

Hockey parenting made simple

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By *Dan Bauer*

It is official, all youth athletics are nuts. Hockey may have earned the right of getting there first, but every other sport has now fallen in place. They are all too organized, travel too much, too expensive and too time consuming. We place put too much emphasis on keeping score and winning and too little emphasis on having fun.

As another youth hockey season descends upon us I have some simple advice for parents to help make your hockey experience more enjoyable.

Skip tryouts. Leave the rink, go to a movie, have dinner with your spouse, just stay away. If your child makes the A team, be happy and humble. If your child makes the B team, be happy and calm. Next to skill, the most important quality of a good athlete is confidence. Benefit: Stress Reduction.

Every rink has a water fountain. Save time and money on the Gatorade, because I'm not certain that 10 year-olds even have electrolytes. And if they do, I bet they have a lot of them. We only start losing things when we get older. Savings: 80+ games & practices @ \$2.00 = \$160.

They can carry their own bag and if they can't it's too big. You don't carry your kid's backpack to school for them; you shouldn't have to carry their hockey bag either. Donate your wheelie bag to a stewardess and get one that has to be carried. Benefit: Increased leg strength.

Kids can dress and undress themselves—go get a cup of coffee and relax. Once they have been through it a few times they can figure it out. And if they can't, that is why they have teammates. Eventually they will get it on or off. Be patient. Benefit: Team Unity. (PS: Coffee is cheaper than Gatorade)

Teach them to tie their own skates as soon as possible—good skaters have loose skates, so let them get use to it early. As long as you keep tying them they are going to let you. Haven't we learned this "helpless" lesson before? Benefit: Ankle strength.

New equipment is for Christmas, maybe a birthday—but should not be a birthright of every new season. Buy used equipment—a 58lb squirt doesn't need the support of a \$300 pair of skates. A \$300 pair of skates could be worn by a 58lb squirt for ten years and still not be worn out—it's basic physics. Today's skates are as rigid as marine core training. Savings: \$200+.

On the subject of skates, as soon as they are old enough to drive, they are old enough to get their own skates sharpened. If they tell you they don't have time, compare your schedule to theirs, then hand the skates back to them. Benefit: Time for you & responsibility for them.

Buy wooden sticks. Force dealers to put them back on the stick rack; it is supply & demand economics. A 9 year old doesn't need a composite stick unless he is 6' and 200lbs, or you can buy a 10 flex. A wooden stick will do fine. Save me the sales pitch on response and feel. Until they can feel the difference between clean and dirty hair save your money. And like tying skates, they can learn to tape their stick much sooner than they would like you to believe. Savings: \$200+. Benefit: Wrist strength & eye-hand coordination.

Kids believe that the concession stand is an essential part of hockey—like their skates. If they go out and skate well, have fun and come off with a smile on their face—they don't need a reward, except maybe a pat on the back. Walk past the concession stand a few times—I know we need to support the rink, but it shouldn't be the place where you eat most of your meals.

They also don't need breakfast at Perkins or lunch at Mc Donalds after every game or practice. Let them learn that the reward is hockey! It is a privilege to be able to play and if they don't make their bed and feed the dog you will take it away. Benefit: Discipline, help around the house, more money for coffee.

Herb Brooks said it best, "The name on the front of the jersey is a heck of a lot more important than the name on the back". This is a team sport; the sooner kids learn that, the better. Names on the back of jerseys are for when you get to the NHL. You should be able to figure out which one is yours without that visual aide. If you can't, remember that is why we put numbers on the jerseys—those numbers aren't a ranking system—they are for identification. Nobody wears two nametags at work, right? Benefit: Team Unity & Humility.

Don't watch every practice—let them tell you about a few—they'll enjoy it. Send them the message that you have more important things to do than watch the practice. This is not neglect, but common sense. If parents spent as much time helping kids with their homework as they do watching practice, our kids would all be getting straight A's. This is their experience—not yours. Turn them loose. Benefit: Time.

Let your kids have fun. If their best friend calls on a Friday night and wants them to: a) go to a movie, b) go to the outdoor rink, c) go sledding, don't say no because they have a game tomorrow, or in most cases three games. They are kids, if you haven't noticed they don't get tired. Do you ever remember being too tired as a kid? Let them go swimming at the motel, play football in the snow. AJ Hawk might need to sleep in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber, but your kid doesn't. Benefit: Balance, & a Happier Child.

Don't try to coach—your team already has one. Pat them on the back after a tough loss and thank them for their time and effort. Buy them a cup of coffee and talk about anything, but hockey. Benefit: Respect.

Last, but not least, at an athletic contest you can be a player, a coach, a fan or an official—but you can only be one. For those parents who are confused, you are a fan. Cheer when your team does something well. Drink coffee the rest of the time, it tastes better than your foot. Benefit: More

friends, fewer enemies.

Enjoy your season!

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