

A word from a player

Jun 1 2009, 12:00 AM

Topic: [Coaching Education](#)

From [US Youth Soccer Blog-Sam Snow](#)

Now and then we adult leaders in the game need to hear from and listen to the players. Here is a portion of a letter written by a 15-year-old player to parents in her State Association. So let's listen up...

During my nine years of experience, I have noticed numerous parents on the sidelines who do not always act as role models for their children when it comes to sportsmanship. I believe it is a parent's responsibility to instill in their child the importance of good sportsmanship and offset the "win at all costs" philosophy. To encourage parents to act responsibly, I would like to see the state leadership team consider having parents sign a contract before each season begins.

Soccer is a team sport and parents need to understand that and encourage their child to be a team player. There have been too many times when a parent only wants his or her child to succeed or be the best, which does not support a team environment. As an example, I have seen where a parent will pay their child for every goal they score. This encourages the child to try and only score goals, as opposed to passing to another player that may have a better shot at making a goal. While scoring goals is certainly important, playing defensively to ensure the other team does not is just as important. No position on the soccer field is more important than another. If parents are reminded of this in the contract, they can help their child actively participate in a cooperative and coordinated effort on the part of the team working together towards their common goal.

The sport of soccer is naturally competitive so parents can tend to get a bit high strung and say or yell things on the sidelines that are not appropriate. For example, there are times when a parent may not agree with the call a referee has made, and will berate and yell at that referee to the point he or she is asked to leave the sidelines. Parents must remember to demonstrate respect for coaches, players and referees and never openly berate, criticize, tease or demean anyone involved in the game. As a player, I can assure you that if a parent says something on the sidelines, we do hear it on the field. Children do learn from their behavior, so it is important they set a positive example.

In addition, parents need to be humble, trust the coach and admit that the way they think a child should play or a coach should teach is not the only way a child can learn. Each year I have played, there are always parents who seem to not support the team because they spend the entire game instructing the players from the sidelines. This confuses the players and really undermines the efforts of the coaches. Parents need to be reminded that they should avoid confusion when cheering on the sidelines. Including some examples of what parents should and should not say in a contract will encourage positive behavior. Hearing positive encouragement is always more motivating to me than being told to "shoot" or "pass it" when I am playing.

These are just a few of the areas that could be addressed in a sportsmanship contract. I do not think parents intentionally demonstrate behavior that is not sportsman like. If they are required to review what their role is for the soccer season, and then sign an agreement, it will serve as a friendly reminder what their responsibility is as a parent of a player. In addition, if you receive complaints regarding a particular parent's behavior, you have documentation that the parent agreed to behave according to the sportsmanship guidelines and take action if he or she continues behaving inappropriately.

I truly believe this will encourage positive support on the sidelines from parents both during games and at practices. If players receive positive encouragement and are taught sportsmanship at a young age, they will be able to model that behavior as a player or observer today and in the future.