

SPORT SCRAPS: Parents Supporting Coaches

By Ron Weese

I have fun with Twitter. Often, I tweet something out (@ronweese) just to see the uptake by readers. It is a barometer of sorts. A recent essay I tweeted out from coach Alison Belbin who wrote in the Globe and Mail some time back "Parents: Here's Why you should just leave your kid's coach alone" received likes and re-tweets. It suggests the topic hit a note with readers.

The essay was tagged as "A Coach's plea to parents" and drove home the point that for the most part, coaches are volunteers who take time out of their busy lives with children of their own at home, not to mention spouses, mortgages, job pressures and a host of time-sucking activities with which we all have to contend. They leave their home, often being the first one on the field to help your children be active, learn skills and socialize with their friends. Besides their sport knowledge, these coaches often know a lot about your kid that you don't know because they see them in a different context. They use that knowledge to help them grow to be not just better players, but better people.

What is the reward? For most, it is the feeling of contribution to the girls and/or boys on the team. But sometimes that joy turns foul. Most often it is due to the unsolicited criticism about why a player was subbed off the last game. Sometimes it is the decision-making that was made that caused a loss or conversely, the reason for a win was due to the inappropriate amount of playing time of "favoured" players. Parents often miss the hugs and high-fives that come regardless of the score. Sometimes they miss the satisfaction that comes from players doing their best.

And by the way, coaches listen better than anyone. They know what is being said about them by parents and about other players on the team. They know about those conversations that happen on the ride home, around the dinner table and that are over-heard in phone calls. But both the players and the coaches continue to show up despite these conversations. They keep trying.

Working with Parents in sport at www.parentsinsport.co.uk provides a few tips help your child's coach. Check these off as you review the sport experiences you have. Be positive at all times, don't "coach" from the sidelines, don't stir up negative issues with other parents, respect the rules and the officials, support the coach's decisions, encourage your child, listen to your child, praise your child for their effort, smile a lot and enjoy your child's participation. Nothing in this list about playing time, technical or tactical strategies or officiating.

Remember that after the game or practice, while you might be composing an email or text telling them what went wrong, they are going home to their own families; the house-work and chores that were left to get to the field on time, their own kids who may have fallen asleep on the couch waiting for them, or a deadline that has to be met tomorrow from their "real" job. The dog may have thrown up.

Coaches need parents as partners, not as advocates for their children, not as supervisors of their job performance on the field. They need parents to support their child so that each kid gets the best experience from sport and learns life-lessons along the way. Let's consider those life-lessons before that next critical e-mail or text is sent to a coach. Even better; why not send an email or text of thanks for helping your child become a better person? That is a real gift and it is one of the best reasons for having your child in quality sport.