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SECTION: SPORTS

HEADLINE: The real children in youth sports

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Feb. 22--I'd never seen anything quite like it.

There he was, a middle-aged man in his late 30s early 40s, yelling and screaming on the sidelines like a maniac.

The girls on the field -- all part of the Arroyo Youth Soccer Club in Harlingen, which opened the spring season on Saturday -- were focused on this man like a hawk. It was hard not to be since he was so loud.

Suddenly, another gentleman, about the same age as the first, appeared on the sidelines. And, just like the first guy, he started passionately shouting instructions to the girls.

And just when it looked like these two guys couldn't be outdone, a third man, this one slightly older, made an appearance and actually outshouted the first two.

Needless to say, the girls on the field started to become confused.

Each man was telling them to do something different. Which coach should they listen to?

But, wait. Did I mention that none of these men were coaches? They were overzealous fathers. The teams' real coaches were on the opposite end of the soccer field trying to instruct their teams, but having very little luck.

The girls on both teams didn't have time to listen to their real coaches. They were too busy trying to focus on the fathers, who by now were simply making fools of themselves.

As a father of a 9-year-old daughter who plays soccer, I understand the desire to get involved.

During games, it's common for parents to shout instructions to their kids.

I'll occasionally shout tips to my child, telling her to kick the ball harder or to pay attention.

But I've told her that if I ever get to the point where I'm running up and down the sidelines like I'm the reincarnation of Vince Lombardi, to please deny me as her father.

And incidents like the above-mentioned are not limited to soccer in Harlingen. I've seen this scene occur at youth leagues throughout the Valley.

Also, such behavior is not limited to The Beautiful Game. I've seen this happen at youth softball games, baseball games and, of course, football games.

And while I've seen this sort of scene during a few boys' soccer games, it seems worse when girls play.

Maybe it's just in a father's nature to try and protect his daughter that makes these dads act so crazy.

I understand that a lot of these dads know more about the game than some of the coaches out there. A lot of these fathers are former coaches or players who obviously know the game. I'm not questioning that.

But that shouldn't give these guys the right to stand there and verbally abuse the real coaches, as some often do.

If these fathers feel they can do a better job than the coaches, then maybe they should be coaching.

Maybe they should be the ones giving of their time and effort to help these kids rather than confusing the kids by acting like clowns.

It's weird how when it comes to youth sports, the real children are most often the adults.

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