

# HOW TO WATCH YOUR KID'S GAME WITHOUT BEING A JERK

Mar 102014



When we teach our kids a team sport – there are really TWO LESSONS happening. There is the sport – and then there are the deeper, truer, lessons. Lessons like how to be part of a team – how to win with class and lose with grace – how to show up, take risks, fall down, get back up, and how to treat friends and adversaries. Like my husband says, very few of his players will ever play professional sports – but all of them will become citizens. And so what Craig is really trying to do as the kids' coach is to USE SOCCER to teach kids how to be brave, kind and happy citizens.

Keeping that end goal in mind, here are a few suggestions:

1. Please respect your kid's courage. Be in AWE of her. Look at what she's doing! She's out there on a big field in front of screaming adult spectators trying something new and scary and taking

huge public risks. Can you imagine the COURAGE that takes a small child? Can you imagine how scary that would be for YOU? Have some reverence for every kid out there, especially yours. Don't wait till she scores ten goals to be proud of her. Tell her after every game that she was so brave and that you couldn't be prouder of her – because life is about showing up, trying, being kind, resting, and then trying again. And that's what she's doing. So no matter how she plays – hug her and tell her, YES, brave sister! Well done!

2. Don't trash talk the coach. If you have questions about his methods or vision – call him up and ask to talk – person to person. Be a grown-up about it because the way you handle your concerns teaches your child how a good citizen deals with conflict. Again – we are not just trying to win soccer championships here – we are doing something INFINITELY MORE IMPORTANT – we are shaping hearts and minds. So behave the way you'd like your child to behave. If you must complain about the coach – maybe don't do it on the sidelines. Likely, his wife is sitting right next to you. It's awkward. Also – and I wish this went without saying but my experience over the past few seasons has taught me otherwise – ***never, ever trash talk any player on the field, from either team. The number of exceptions to this rule is zero exceptions.*** They are children. You are a grown up. That is all.
3. Before yelling out directions to individual players during the game: please look down at your shirt first. If your shirt says the word "Coach" on it: Yes! Go for it! Yell away! But if your shirt does NOT say "Coach:" *shhhhhhhh*. All the yelling confuses the players – they can't hear the coach, and so they're trying to PLEASE YOU instead of learning to PLAY SOCCER. For that one hour: you are not the boss of them. Sit back and enjoy it! And don't worry – most of the directions you're calling out like: *GET THE BALL!* and *FASTER!* – are unnecessary, really. The kids might not know much, but they definitely know they're supposed to run fast and try to get the ball. They're *trying*. It's just that they're kids and sports are hard. So give them some time to think and to *listen for their coach* instead of just constantly reacting to you. On Saturday mornings you are not the athlete and you are not the coach. You are a parent. So just *parent* – just be a loving, supportive, encouraging cheer-er on-er.
4. If you need to make or take a quick call on your phone – go for it! If you need to have a twenty minute business or personal call – maybe step away from the sideline. This is a really special time for many parents and we're trying to take it all in. Signal that you think this time is special too by removing yourself if you have business to tend to.

5. Consider displaying appreciation for the other team. The big difference between THEM and US is that their names got placed on one roster while our kids' name got placed on another. So, no difference. When trying to have compassion for both teams it's helpful to remember that most of these players JUST GOT BORN during the past decade. They're little. So we should be kind to all of them, not just the ones wearing the same color as our kid. I always pretend that a dear friend with a kid on the other team is sitting beside me. If I wouldn't say it with her there, I don't say it at all.
6. Ask your child *how she'd like you to cheer* for her. My son likes me to be really quiet on the sideline. Tish likes me to call out her name a few times per game, but not too much. Amma wants me to cheer for everyone throughout the entire game as loudly and often as humanly possible. I LOVE AMMA'S GAMES THE BEST BECAUSE I AM NATURALLY A CRAZY CHEERER. But I respect all my kids' wishes. One player on Craig's team last year always wanted to play defense. When Craig asked him about this he said he was "afraid to score" because he knew his very vocal (and precious) dad would go crazy with loud pride and this kid was just too shy to handle that. He was afraid to tell his dad though, so he played beneath his ability all season. Find out what your kid needs from you on the sideline. Remember that you are there FOR your child, not the other way around. She's not performing for you, you are supporting her.
7. Consider broadening your definitions of "wins" and "losses." Last season several parents became upset because Craig was playing everyone instead of just the "best players." These parents insisted that Craig was "hurting their chances to win." And Craig had to explain that at this age- his goals for the game were as follows: Everyone stays safe. Everyone plays. Everyone receives both praise and direction from him at least once. Everyone shows excellent sportsmanship. Everyone's smiling. *That's a win for him.* With the younger kids- Craig usually can't remember what the score was- but he can always tell you who worked on her shooting and who helped up a player from the other team and who played keeper even though she was really scared. *Victory, victory, VICTORY!*
8. Your kid, more than anything wants to HAVE FUN and MAKE YOU PROUD. Please, please teach her that she can do both at the same time. Most of these kids just want to pull on their cool shin guards, pump their little legs up and down the field, test out their courage, and eat orange slices with their friends. Let them *have that*. They have the rest of their lives to compete and

worry and strive and fret. Let's let them be kids and be free for now. Let's teach them that the victory is in SHOWING UP AND TAKING A RISK, not in the outcome.

9. Win or Lose – thank your coach. In front of the kids, shake the coach's hand and say "Good Game, Coach." He deserves your public, sincere thanks because he works hard and loves your kid. And you never know his story. He could even be a former professional soccer player who learned during his twenty-five year soccer career that the best thing sports have to offer is CHARACTER BUILDING. And so what he's doing is more important than winning. He's BUILDING. He's helping to BUILD YOUR KID. Thank him for it.

- See more at: <http://momastery.com/blog/2014/03/10/how-to-watch-your-kids-game-without-being-a-jerk/#sthash.9aFcEGBs.dpuf>