



FOR PLAYERS - PARENTS & COACHES

Parents should remain a mystery at youth sports contests

My son (he's nine) plays youth baseball in Dracut, and my wife and I usually sit in the same place for every game. We plunk down our camp chairs behind the backstop so we get a good view of the game. We end up chatting with the umpire between innings. It's usually a high school student trying to make a few dollars to keep gas in his car. We've learned most of the players' names and cheer for them all when they are at bat or in the field.

During a recent game, my son did well on the pitcher's mound and had a couple of nice hits at the plate. In between one of the later innings, the umpire asked who our son was. We told him he was the one who had been pitching, and he said, "Wow, he's really good." We thanked him, and he went on with the game. I didn't think anything of it at the time, but later, I thought it interesting that it wasn't obvious who our son was. I guess we were cheering the same for everyone on the team.

Now that I have a son involved in youth sports, I'm beginning to see things from the other side. I've coached at every level: youth sports, middle school, high school and college, but now I've become the parent. For years, I've viewed parents of athletes from the coach's perspective. I've dealt with complaints about playing time, questions about my strategy and discussions about the schedules. Some parents have been great to deal with, but some have not. Most coaches and officials can tell you horror stories about parents at games and practices. As a coach, dealing with parents is part of the job -- an important part. It takes patience, diplomacy and a good sense of humor to cultivate a good relationship with parents. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

As a coach, I wish all parents would remain mysteries during the games. Think of how much more enjoyable watching the games would be if parents cheered for everyone on the team equally. No one would be calling attention to himself or herself when his or her child was at bat. No one would groan when a weaker player came to bat at a key moment in the game. No one would try to coach his or her child from the sidelines. No one would embarrass his or her child during a game by confronting a coach about playing time. No one would know which child was yours.

You don't have to scream like a maniac when your child makes a play or comes to bat. They know your voice and know where you are sitting. Trust me, they hear you. They might not hear you at home when you ask them to help take out the trash, but they'll hear you at the game.

The next time you're at your child's game, cheer for all the players on the team like they were your own. Keep your opinions about the coaching to yourself. Be supportive but not overbearing. Make it your goal to have someone come up to you and ask, "Which one is yours?" If you remain a mystery at your child's game, you may just discover more about your child...and yourself.

From the blog, "The World of TV"

Random thoughts and digressions from Tom Varnum the Boston University women's golf coach and a high school English teacher at Tyngsboro High School.