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HEADLINE: World class soccer star, soccer mom - Joy Fawcett - urges parents to back off

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Three-time Olympian and women's World Cup champion Joy Fawcett and her 8-year-old daughter spent Saturday at the Palo Alto High School soccer field, signing autographs and promoting well-behaved parenting from the sidelines.

Fawcett, 42, made history as the first national team player to give birth during the season darting off the field for just three weeks before returning to play. She went on to have two more daughters during her 17-year career among the nation's soccer elite.

Together with the second national team player to give birth, Carla Overbeck, the pair convinced the national league to support parenting players by paying for babysitters and separate rooms.

Fawcett never felt she had to choose between her children and the game, and pregnancy did not set her back; she nursed her babies in halftime breaks in the locker room.

Now, as mother of three young athletes herself, the winner of two Olympic gold medals following a successful playing career at the University of California-Berkeley, is an advocate for change in the sports culture consuming so many American families and not always in healthy ways. Fawcett who sits on the board of a national nonprofit organization promoting "positive sports parenting" said she sees too many parents "stomping around on the sidelines" and lecturing their kids after games.

"Parents just go a bit crazy," she said.

But she understands the impulses, and has to check her own at times, she added. Two of Fawcett's three daughters, ages 8, 12 and 15, are soccer players. And the family spends seven days a week shuttling between games and practices in their Suburban, loaded up with teammates, tangerines and crackers.

"I would definitely love to tell them all the things they did wrong, but I know better because they don't want to hear it," she said.

As founder of the Orange County Saddleback United Soccer Club, Fawcett has pushed for culture change among parents who are too quick to envision college scholarships and

professional careers for their children, despite the relatively minuscule percentage who will achieve that status.

And Saddleback parents must behave. If they mouth off inappropriately from the sidelines, they are handed a candy sucker an opportunity to otherwise occupy their tongues.

America Brown, a Burlingame soccer mom who often stays up until 2 a.m. arranging carpools and sending out snack schedules, agreed with the main message of Fawcett's foundation, Positive Coaching Alliance. The organization that emerged from Stanford University's Athletic Department in 1998 has held workshops for more than 1,100 youth sports groups, schools and cities nationwide, while reminding parents that it is, after all, a game.

That message gets clouded among many parents, who end up overly invested as they spend hours carting kids to sporting events and watching their every move from the sidelines.

But Brown said there is a simple reminder she adheres to: "As long as my kids are having fun and enjoying the game, I'll do whatever it takes to get them there."