

Bringing Parents Up to Code



BY RICK REILLY

THERE'S ONLY one place in the galaxy where kids' sports is sane.

Jupiter.

Jupiter, Fla., that is, where on Feb. 15, the town's athletic association did something we should've done in America 20 years ago. It took the *parents* out behind the woodshed.

If you wanted your kid to play on one of the Jupiter association's zillion teams this year, you had to file into a minor league baseball stadium, watch a video on sportsmanship and then vow not to insult, cuss at, holler at, spit upon, push, punch, body-slam or otherwise abuse a coach, referee, team mom, scorekeeper, fan, player or another parent.

You think it doesn't happen? In Port St. Lucie, Fla., a youth soccer coach head-butted a referee, breaking the ref's nose. In Wagoner, Okla., a 36-year-old coach started choking a 15-year-old umpire in a tee-ball game for 5- and 6-year-olds. In Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., a baseball game for 7- and 8-year-olds ended in a parents' brawl. In Boca Raton, Fla., one of the managers in a baseball game for 9- and 10-year-olds mooned the opponents' parents.

And you thought pro sports was mayhem.

Jupiter parents had to sign the code of ethics, which included such pledges as "I will remember that the game is for youth—not adults" and "I will do my very best to make youth sports fun for my child." Break the code and they're banished from the association's games for as much as a year.

Problem was, that code didn't go nearly far enough. As a poor slob who has coached kids' sports for 10 years and gone to more kids' games than Mr. and Mrs. Osmond combined, I would've made the parents sign this—in blood:

• I'll keep in mind that, in case I hadn't noticed, my kid isn't related to the Griffey's. There's probably no college scholarship on the line, to say nothing of a \$116.5 million guaranteed contract with the Cincinnati Reds. In fact, right now my kid is filling the inside of his baseball glove with ants. He looks happy. I'll shut up.

Jupiter moms and dads signed a code of ethics, pledging, "I will remember that the game is for youth—not adults."

• I won't dump my kid out of the Lexus 20 minutes late to practice and then honk the horn when I pick him up 20 minutes early, as though the coach is some kind of hourly nanny service. If my kid has to miss a game, I'll call the day before. It doesn't cost any more to be decent.

• I'll remember that this isn't the seventh game of the NBA Finals. This is the 6-year-olds' YMCA Lil' Celtics finals, and by supper time not one of these kids will remember the score. They will remember that I tried to ride the other coach bareback, and possibly they'll remember the incident in the squad car, but not the score.

• I'll realize that the guy behind the umpire's mask, whom I've been calling "José Feliciano" and "Coco, the talking ape," is probably just a 15-year-old kid with a tube of Oxy 10 in his pocket, making \$12 the hard way. I'll shut up.

• I'll stop harrumphing out of the side of my mouth about how much the coach stinks, unless I want to give up my Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays every week, call 15 kids every time it rains and spend \$200 every season on ice cream, catcher's throat guards and new seat covers. I'll shut up. (Oh, and once a year, I'll tell her thanks.)

• I won't rupture my larynx hollering nonstop directions. For one thing, my kid can't hear me. For two, because I'm shouting, he can't hear the coach, either. For three, I really have no idea what I'm talking about. Screaming at little Justin to "Tag up! Tag up!" when there are two outs is probably not very helpful. I'll shut up.

• Win or lose, I won't make the ride home the worst 20 minutes in my kid's life. "You played great" should about cover it every time. Then I'll shut up.

• One season a year, even if it kills me, I won't make my kid sign up for an organized sport. It's probably not necessary to have him play 91 hockey games in three leagues from September to June and then send him to Skating Camp, Slap Shot Camp and Orange Pylon Camp all summer. I'll try to remember that Be a Kid Camp isn't so terrible once in a while. Neither is Invent a Game Involving a Taped Sock, a Broom and Old Lady Winslow's Fence Camp, come to think of it.

• Most important, I promise I'll do everything in my power, no matter what, to remember to arrive at games with the single most important thing of all . . . the orange slices. □

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