

Hey, Parents, Listen Up!*

by Rick Wolff

Your son slides into home plate — easily beating the tag, but the ump hollers “Out!” Or your daughter the goalie is looking left when all the action is to her right. You’re on the sidelines. What should you do or say?

From years of experience as a sports dad, a coach and a psychologist, my advice is: Always THINK before you act or speak. Here are 10 rules to remember when you’re on the sidelines at your kid’s game.

- 1) **CHEER, don’t SNEER!** Only positive words should come out of your mouth during a game. There is simply no place for negative comments or criticism.
- 2) **WALK before you SQUAWK.** If you feel a sudden urge to yell at the coach or the ref, take a walk and cool off before you say something that will embarrass you or your child.
- 3) **A YELL won’t make the team JELL.** Don’t bellow instructions to your child from the sideline. It’s boorish and your child can’t hear a word you’re saying anyway!
- 4) **Don’t sell them SHORT, be a SPORT.** If the opposing team has played well, give them a pat on the back. Nothing makes a kid feel more special than when a parent from the opposing team tells him how well she played.
- 5) **Don’t point and BLAME when they lose a GAME.** When your child’s team loses, don’t blame it on a bad call, a teammate’s error or anything else. How will your child learn responsibility if you don’t?
- 6) **Give ‘em a SMILE, not BILE.** Kids always respond to the coach or parent who smiles; not the adult who criticizes or scowls. Besides, your child wants to see you having fun.
- 7) **RAISE with PRAISE.** That’s right, the kids will “raise” their game and their efforts if you praise them. Use any achievement as an excuse for a compliment. They want to believe in themselves. And you can help them.
- 8) **For Pete’s SAKE, give the ref a BREAK!** Remember, most of the umpires and refs are volunteers donating their time to your kid(s). And accept it: “Bad” calls are part of sports.
- 9) **PARALYSIS by ANALYSIS.** Avoid replaying the game in the car on the drive home. If your child brings the game up, fine. But chances are it’s about the last thing she wants to talk about.
- 10) **This I BESEECH, practice what your PREACH.** With too many pro athletes talking trash and misbehaving, parents have to work extra hard to teach kids fair play. Make sure your own sportsmanship is flawless. You are the most important role models the kids have!

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