

I know that as the players get older we like to think that some of these rules don't always apply but this is a nice article and I hope everyone will pass it on to others. The more discussion there is about unacceptable behavior, the better we can make the game for the kids. For those of you that don't know, MYSA now has a Code of Ethics that was adopted at the 2004 AGM. I will forward each of you a copy of it in the near future and I encourage you to share this with your parents, players, and coaches.

Have a great day!!

Kay Breland
MYSA Division I

"I can't tell you how many times I have heard kids say, 'Shut up dad!' " says Danville's John Wondolowski, whose under-11 soccer team won the State Cup last spring.

When dad won't pipe down, the next step is off the field. Many kids drop sports -- **an estimated 70 percent quit before they reach the age of 12** -- but some also find another outlet. Skateboarders, mountain bikers, and surfers are just part of an emerging X-Games generation. There are fewer rules, less structure, and -- best of all -- dad doesn't know the first thing about it.

"That's the protection," says Positive Coaching Alliance's Thompson. "No adults. It is not hyper competitive. Fifteen or 20 years ago adults didn't know anything about soccer. Now you've got guys who think they know all about it. My son is into surfing, skating, and snowboarding. His point was: Do I want to stand in line, wait to bat, and have the coach yell at me? Or do I want to sit out in the ocean?"

A kinder, gentler approach was the idea behind "Silent Sunday" last October in a Cleveland suburb. Coaches and parents in the 217-team league were told not to yell at the players, not even to cheer good plays. Was it hard to break old habits? Well, some parents, afraid they couldn't resist the temptation, put duct tape over their mouths.

Another soccer coach turned the tables on his parents. He put them on the field for a practice and let the kids scream instructions at them as they scrambled to kick the ball. Reportedly, the parents were ready for the exercise to stop long before the kids.

Are those the only choices? Do kids either have to drop out of sports or duct tape their parents' mouths shut?

Well no, there are options, proposed by groups like Thompson's PSA and the Matteucci Foundation. It begins with what groups like Ballistic soccer calls "zero tolerance" for attacks on officials, but more than anything it involves changing perceptions for parents.

"After all," says Thompson, "when you go to a spelling bee, nobody screams at the officials. It isn't done."

"We turn our heads," says Still of the Association of Sports Officials. "We say, 'I'm going to let it go. It is no big deal. Bill is a good guy, he just lost it that one time.'"

That, says facilitators like Matteucci, has to stop. A clear ethics code must be established before the season begins and the parents must go over it. Expecting them to read a handout isn't enough. Matteucci advocates reading the code aloud before every game.

Second, parents who get out of control need to be told so, and in a way that makes it clear that they are out of step with the entire group. And, if the coach, or some of the other parents, cannot calm the transgressor down, enforce the rules and call a forfeit.

"Call the game," says Matteucci. "If we do, life goes on."

But most important, parents need to monitor their level of involvement with an eye toward scaling it down. Chances are, their son or daughter is not going to get a college scholarship, or appear on a Wheaties box. In 10 years, the best you can hope is that the kids still enjoy staying physically active and look back fondly on their sports career.

What's fun about sports if you don't win? Thompson recommends changing the goal. He worked with a soccer team that was so outclassed that it lost every game. Instead of winning, or even scoring, the team decided to make its objective to get the ball over midfield five times in one game.

When they finally did it, cheers rang up and down their sideline, puzzling the opposing parents.

"They were asking, 'What are they so happy about?' " Thompson said. "Aren't we beating them by eight goals?"

Yes, but they were playing a different game.

WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO?

-- DON'T: Focus on wins and losses. Some experts suggest that the perfect season is .500, enough wins for confidence, enough losses for a challenge. Adjust your expectations.

-- DO: Have a plan in place for disruptive parents and make sure everyone knows it will not be tolerated. Forfeit a game if necessary.

-- DON'T: Yell at the players, especially your children. Positive feedback is always encouraged, but the coach handles strategy, not the parents.

-- DO: Get to know the coach and understand his philosophy. But do not campaign for playing time for your child.

-- DON'T: Get carried away if your child shows early athletic ability. **Studies show only 10 percent of gifted athletes could be recognized by the age of 12.**

-- DO: Recognize that a full college scholarship is not a realistic goal for the majority of players, even the good ones. Thirty million children are playing sports in America. Only about 300,000 play in college at Division I, II, or III level.

-- DON'T: Launch into a critique after each game. Listen. Ask your child, "What was your favorite part of the game? Why?"

-- DO: Concentrate on ELM. E for Effort, which everyone can contribute. L for Learning skills. M for Mistakes (bounce back from them; everyone makes them).

-- DON'T: Stand by and let a parent abuse an official, coach, or player. Remind him or her, as a group, that the game is for the kids. Make it clear this is not a confrontation but that he or she is out of step with the majority.

-- DO: Set up a workable plan for grievances. Make it clear that nothing will be settled at the game, but there is a way to present concerns to an impartial board. Angry, out of control parents will get a hearing, but not on the field.

-- DON'T: Vent at the officials. There is no harder job, and most of them are volunteers, taking on what has become an unpleasant task for the good of your children. Respect their commitment and realize they may miss a call.

-- DO: Encourage your child and his teammates. Studies show that the "magic ratio" between praise and criticism that works is 5:1. Children who received a 1:1 ratio were described as "despairing."