

The Six Golden Rules

- **Rule #1: Thou Shalt Not Praise Thy Own Child.**

It is the late in the second half of a vital game and the score is tied against the arch-villain traditional enemies. Your daughter performs a full speed sliding tackle to strip the ball from an attacker who eluded the keeper 3 feet in front of the goal. She does a "pop-up" slide and comes to her feet without ever losing the ball. Juking and faking, she takes a run up the touchline, leaving opponents sprawling in her wake and then, sensing that the whistle is about to blow, hits an off-foot shot from 35 yards that starts out 20 yards wide and hooks back just into the upper "V" to win the game. Your reaction? A pleased smile. A little leap no more than 4 inches off the ground. No cries of "Where is Anson Dorrance when we really need him?" No matter your intent, shoveling plaudits on your own kid is seen as basically self-promotion, selfish, and destructive of team unity. Other parents will mutter darkly and cast jealous glances at you.

- **Rule #2: Thou Shalt Praise Other Parents' Children.**

The reason that you don't have to praise your own daughter is that it is the sworn duty of the other parents to do it for you. In situation #1 they will give you high-fives, hug you, and generally declare that the spirit of Pele (or Mia Hamm) is being channeled by your child. When someone else's little girl does anything ranging from mediocre to spectacular you will run up to them with similar comments, assuring them that international stardom is only a short time away, and that this is proof that the gene pool runs true. When another girl does something appallingly awful you are duty-bound to rush to the grieving parent to assure them that it wasn't that bad, and that she's been having such a good game she can be forgiven one little goof.

- **Rule #3: Thou Shalt Never Criticize Players in Public.**

The coach has done it again. Starting at striker is a girl who is slower than America OnLine, completely clueless about the tactical niceties of her position, and to whom "airhead" would have to be considered a compliment. You see the opposing team laughing and pointing. You groan in what you think is a quiet voice "How can he even keep that dolt on the team". Your feet leave the ground as you discover that the hulking behemoth behind you is her Uncle/Brother whom you had never met.

You can generally take as a given that the players are trying as hard as they can with differing amounts of skill. Desirable as a "skillectomy" might be, the ability to trap a line drive and drop it on the shooting foot cannot be grafted on or surgically attached. Secondly, players are quite aware when they have made a bonehead play. You will rarely hear a player shout "Thanks guys, I didn't realize that whiffing was a bad thing!" Thirdly, even at the U-18 level these are still our kids - not professionals - and even the pros make mistakes. The pros are paid to be able to take criticism as aimed at their play rather than themselves as persons. Your daughters aren't.

- **Rule #4: When Commenting about the Field Action, Silence is Golden.**

At times you may feel like commenting upon the quality of play, the quality of officiating, and the coaches' decisions. Due to your years of observing from the sidelines and the fact that you coached the "Sunflowers" in the U-8 rec league you may have the belief that your opinions are (1) accurate, (2) incisive; and (3) worthy of communicating loudly so everyone else can hear them. You are wrong. Neither the players, the referees, nor the coach are going to make any changes in response to your bellows from the sideline. They are, however, going to be mad at you - joining a group including your spouse, your friends, and anyone standing close to you. Kids goof, refs goof, coaches goof. Before you shout, picture your next day at work as you are working on a project and in the doorway to your office are a crowd of players, coaches and refs booing you and demanding that you be fired.

- **Rule #5: Silence Can Be Deadly.**

The usual response to your sideline comments is a tug on your shirt from your spouse, a glare, rolling of eyes by your neighbors, and a silent promise by your daughter to change her name and become an orphan. However, there are those times when your comments result in a sudden pall of silence and your becoming the center of attention from the sidelines and the field. Sort of like in 4th grade when you fell asleep in class and made a funny sound when you startled awake. This means you have Crossed The Line from being an obnoxious parent/fan to another status entirely - such as the Unknown Brother at a U-16 Regionals game making anatomically uncomfortable suggestions about where a referee's un-blown whistle should reside. When silence falls and you are the focus of everyone's attention it may be time to announce that you are overdue at the hospital to perform a lifesaving operation and to slink away at top speed.

- **Rule #6: This Is Still a Game.**

Despite the fact that each player's family has invested a great deal of time and money in soccer at this level, and they are hoping that soccer will help pay the college bills, it is still a game and if your

daughter doesn't enjoy it she will not play well - and maybe not at all. Ask yourself if what you do at games and practices and tournaments helps your daughter have fun and enjoy the game or adds pressure and worry. Ask yourself after the game if watching two teams of beautiful, talented, fit, and eager young ladies was fun for you? If it wasn't - if you found yourself criticizing, carping, upset, and unhappy - remember that there is enough pressure and stress involved with making a living and guiding your family through the challenges of modern life. Forget the calls, forget the score, forget the standings. Give your daughter a hug, tell her you love her, and be thankful for every day you have to share with her because they don't stay kids very long.