

# Try Not To Take It Too Seriously, Dad

Of course, it's wonderful to share your young athlete's adventures as he or she advances through elementary school and junior high. Few parental experiences compare with the thrill and excitement of watching children learn to master various physical skills, compete against their peers and cope with the fickleness of winning and losing. But while we Moms and Dads should enjoy our kids' participation in youth sports, we can get too caught up in the emotions of their games and lose our adult perspective. Perhaps you have experienced those moments yourself. After all, when we think our child's happiness or well-being is at stake, it can be very difficult to know when to back off.

To that end, here's a guide to help you identify some emotional turning points in your role as the parent of a youth-sport athlete. You know you're taking it a bit too seriously when:

- *You're more nervous before your child's upcoming game than he is.*

If his fifth-grade soccer game is the biggest thing in your week, you better take a step back. Suggestion: Why not participate in your own adult sports league and then focus on your own performance? Worry about your upcoming game - not your kid's.

- *You have a difficult time bouncing back after a loss or disappointing performance by your son.*

If you find yourself becoming too moody or sullen, you're most likely taking it too seriously. Kids are much more resilient after a bad outing or loss than we are. They usually bounce back very quickly. Suggestion: Rather than sitting home and stewing, plan some other activity for yourself after your child's youth game. By diverting your attention elsewhere - work, play, errands - you'll force yourself to let go of your own moodiness.

- *You make mental notes during a game about your daughter's play, and you can't wait to give her your comments afterward.*

Suggestion: It's O.K. to offer tips and instruction, but do it when the child comes to you, not the other way around.

- *You scream and yell at the referee or umpire during your child's game.*

Suggestion: If you can't control your emotions, then either stop going to the games, or stand so far away from the playing field that nobody else can hear you.

- *You brag to your child about how well you used to play, how hard you used to practice, how kids today don't put in the effort, and so forth.*

Suggestion: While it's nice to have pleasant memories of your own sports career, be careful not to place so much of a psychological burden on your child that she feels compelled to live up to what you did as a youngster. And be willing to admit you had your share of poor performances also. Recognizing the warning signs when you're too emotionally involved with your kids' sports is vital for all parents. Don't be afraid to back off. In the long run, not only will your children enjoy their sport more on their own terms, but you'll begin to put it all into a fuller and more rewarding perspective.

Sports psychology expert Rick Wolff is the father of three children and the author of *Good Sports, The Concerned Parents' Guide to Competitive Youth Sports* (Sagamore, 1-800-327-5557). You can send questions to him at Parents' Guide, P.O. Box 5574, New York, N.Y. 10185-5574.

## *Some friendly Advice*

*Ask your spouse to act as a personal barometer for you. Let him or her tell you if you seem to be taking it all too seriously.*

*Remember that your kids take their cues from you. If you're moody and depressed after a poor performance they'll copy your behavior.*

*Here's the bottom line: If your children are having fun and enjoying themselves, that should be enough satisfaction for you.*