PARENT ASSESSMENT
OF SPECTATOR
BEHAVIOR IN SOCCER

Preliminary Findings for Indiana Soccer Association
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

• Explore perceptions of spectator behaviors
• Review Observed (O) behaviors of parents
• Review Personal behaviors (PB) of parents
• Share perceptions of soccer climate within the state
HOW DO WE STUDY SPECTATOR BEHAVIOR?

• Studies historically have been observational (Blom et al., 2008) & focused on parent emotional reactions (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Omli & Lavoi, 2012)

• Omli & Lavoi (2009) studied parent observations of spectator behavior in midwestern United States, examined parent observations

• My dissertation studied spectator behavior in light of Act 355 in Louisiana (2020) and modeled Omli & Lavoi (2009) approach
HOW DID THIS STUDY EMERGE?

• 2021-Engaged Delaware County FC in exploratory study
• 2022-Spring-Cutters SC participated in the pilot study
• Fall 2022- In cooperation with ISA, my team launched state-wide study of parent behavior

• GOAL
  • To understand more about spectator behaviors and to rely upon data to guide action steps
Sample (N=1,363)

- Funded by ISA
- Survey developed and participants used Qualtrics software
- All materials BSU IRB approved
- Distributed by ISA email list to those on file with ISA
- State-wide study conducted October 26-November 9, 2022
- One of the largest data sets on parent behavior that exists!!

Parents (N=1,363)

- 39% Male
- 61% Female or prefer not to say

Oldest Youth Participants (As Reported by Parents)

- 89% Travel/Select Players
- Gender
  - 61% Male
  - 39% Female or prefer not to say
YOUTH SPORT CHALLENGES

• High rates of youth sports dropout by age 12 (Aspen Institute, 2015, 2019)
• In specialized environments, higher risk of injury, increased psychological distress, and higher levels of drop out (Jayanthi et al., 2013)
• Burnout in sports is a response to chronic stressors (Bean et al., 2014; Schaufeli, 2009)
• In youth sport, context is important in optimizing the experience:
  Influential variables include:
  • The climate, in this case, parent behavior
  • The application and transfer of life skills (learned through experiences or observation)
### State-Wide Study Spectator Behavior Comparison (N=1,363)

#### Observed Behaviors (Mean)
- Yell at another spectator (2.28)
- **Yell at their own child (2.69)**
- Yell at child’s teammate (1.95)
- Cuss loud enough for athletes to hear (2.15)
- **Yell at referee in a demeaning manner (3.17)**
- Acting in a way considered embarrassing (2.66)
- Get into it with someone (1.70)
- **Coaching from the sidelines (3.86)**
- Encourage rough play (2.68)
- Encourage play outside rules (1.78)

#### Personal Behaviors (Mean)
- Yell at another spectator (1.12)
- Yell at their own child (1.27)
- Yell at child’s teammate (1.07)
- Cuss loud enough for athletes to hear (1.19)
- **Yell at referee in a demeaning manner (1.47)**
- Acting embarrassing (1.28)
- Get into it with someone (1.12)
- **Coaching from the sidelines (2.21)**
- Encourage rough play (1.09)
- **Encourage play outside rules (1.08)**

1-never 2-almost never 3-sometimes 4-a lot of the time 5-all of the time
COACHING FROM THE SIDELINES

• Parents are *observing and frequently participating* in this activity
• Some believe sideline coaching *supplements* the team’s coach
• Instruction varies and is often *in opposition* to what the coach instructs
• Some coaches are asking parents not to coach because it causes anxiety, confusion, and misunderstandings
• Parents also report *mistrust or a lack of coaching* as the reason for doing so from the sidelines
FACTORS DIMINISHING PLAYER AND SPECTATOR EXPERIENCE

- Parent Behavior: 56%
- Coaching Behavior: 19%
- Referees: 15%
- Organizational Management: 10%
If the officiating is poor then the parents and coaches tend to be more involved in a negative way.

How parents support their players reflects in how the team plays and it also reflects how the coaches behave on the field.

Parent verbal abuse of the refs is nearly always the worst part of the spectator experience.

A spectator acting negatively ruins the experience. It makes everyone tense.

I have no idea how one gets involved with any management group - Indiana Soccer, the Indiana State Referee Committee, or anything else to get involved to make a change.
Improving Game Environment

- 82% Support ISA efforts to aid referees
- 48% Support Prompt, punitive sanctions for parents
- 24% Support video of games
- 58% offered to be a resource for home club

Players Thoughts (Per Parents)

- 13.3% Almost Always or Always impacted by parent behavior
SUGGESTIONS

Improving Spectator Behavior
Have someone from the host club walking along parent sidelines; tell parents specifically what is helpful and not from sidelines ("good job" versus "pass to my kid")

Encourage spectators to just watch quietly and provide positive encouragement.

Have coaches talk to spectators before games asking for civility and have refs card and eject spectators

I actually think encouraging more (positive yet competitive) spectator behavior would improve the experience for everyone

I think all clubs should have behavior agreements that parents sign, and they should enforce them. The 'abuse free' signs are helpful for showing ref support by clubs.
1) A strict no-nonsense policy; 1 strike and you're asked to leave. However, this may prove difficult as enforcement is sometimes left to the sometimes young referees. Field management/security would have to improve. 2) Suspension of spectator privileges for home games for those parents who fall out of line, as home games would be the easiest to enforce.

The behavior of parents and coaches and players that is not appropriate can not be tolerated. Too often nothing is done by the organization to address issues. What we allow, we teach as acceptable. Unfortunately, when we have in appropriate behavior that person (parent, fan, coach or player) must be removed and not allowed to participate anymore for the remainder of the season or calendar year.

It's really pretty good. Just the loud screaming from parents "Get him!" "Get the ball!" "Run!" is annoyingly loud, but it is not demeaning.

Referee communication prior to the game. Set boundaries.

Referees could make sure there is no coaching by parents. Tennis already does this.
I think people need to understand what they say stays with us. If they are bullying or saying rude things they should be kicked out.

Having bleachers with parents sitting further away may be better. So there's no point in trying to coach

Education by the clubs to the parents about the rules of the game most frequently causing them to become upset.

I suggest a before game speech from the 1st ref

ISA needs to do a better effort to get clubs to educate the fan / family of the laws of the game. They also need to help fans / families understand the process for yellow cards, red cards, fan dismissal as well as forcing coaches / clubs to police their fans / families when an official request them to do so.

Coaches and organizations need to start enforcing better behavior by banning them from attending games. I would also suggest a buffer between opposing teams and coaches. Perhaps a coach's and parent's boundary.
SUMMARY OF INITIAL KEY FINDINGS

• Key areas of discrepancy exist between observations (O) and personal behaviors (PB)
  • Coaching from the sidelines is the most frequent spectator behavior and the largest differential between O & PB
  • 55% report parent behavior detracts from good experiences (#1 response)
  • About 14% of parents reported their youth are negatively impacted by parent behavior (all of the time or most of the time)
SUMMARY OF INITIAL KEY FINDINGS

• Vast majority of parents (89%+) always feel safe at both home and away fields

• (82%) Actions of ISA to address referee challenges are generally supported

• More punitive sanctions are supported over increased video

• Parents have expressed a desire to be engaged and assist when possible
REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

• What is your reaction to these findings?

• What was expected or unexpected?

• What steps are you taking to address parent spectator behavior?

• What else would you like to do? What is necessary?