

Sports Should Belong To Kids, Not Parents

BY RICK WOLFF

Dear Parent:

Thanks for the opportunity to work with your child this season. I hope we can have some fun together.

First, I want you to know I fully understand that nothing is more important to you than the well-being of your sons and daughters. Like all good parents, you want the very best for them—in school, in their young social lives, in their extracurricular activities and, of course, in sports.

I also want what's best for your child, as well as for all of his teammates. And to ensure a good experience for everyone, I'm going to need your help on a few key issues.

For starters, we need to remember the season belongs to the kids, not us. Your days as a budding athlete are behind you now, so don't use your child's sports as a chance to relive your glory years. Support him in good games and bad games, and don't add to the pressure on him by asking him to carry on your personal aspirations.

When you do look back on playing sports as a kid, did you ever strike out with the bases loaded, miss a key free throw or shoot the puck wide of an open net? Chances are, you did. Making mistakes is a reality for all athletes, regardless of age. But one of the lessons of sports is in working hard to overcome missteps. Perhaps you have forgotten that. So this season, if your son has a tough game, give him a reassuring smile instead of a scowl. Praise his effort instead of disparaging him for "letting you down." As his coach, I'm going to stay as positive as I can, and I hope I can count on you to do the same.

Also, know that it's my responsibility to help your son identify his athletic strengths, while also working with him to develop aspects of his game that need some polishing. Please give me the freedom I need to accomplish this. I have been coaching for a long time and have learned a lot, and I'm dedicated to passing those lessons along to your child.

Similarly, give me a chance to let your son play a variety

of positions. While you may have always trained (or wanted) your son to play point guard, please don't worry if I decide to try him as a forward. Nothing is permanent when it comes to positions. Seeing the whole team in practice, I have a better sense of how he can help the team most.

I also understand that when you come to watch a game, you want to see your son play. And I know your son doesn't want to sit the bench. Sometimes I've wished that I had only enough players for each position. That way every kid would play every minute. But of course, that is never the case. I always have kids on the sideline, waiting to get their shot.

I'll make sure every kid plays as much as possible and, hopefully, helps the team do well. All the

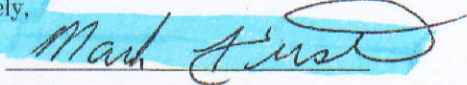
balancing and juggling of lineups isn't easy, so please bear with me. If your child truly feels that he's being shortchanged on playing time, encourage him to come and talk to me.

(He can learn by standing up for himself rather than having you do it for him.) If you want to talk, that's fine too. We can always chat after practice, when I can listen closely to your concerns—not before, during or after games.

Youth sports have changed so much since we played them. The expectations and pressures are greater.

Winning seems more important than having fun, and many parents think this is just the latest stop on the road to a college scholarship and a pro contract. But that will only happen for a very select few. So we just have to focus on helping every kid on this team have a terrific season. Let's work together to make sure that happens.

Sincerely,
Coach



Rick Wolff is chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting (www.sportsparenting.org). His weekly radio show, The Sports Edge, is heard every Sunday morning on WFAN Sports Radio 660 AM in New York.

