

For the Parents - Game Day

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Parents of young athletes sometimes struggle in their efforts to help their children's development in sport. Well intentioned, much of the time, their methods employ over-questioning, critical comments and unrealistic demands toward their children. This is all done in an effort to come across as the caring, tough-love soccer parent.

The situations that many young soccer athletes deal with before, during and after games and training sessions could bring a grown adult to tears. Let's take a look at some of these situations...

"Interrogation on Wheels"

The car door closes, your soccer player child is seat-belted in, you start the engine, the car begins to move and you start 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"

You've arrived at the field. Your child is gathering her stuff. You lock the doors of the car. You still have a few minutes to walk with your child 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; your child is not starting. Your body tenses, your 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."

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

"What is he doing?"
"This guy's a clown!"
"He doesn't like her!"
"She can't even kick a ball with her left foot!"

As the game progresses, an opposing player, on your daughter's side of the field, receives the ball and dribbles straight at your daughter. Your negative comments begin so that your child can hear them:

"Stop backing up...be aggressive...step up!"
"Come on...get the ball...tackle her!"

When the opponent dribbles by your daughter, your daughter trips and falls. The opponent proceeds to cross the ball and a goal is scored against your daughter's team. You are beside yourself with rage! You just can't stand it! You throw your arms down vigorously, you begin to pace the touchline for a few steps and your negative comments become extremely vocal...you are willing to share them with anyone who will listen!

"Get up...what are you doing?!" (to daughter)
"I knew it...this coach is a moron!"
"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 your daughter's team lose 1-0. The coach is talking to the team and you decide that you must talk to the coach RIGHT NOW...IMMEDIATELY! It cannot wait! You walk over to where the team is sitting, interrupt the coach in an angry tone, and inform him that you want to talk to him. Your daughter is embarrassed. The coach suggests that you step away and wait until he is done speaking to the team. Then he will speak with you privately. You storm off and say, "Forget it!" Your 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 your comments, including the players.

"Interrogation on Wheels Again"

You get into your car and yell to your daughter 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!”

You get home; your daughter gets out of the car in tears, goes up to her room...and decides to quit soccer!

Friendly Advice:

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 is the 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.