

## **Message to all Parents - Redirecting those Misguided Family Enthusiasts**

**By Darren Laver**

*“Phyllis is a self-confessed pit bull soccer mom. Mess with any of her kids and she will give you the business. Recently she told me of an interesting incident with her 12-year-old boy, Jake. As she rushed to clean out the living room, Jake ran his fingers along the table, scoffed at the residue and gave her a disapproving look. ‘This is just not right mom...you are just spreading the dust around instead of cleaning properly’. Phyllis was perplexed but let it go...maybe it was one of those strange teenage phases. But then the very next day, Jake was at it again. This time it was the bed that was ‘not done quite right’. Apparently, Jake saw a nurse doing it properly with all the corners folded neatly underneath the bed. Things came to a head when Jake scoffed at the Sunday dinner...apparently the ‘chicken was somewhat dry’ and the ‘veggies were on the soggy side of things’. He also thought the ‘sauce was rather watery’ and ‘lacked that extra something to make it really pop’. Jake concluded that the dinner was a ‘very good effort’ but ‘needed some work’.*

*Phyllis was even more perplexed that her husband of 17 years and her two daughters were not commenting. Desperately trying to keep her cool, Phyllis snapped ‘who do you think you are Jake, telling me how to do my work? If you can do it better, why don’t you just take over. I would be happy to have some time to myself’. Everybody at the table laughed. Phyllis didn’t get the joke until Jake told her that she had been doing that to him at his soccer games as far back as he could remember. Phyllis refused to believe that she was a soccer momzilla but the point had been made and everyone in the family seemed to agree”.*

This is often the case when parents think they are helping, but they are not. Research has shown the bad behavior of parents on the sidelines (no matter how well-intentioned) negatively affects the way in which children perceive and engage in sports. Some of these kids are in their teenage years, creating even more pressure for them and their peers. We all know kids are almost chronically ashamed of their parents during their teens. You as a responsible parent should not make things worse by making a spectacle of yourself on the sidelines. Remember that you are on the sidelines for a very good reason...you are not one of the players. The age of the helicopter soccer parent ought to come to an end. There is love...and there is just being plain overbearing.

You may think you are pushing them to win through subtle pressure, but in reality, you are just making the entire experience unpleasant for them. I would go as far as talking about ‘trauma’ in terms of the consequences that can result from this type of behavior. Even worse, you may be giving the kids a very bad example when you start to shout at the match officials. That referee is just doing their job and you have no right to make his or her job any more difficult than already it is. Your child will soon learn that it is ok to be rude and nasty to people when you don’t get your way in a match.

This open complaint about uncouth parents is not something that has just come out of the blue. So much has been written about the acceptable etiquette for soccer parents, but it seems that some are not prepared to listen or act accordingly. One of the coaches I know just became exasperated by it all, once responding to an irate parent:

*“I don’t shout at you when you miss a pass...so why do you shout at me when I make a mistake?”*

That coach ended up repeating this quote to parents at the start of each game. Being a concerned, loving, and attentive parent should not give you the right to become a parentzilla. I know that people make light

about the aggressive soccer dads and ferocious soccer moms when their children's future is at stake. All that is well, but there comes a time when they must focus on soccer, not your own personal histrionics.

### **Kids Being Forced to be the Adult in the Room**

When you reverse roles and become the bratty kid, you are putting responsibilities on your child which should never be theirs in the first place. You are also slowly killing the love of the game which we the soccer coaches utilize as our raw materials when we are socializing the players. The moment that soccer becomes a chore, we begin to lose the attention and commitment of these players. How do you expect them to settle down, focus, and learn if you are creating your own drama on the sidelines? The truth is you are becoming an embarrassment to everyone including the player, their friends, and their peers. We know that up to 75% of all soccer players in the USA drop out of the game by the time they are 13 years of age. This is an appalling statistic that should be a wakeup call for parents. I am not saying that the dropout rates are all due to irrational parents, bad coaches and oppressive soccer clubs might have something to do with it too.

Nevertheless, we have to realize that it is the responsibility for parents to give their children the best start in life as well as the right learning environment. If you have dreams of producing your own home-grown Lionel Messi; the last thing you need to be doing is harming their education through over-zealous side commentaries. Besides, it is always a good idea not to allow your child to be identified as a 'problem case' due to your errant behavior. The coaches will be so afraid of confronting the real issues that need to be addressed because they know that at one point or the other, you are going to make a scene. Eventually, your child begins to lose out on the guidance and support that they would naturally expect to come from their coach.

### **Parents Can Create Supportive Learning Environments**

It does not always have to be a contest between the coach, match officials, and the parents. They all have an interest in ensuring that the young players do their very best in the sport. That is why it is always a good idea to form alliances with the people helping your kid. If the child knows that you are all working together in order to support them...that gives them that extra bit of confidence and push. Think about a failing marriage to really understand how this works. The parents that go for the messy Hollywood-type divorces end up harming their children. Those that are reasonable and do not lose their cool can actually help their children get through this difficult time. Soccer is a very demanding sport from the physical, emotional, psychological and social point of view. These kids need all the help that they can find. You, the parent, can be part of the solution.

I am not saying parents have nothing worthwhile to contribute to the game. After all, you are the person that ultimately pays the bills and brings the kids to the practice sessions. That entitles you to have a say. However, those rights also come with certain responsibilities. If you have a genuine issue that needs to be addressed, you can take the opportunity to discuss it with the coach and the child off the field. Even if you consider yourself to be something of a soccer expert, you can still bring some ideas to the game. Make the coach your friend and deal with problems together, all in the best interest of your child. You will enjoy a much happier experience at the games and your child will respect you even more.