

The Role of Parents in Athletics

By Bruce Brown

A. BEFORE THE GAME

As the season begins, parents are encouraged to ask themselves the following questions:

- *Do you want them to play? If so, why?
- *What will be a successful season for you as a parent?
- *What are your goals for them?
- *What do you hope they gain from the experience?
- *What do you think their role will be on this team?

After the parents have answered these questions, ask your son the following questions: (Just listen without talking.)

- *Why are you playing?
- *What is a successful season?
- *What goals do you have?
- *What do you think your role will be on this team?

Once the parents have heard their kid's answers and compared them to their own responses, if both sets of expectations are the same, great. On the other hand, if the parent's responses are different from their children's, the kids need their parents to change their attitudes and accept theirs. No questions.

If the parent's goals are something other than that, a conflict will eventually arise.

The next step is to “release” their son to the game and to the coach.

If a parent feels the need to talk to a coach, he should call and allow the coach to choose an appropriate time and place.

Appropriate Discussion Topics:

- *Mental or physical treatment of your child
- *Ways to help your child improve
- *Concerns about your child's behavior

Inappropriate Discussion Topics

- *Playing time
- *Team strategy or play calling
- *Other team members

By releasing their young athlete to the game and coach, the parents are telling their children that all successes are theirs, all failures are theirs, and all problems are theirs.

The dilemma for most adults is that it is easy for them to see “solutions” in athletic situations and it is too painful for adults to let their children find their own solutions. Athletics is one of the best places for young people to take risks and to fail.

Red Flags to show that parents haven't released their child:

- *A parent who is continuing to live his own personal athletic dream through his child.
- *If a parent tends to share in the credit when the child has done well.
- *A parent is trying to solve all of his child's athletic related problems.
- *If a parent is trying to continue to coach his child when the athlete probably knows more about the game than the parent does.
- *A parent should realize that he is taking things too seriously when:
 - He is nervous before the child's game.
 - Has difficulty bouncing back after a defeat.
 - Makes mental notes during the game so can give advice later
 - He becomes verbally critical of an official.
- *When athletes avoid their parents after games or are embarrassed about their parent's involvement.

B. DURING THE GAME

The single most important contribution a parent can make during a game is to model appropriate behavior.

The second responsibility that athletes state they need their parents to do during the game is to focus on the team and the team's goals.

The third thing that kids need during the game is to have only one instructional voice offering advice. That voice should be the coach's.

There are only four roles during a game: spectator, competitor, official, and coach. You have to pick 1. You can't be more than 1.

If parents act appropriately, players indicate that they love to have them present at games. If parents cannot adhere to reasonable standards of behavior, they would rather have their parents stay home.

C. AFTER THE GAME

Most athletes desperately want their parents to give them time and space at the end of a game.

When it comes to recalling their least-enjoyable memory, many athletes will name "after the game" and often specifically "after the game in the care with parents." This situation is often when the most confidence cutting, confrontation, and confusion occurs for the athlete. Unfortunately, some high school athletes do not want to go home after the game because they do not want to face the questioning or criticism. What they need most at these times is not another coach, but a parent. ("Just be my Dad.")

One comment from a parent that can always be sincerely said and received by an athlete is "I love watching you play."