLYMPIC SOFTBALL COACH MIKE CANDREA

Good sportsmanship is not only a responsibility for coaches and athletes but a primary responsibility for parents in building a positive culture for our kids' sport experience. How many times do you see irate fans take away from the action on the field by their rude comments to players, umpires, and coaches? This behavior is unacceptable from our players, so why would we allow parents to spoil the experience in this fashion? It seems that this behavior not only happens at the professional and college levels, but even down to the youth level where the impact sometimes forces kids to not want to play the game any longer. As a coach, I know the impact of what I say and how I say it can have a huge impact on their confidence, self-esteem, and pride at an age where they are still trying to find out who they are as an individual.

In addition, the line between being a supportive, engaged, sports-loving parent and applying too much pressure on kids is easily crossed. To avoid embarrassing your child and making her feel more pressure than she already feels about playing the game, there must be some guidelines for all involved to make the experience a positive one.

DURING THE GAME:

- Avoid criticizing the umpires – this teaches the child to have a victim mentality and reinforces that it's okay to blame others for his/her performance. Even if the call is wrong, the umpires are human and do make mistakes. We have chosen them to regulate the play of the game and must support them in this role. Model appropriate behavior by showing confidence and poise.
- Use encouraging comments during the game. Save constructive feedback for one-on-one discussions with your child after the emotion of the game has passed.
- Avoid coaching from the sidelines. Nothing frustrates a coach more than when a parent yells mechanical thoughts and becomes a distraction. If you want to coach, then coach!!!! It is very important to have one instructional voice.
- Show unconditional support immediately following the game. Win or lose, put your arm around your child and give encouraging feedback.

AFTER THE GAME:

- Focus on effort and improvement versus winning and losing.
- If the child believes it's all about winning, especially at the younger ages, she may come to believe that she will never please you.
- Comment on her improvement since the beginning of practices, the beginning of the season, or since last year. Acknowledge how the hard work in practice will pay off and begin to show on the field.
- Your child will naturally bring up the topic of whether the team won or lost. Celebrate the victories – but tie them to specific behaviors. What did your team do that contributed to the win?
- Same for losses – what could the team do better the next time?
- A great thing to say to your child after the game is “I love watching you play!” Counter-balance your child's complaints about the umpires. Remind her that they are human and make mistakes. It is all part of playing the game!
- Don't make the topic of discussion on the way home all about the game! Never forget about showing your love for your daughter and demonstrating that her performance in a game will never define who she is. If there is a discussion, make sure your emotions are gone and you have time to think about what to say.

- No kid plays bad or makes mistakes on purpose. The game we play is a game of success and failure, and they need to learn how to handle the ups and downs. Great life lessons can be taught playing athletics, so never forget the big picture.
- If your kid tries to avoid you after a game or if you celebrate wins or suffer losses more than your kid does, these are considered red flags!
- Come clean with your child if you 'lose it' during a game. Let them know that you were frustrated or angry with the umpires, other team, etc. It is not okay to demonstrate that frustration/anger with yelling and setting a bad example. This is why some leagues do not allow parents to watch, which is quite sad!
- Confessing your mistake will teach your child that feelings are okay, but the way you express those feelings is not always okay. Apologize for embarrassing your child (even if she says she wasn't embarrassed) and reinforce that this is an area you are working on improving. You will earn great respect in your child's eyes by "coming clean."

REMEMBER

We have a duty as adults to set an example and teach what is right and wrong. The foundation for our kid's future success in life is to understand that we all need to treat others as we would like to be treated. Remember, you set a standard every day and your actions speak louder than your words. Playing sports should be a great learning experience that teaches teamwork, discipline, and a fun experience. Make sure you are aware of your role, whether it is:

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

We can only choose ONE!!