

Running head: WHO'S MISBEHAVING NOW?

Who's Misbehaving Now?

Parental and Coach Conduct in Youth Sports

Maggie Durham

XXX University

Who's Misbehaving Now? Parental and Coach Conduct in Youth Sports

Walk past any athletic field on any given day of the week and there are dozens of young athletes either practicing baseball, soccer, or football, or playing a game against another team. By the time they reach age 12, three-quarters of those players drop out (Lancaster, 2001; Lord, 2000). With childhood obesity at such a high level, it is much better for the children to participate in organized sports than to sit in front of a TV or computer.

Unfortunately, young athletes are becoming discouraged and dropping out of organized sports, not because of their own physical limitations and skills or understanding of the game, but because of the conduct of both parents and coaches, and lack of sportsmanship.

Parents are partly to blame for the high dropout rate. Even though the parents think they are doing their best by encouraging participation in sports and wanting their child to “be the star of the team,” their own conduct on the sidelines is ruining the fun for the young athletes. They are losing their perspective and viewing their child’s sports activity as if it were the World Series or the Super Bowl. They are putting too much pressure on these young athletes and can be seen hitting, slapping, kicking, and verbally insulting their child for not “catching that ball” or “missing a tackle.” In addition to the attacks on the children, there have been reports of attacks on adults: “A Maryland father, disappointed that his son had been left off the all-star team, knocked down and kicked a coach” (Lord, 2001, p.52). This type of parental behavior needs to change. Parents need to encourage and praise their child’s efforts. Lancaster (2001) says that “it’s time to give sports back to kids” (p.13). He also says without this says without this pressure from parents, “the children’s confidence, ability, and joy in playing would naturally increase” (p.13).

It is not only the parents who are ruining organized sports for children; the coaches are doing their part in discouraging children from continuing to play. Lancaster (2001) says that

part of this problem is that “some of the youth coaches have little or no experience in teaching a sport, and therefore don’t know how to develop a young person’s talent or teach the entire game” (p.13). In addition, some of these coaches have little or no experience in working with children. They may be former athletes themselves, volunteer dads or “wannabe” championship coaches, and they may lack the patience to allow children to make mistakes. In one instance, “an Oklahoma coach had to be restrained after choking the teenage umpire during a T-ball game for 5- and 6-year-olds” (Lord, 2000, p.52). The “win-at-all-costs” attitude of many of these coaches is defeating the purpose of youth sports and displaying a poor role model for these young athletes. One alternative adopted by a Des Moines Athletic Association was a coaching clinic as well as a ruling that every player must have a turn (Lord, 2000). The NFL youth programs require that coaches develop the skills of every participant and that everyone receives equal instruction and playing time (Lancaster, 2001). Is that not what organized youth sports are supposed to achieve?

In a survey by Fred Engh, president of the National Alliance for Youth Sports, 8.2 percent of the young players stated they “were pressured into harming others” by both parents and coaches (Lord, 2001). Whatever happened to sportsmanship, fair play, and just enjoying the game? The quality of sportsmanship, civility, and ethics is being replaced with a “win at all costs” attitude. Lord (2000) reports, “The Des Moines youth baseball league adopted a zero tolerance policy toward obnoxious adults; cuss or brawl and the kid leaves the team” (p.52). In other areas of the United States, this violent behavior between both parents and coaches has necessitated parental codes of conduct, which requires parents to either view a video on sideline manners or attend a class as well as sign a code of behavior contract before their child can play the sport (Lord, 2000; “Mom! It’s only a game,” 1999). Coaches as

well have been banned from coaching because of their violent conduct. Even the officials are suffering from this inappropriate conduct to the extent that some states now have enacted laws protecting them from parental and coach violence; in addition, the National Association of Sports Officials is even offering assault insurance (Lord, 2000).

Many people studying youth sports agree that this conduct on the part of parents and coaches as well as lack of sportsmanship needs to change in order to stop discouraging these young athletes and causing them to drop out of sports. These young athletes need motivators in the form of parents and coaches. With supportive parents and coaches, who knows what might happen: another Mickey Mantle, Donovan McNabb, or Curt Schilling may be out there on that Little League baseball or Pee-Wee football field.

References

Lancaster, S. (2001, January 22). Fixing kids' sports. *Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved from <http://www.csmonitor.com>

Lord, M. (2000, May 15). When cheers turn into jeers (and tears). *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.USNews.com/>

Mom! It's only a game. (1999, December 10). *Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved from <http://www.csmonitor.com>

