

Top Ten Issues for Sports Parents  
October 6, 2001

Hi everybody, and welcome to another edition of The Sports Edge, brought to you in part each Sunday AM by Con Edison, People Helping People Everyday....

On last week's show, we devoted the hour to discussing the Top 10 issues facing Coaches today when it comes to working with kids in sports....and by all accounts, we had a very spirited response to my so-called Top 10 list. Along the way, we talked about issues involving discipline, sportsmanship, fund-raising, and even...

And so, on today's show, I thought I'd do the same kind of list for Parents who have kids who play sports....we'll call this one our Top Ten Issues for Sports Parents....and whether your son or daughter is graduating from high school or your child is just starting out as a 5 or 6 year old, I think you'll find my list right to the point...

But let me warn you right from the start...there are going to be some items on my list you may not agree with - or that you may not want to hear....but either way, I want to hear your thoughts on what constitutes the biggest issues facing Parents who have kids who play sports today....718-937-6666 is the number - I'll be back with Issue No. 10, right after this..

(break)

We're going over my list of the Top 10 issues confronting Sports Parents today, and we're working them backward from 10 up to Number One....

And as I go through this list, I encourage you to call with your thoughts and observations about what you feel are the biggest issues confronting sports parents today....the number is 718-937-6666

And during the week, this list - like the last one - will be posted at [www.sportsparenting.org](http://www.sportsparenting.org) at the Center for Sports Parenting...

Here we go.....

Issue No. 10 - The issue of playing time.

Now, by all accounts, this could have easily been the Number One Concern...but I wanted to get into right away....You have to understand, Mom and Dad, that if your kid goes out for a team - -unless the league stipulates that every kid has to play at least a certain portion of the game - there's no guarantee that your kid is going to play a lot in the game....

That's a cruel harsh reality for the kids - but it's even harder for the parents, especially if you have high expectations for your athlete.

What can you (or your child) do about it? Of course, a meeting with the coach can be helpful....but it doesn't always solve all the problems of playing time....In fact, one of the life lessons you have to teach your youngster is that being talented just isn't enough....you have to be able to show and impress the coach with your desire to want to play....

ISSUE #9 - Parental behavior at the games.

Another key issue, and one that we have covered endlessly on this show....In short, it's as simple as this: Your job is to act like a grown-up at the kids' games - it's not you playing in the game - it's your kid. Your childhood is over - and as an adult, you must understand that if you go nuts at your kids' games, the kids will eventually copy and follow your actions and become just as unsportsmanslike as you are.

3) ISSUE #8 – Sportsmanship.

Again, it's up to you - the parents - to set the record straight....show the kids that you can enjoy the game - win or lose - and still shake the other team's hand....same goes for the ref or ump....you know, it's easy to say "Good game" to the ref after your team has won....it's a lot tougher - and a lot classier - to say "Good game" after your team has lost.

Sportsmanship takes real effort - and while you can certainly encourage your child to compete as best as he or she can, when the game is over, they have to revert to being civil human beings --and so do you!

ISSUE #7 - Do your homework on Travel teams.

As a parent, if your kid wants to try out for a travel team, it's your job to check on the team, the coach, and what kind of priorities the coach has for the team. That means checking on playing time, coaching strategies, checking with former players on the team, how cuts are made, and so forth.

Most sports parents only want to see the positive aspects of travel teams - and that's fine...but if you're smart, you'll be watchful of the things that can easily go wrong...

Remember - if you don't look out for your child, who will?

ISSUE #6 - Know how to support and praise your kid.

Especially when things aren't going well. A loss is tough enough for a kid - he or she doesn't need you doing a post-game analysis on them too.

I've talked about the PGA before - the post-game analysis. Be very careful not to start pointing out to your athlete what they did wrong, or need to improve, right after the game is over. Kids HATE that - and I promise you this - if you do it enough times, your kid will quit rather than endure your post-game grill systems.

Try using the praise sandwich approach whenever you want to give some constructive criticism....and watch your words and tone of voice carefully!

One other note - -Adversity is still a great teacher and motivator....Every young athlete will go through some sort of adversity in their life, and it's at that time that they'll be more responsive to your instruction and ideas....but the key is - They have to come to you - not the other way around!

ISSUE #5 - Be careful of having your child specialize in a sport too early in life.

Another issue we've debated many times on this show....and of all the professional coaches and athletes that I've discussed this with, Not One has said that a kid ought to play just one sport when they're growing up?

Why? Because playing one sport will lead to burn-out by the time they're 13 or 14.....and even worse, that one sport all year round will transform from being fun to being just a job....

Bottom line? Let your kid play a variety of sports when they're kids....they don't have to start even thinking about specialization until they're 15 or 16.

ISSUE #4 - Don't be in a hurry to show them how you used to play the sport.

No kid ever wants to have Dad show them how "I used to do this..." The truth is, your child wants to be their own man or woman - and they really aren't that interested in how you performed a certain move or step....what they really want is to develop their own signature moves.

ISSUE #3 - Get a reality check.

The stats don't lie....very few kids go on to play college sports....do you think the stats don't apply to your kid?

If the odds are that less than 5% of all high school varsity athletes ever go on to play a collegiate sport, why do so many parents think that their kid is going to be that special one?

It's like a story a hockey parent told me the other day. He said, "Rick, you see all those Moms and Dads in the stands at this hockey game? I said sure. Well, they all think their kid is going to get a college scholarship for hockey....that's the difference between those parents and me - because I know my kid is going to get a scholarship."

9) ISSUE #2 - -Get involved as a coach or assistant coach.

Rather than stand on the sidelines at the games and criticize the coaching strategies, if you think you can do better, then offer your services and become either a head coach or assistant coach....once you find yourself on that side of the fence, you'll discover that coaching is a little tougher than you had thought....

And if you can't get coach, then get outside and practice with your child...get involved that way.

10) ISSUE #1 - -Put a smile on your face - let them know they're doing great.

Relax. Enjoy the moment. Take a moment and just look at that youngster of yours on the field or court or ice. Look how they move - how they enjoy chatting with their friends on the team. Sometimes, you might even see them smile because they're enjoying themselves....that's what you should want for your kid.

And so, take a lesson from that. If they're having fun, you learn from their lead....you have fun too....smile....enjoy the game....give the kids a real pat on the back....and their parents and the coach, too....

If you can master this simple philosophy, you'll find that you'll really enjoy youth sports a lot more.