

Soccer parents need to... CHILL OUT!!!

By Andrew Castiglione

We've got an attitude problem on the youth soccer fields, and it isn't the athletes - it's the "*yelldads*" and "*yellmoms*" on the sidelines who are making the game "unfun" for our kids. The problem is simple: too much negative feedback.

In soccer, as in any sport, it is easy for positive, enthusiastic support to cross over into a succeed-at-all-costs mentality. Many parents probably aren't even aware they are crossing the line, that their desire to see their child perform well is getting the better of them.

Sadly, for many of our players - especially our boys - game time has become an exercise in anxiety instead of an opportunity to develop a love of the game and the indescribable feeling that comes with "belonging to a group in which all members are endeavoring to do their best."

Like backseat drivers, some parents would do well to wear the cone of silence for a game or two. Take the big picture approach. No single game is that important. Each contest is a stepping stone in which the kids should discover something new and positive about themselves.

Parents, concentrate on the positive. Every young person on the field does something good some of the time. Notice what they are doing right. Make a big deal out of it. After the game, resist the urge to provide post-game commentary and analysis. Your kid is physically and emotionally tired. Respect that. Win or lose, move on. Change the subject entirely. Give them a high five and a hug and ask them what they would like to have for lunch.

Coaches, relax. When the referee blows the whistle to start the game, be satisfied that your athletes are as prepared as they are going to be on this day. Curb the urge to micromanage during the game and give your kids the opportunity to put to use the instruction they've gained in practice.

Kids, stand up for yourselves. You are the ones who put in the effort during long, hot practices. If you feel you're getting too much feedback, too much noise from the sidelines, respectfully tell your "*yellparents*" to zip it.

Perhaps we should turn the tables for a single day and have the parents take the field while the kids scream at us from the sidelines (of course this would require emergency vehicles and the cardio team -- right, kids?). But maybe this would make hypercritical parents see that, first of all, the game isn't as easy as it seems, and secondly, it's not about the parents' bragging rights, it's about our kids developing a love for the game. Let's not get in the way of that. On game day, let the children play.

It's for the KIDS!!!

Cheers!

