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The Voice of Youth Soccer in America – What’s Your Goal?

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PARENTS ON THE SOCCER SIDELINES

FRI, 07/17/2015 - 00:34 JASON PRATT


The Parent Impairment

It is hard to imagine too many people who would look into a mirror and admit that they are staring at “that parent”. Yet all I have to do is refer to “that parent” and you probably know who I am talking about and to what behaviors I am referring.

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Let's start with those parents who feel as though their expert analysis of the game is so valuable that it must be shared at all costs – and sometimes with an undertone of disappointment or frustration. In fact, it's so important that it can't even wait until the child confirms that he/she is ready for the conversation – or interested in it at all – so it happens in the car immediately following the game. You know that parent, and you may even be that parent. I once was as well.

How about those parents who apparently know more about game strategy or soccer player development than the coach does (yet they choose to sit on the parent's sideline instead of volunteering)? There is damage that comes with discrediting the authority figure with whom they are entrusting their child – which is what happens every time they verbalize a disagreement with the coach's direction or strategy.

It probably shouldn't surprise us that there can be such negativity on the sideline. The human brain inherently has what is referred to as a "negativity bias" – meaning that people tend to initially think about the negative aspects before anything else. That's been a good thing through time, as this kind of thinking has helped humans in the early fights for survival, protecting us from dangerous predators, plants, and situations.

But, fellow parents, it's time to all get on the same page when it comes to the evolution of sports parenting. Over time we have become more and more intelligent as a species, benefitting from the many psychology studies and research projects which have proven the power of support, positivity and optimism.

Groups like **Positive Coaching Alliance** specialize in these areas and they prove every single day that a modern thinking parent (or coach) will not only get away from the fight or flight reactive response to situations – but they can actually have a huge and positive impact on the development of their youth athletes.

The science can explain why we got to this point while the research educates us on where we should all strive to be. The even more simple consideration is fun. If you think that your child is having fun while you berate their performance, criticize their coach, and shout your own coaching strategies during the game – then you and I have a different definition of fun.

It won't be long before the kids are not kids anymore. Take the time now to create great memories and lessons for them, instead of focusing on things that all deep down have more to do with your own desires than your child's.

Jason Pratt is the Founder of ProConnect Sports (supporters include Jeff Tipping) and Partnership Manager for Positive Coaching Alliance (supporters include Claudio Reyna). Pratt has previously served as Director of Coaching for Boyertown Soccer Club and Director of Operations for Paul Riley's Women's Professional Supergroup, along with being a past clinician at NSCAA conventions and a Congressional Panel Member on the power of youth sports within a community.



Jason Pratt and Brazilian Superstar Marta.
Photo courtesy of Jason Pratt

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PARENTS ON THE SOCCER SIDELINES #2

TUE, 02/10/2015 - 20:08 JASON PRATT

The Parent Impairment - Round Two

The *Parent Impairment* received a great response – thanks America! In opening the discussion, we heard from several people who had the same frustrations but were left without ways to handle the situation. This follow-up article is intended to touch upon a few ideas to consider.

It is hard to imagine too many people who would look into a mirror and admit that they are

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staring at “that parent”. Yet all I have to do is refer to “that parent” and you probably know who I am talking about and to what behaviors I am referring. Who wants to admit they are ‘that’ parent who embarrasses their child on the soccer field? Being a passionate soccer parent is different than being ‘that’ soccer mom or dad and here are some tips to help ‘rescue’ *that* possibly beloved or hated parent.

The **Positive Coaching Alliance** helps parents with soccer wisdom and information every day, and in my opinion, they are the experts in this field. I’ve learned a lot from PCA over the years as well from my own experiences and experiments, so here are a few quick thoughts for trying to change the culture on your side line. (*Sorry, TOUCH LINE to the purists out there*)

PERSPECTIVE

When adults (whether parents or coaches) go crazy at a youth sporting event – I can say with extreme confidence that the issue comes down to perspective. Is it reasonable that a screaming or judgmental adult would behave the way they were if they were putting “fun” first? What if they were focused on the opportunity for the child to learn about such things as problem solving, resilience, etc.?

The screaming comes from someone who is likely not a bad person but is focused on the wrong things. (*Try repeating that a few times to yourself before you act.*)

Instead of focusing on the amazing and powerful benefits that come from competition, they may be focused on the result of the match and what the scoreboard says. Therefore, anything that inhibits scoreboard success drives them crazy. Mistakes can prevent wins and therefore are seen as a negative, instead of being respected for the learning opportunity that they create! A perceived bad call from the official challenges resilience and self-control. Parents – let it all happen and welcome it all with open arms and your child will benefit more than you can imagine.

If the issue is not the scoreboard-watching, then the next most likely genesis of this behavior would be the view of “this child represents me” or “is an extension of me”. Like the first issue, this doesn’t usually come from a completely bad place – it is good to have pride in what you represent. But your child’s skill and decision-making on the soccer field does not represent anything about you. So take the pressure off of your shoulders on this one and turn it towards the areas where your child DOES actually represent you and your parenting focus – such as using manners and being respectful of those around him/her.

CULTURE KEEPER

Help on the soccer sideline – the parent side: One of the many tools is the concept of a culture keeper. Once you have worked on the perspective of parents, it is a good idea to have a person or people responsible for keeping the comments, energy and culture in line with expectations.

Simple reminders can make a big difference, and in extreme situations one could consider the use of the “parent pop” which is a lollipop politely given to a vocal parent. The presence of the candy in their mouth acts as a less confrontational way to say “shut up”, while also acting as a mental reminder for them.

KEEP ‘EM BUSY

The third and final tool I’ll offer-up is the idea of keeping parents busy with tasks. Consider taking your most vocal or critical parents and give them the responsibility for counting passes, shots, moves attempted, etc. The act of having to keep track of a detail will often keep their criticisms in check, and you could potentially even align their task with an aspect of the game which will educate the parents or give them a new perspective on how hard this game really is. Even taking pictures of the team in action can be a great solution.

Sports are an amazing tool. They force problem-solving in a safe environment. They test our self-control and resilience under adversity. They promote confidence and creativity. They foster social development and dozens of other life-changing benefits... until parents and coaches do something to take all of that away.

Picture this for a moment...

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1. Your child is having a BLAST playing soccer with his teammates and coach
2. He is learning about himself, his abilities, his limits, and preparing for the life he has ahead of him.
3. He is winning games, and losing others - but he handles both with grace.

How out of character would it now be for this environment I've described to have an adult verbally berate the refs? What about coaching the kids on every decision they should be making out there? Or parents talking negatively about how "this coach doesn't know what he is doing"... or giving your child criticism in the car on the way home without so much as checking with him regarding his interest in having a discussion about the game.

It is about them, not you. They are learning every time they are out there and your analysis of their performance is not going to enhance what they are able to learn from the u10 game they just finished. So sit back... enjoy watching them... let the game be the teacher... and everyone will benefit.



Jason Pratt and Brazilian superstar Marta. Photo courtesy of Jason Pratt

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