

Athletes, Parents and Coaches at Competitions

Importance

Team parents are so important in helping make the competitions a positive learning experience for our athletes. The parents, coaches and officials are partners in helping to make a fun, fair, learning experience through competitive events. Each group has responsibilities and we all work together. If that doesn't happen, the athletes will still learn a lot, just not positive things for them to grow with.

Benefits Of Competition

Our young athletes can become better and more mature young adults through their experiences in competitions. Many wonderful life lessons can be learned through competition. Learning to handle success, disappointment, frustration, and all of the other ups and downs we experience in youth sports is terrific. Better to learn to handle these things now when life isn't so serious than later when the consequences are larger. Controlled competition is very good for the overall development of the child/young adult. Competition is good when the 3 partners, the coaches, parents and sports officials, do their jobs the right way.

Life Or Death

Sports don't have to be life or death situations. We have all seen some people act as if they are. Sports are an enjoyable way to practice and learn to perform under a little pressure. (just as at a job or studying for a college final) Sports are a small, small, small part of life. Family is more important. School is more important. Relationships are more important. Happiness is more important. In some ways I think we have made sports more important than they should be.

Awards/Improvement

A trophy is a temporary reward for a good performance. Now put the trophy away and let's work toward the next challenge. The 1st place gymnast may have improved her routines by 1/2 a point. The 10th place girl may have improved her routines 1 1/2 points. Who had a better day? Good question. We cannot all win 1st place, but we can all improve. We all know that sports are not just about awards and scores, sports are about making a better young adult when they grow and leave organized sports.

Awards are nice and have their place in our sports but they shouldn't drive the athlete, the coach or the parent. I always felt that my job as coach was to motivate the kids to want more. To want to sweat. To want to strive. To want to make things better. If I did those things, I was a very successful coach. Regardless of scores and trophies.

Judges & Officials

They aren't perfect. Neither are the athletes, coaches or anyone.

We all see the difficulties with the professional officials in baseball and other pro sports. Bring on the instant replay because the pro officials are making so many mistakes. We see mistakes being made by officials in youth sports, but most of them are trying their best.

The key in youth sports is to control our feelings and emotions regarding officiating. It will never be perfect. I think we teach our children about human beings and their imperfections. The vast, vast, vast majority of sports officials I have dealt with are trying their best to get every call and every score correct. And they do get it right the majority of the time. It is a challenge for us, the parents and the coaches, to use those occasional missed calls as teaching situations for our athletes. We can do it.

Pressure At Competitions

It is good. It makes you feel alive. Competition is a challenge. Sure you may not do well but then maybe you will. Controlled, educational, fun competition helps us all move forward. Not that we always succeed and feel good but it energizes us to work hard and challenge ourselves. This happens for the kids too. As long as we don't go overboard and forget the real purpose.

Athletes Change

When a competition approaches, some young athletes change. It is natural. They get anxious, a little concerned that they aren't ready and they also feel that they should have paid attention in practice more. We want them this way because it shows that they care and the challenge ahead is important. They will learn from this one and build for the next one. This is positive.

Parents & Coaches Change

Of course we change. You are anxious and excited and have to sit in the stands and watch. Tough job. Look for the zillions of positives things that happen in a sports competition. Did you notice the coach a little nervous this morning? Imagine what they are going through with so many athletes to handle. They want so badly for all of them to progress, learn and have a successful competition. This is all good! The coaches have worked hard for the challenge of this competition. Many, many terrific things will be learned from this competition.

Following Our Example

When done right, competition enhances our lives. When done wrong, these impressionable athletes learn plenty, unfortunately not good lessons. The adults in organized sports have to lead the way. We set the example for the young people to see and understand. We limit our emotions and we work with others to make things right. We adjust, we explain and we keep the wonderful world of sports a positive learning experience.

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Team Parents at Competitions

Before The Meet

Your child needs your support and your motivation. The athletes and the coaches have worked hard to prepare for the competition and the challenge. They have set goals and there is a purpose going into each competition.

We need the athletes focused on the competition with as few distractions as possible. If they go into the competition with other things on their minds they will probably not compete to the best of their ability. So, as much as possible, limit outside distractions.

Meet Location

Please make sure that you know how to get to the meet site and how long it takes to get there. A meet performance can be easily messed up by getting lost and being late to the competition. This added stress has hurt many athletes. Getting to the competition on time is one of the most important jobs a parent has on the day of the competition. If you are at an away meet, go to the meet site the night before if possible to make sure there are no problems the next day. This is so very important. A totally ready gymnast can be thrown off by stressing as we get them to the meet late.

Morning of the Meet

The athlete may be a little distant as she is probably doing her routines in her head as you fix her hair or eat breakfast with her. This is natural. They may even be a little irritable as she could be anxious and even a little worried, again this is natural. The less confrontations the better the morning of the meet. This can be a challenging time for the parent as you are starting to take a “back seat” to her attention and importance. “She may have already transported herself to the meet” in her mind. Try not to compound an already anxious situation. This is natural.

Nervousness

We are all nervous. The athlete, the coaches, the parents, the meet officials. We all want to do a good job. If we all understand that we may be a little on edge we can be a little more understanding of our communication and actions. The athlete is focused on the challenge at hand and so is the coach. To expect the coach to have some light hearted talks before a meet is not very reasonable. They have work to do to make sure that your daughter and her teammates are ready. Don't be put off if the coach is a little short with the communication. This is natural.

Start of the Meet

Send your athlete out “into the arena” of the meet with a smile and a hug. Then go find a great seat near “positive” people. There have been rumors that the spectator area at a gymnastics meet can become a pretty negative place. Let's not let that hap-

pen. There are so many wonderful things going on that we shouldn't dwell on getting 1 tenth of a point less than last time on a routine. Or a long discussion with other parents about your dissatisfaction that “she” is judging. Let's have fun.

No team parent has the right to create a negative atmosphere that the other parents have to endure. Sometimes at my meets I encourage the parents to get up and move if they are sitting near a negative parent. Hopefully that negative parent will notice that she is sitting alone and will get the message. Again, there are so many terrific things happening that we shouldn't spoil the competition.

Scores And Comparisons

We all want our child to “shine” at competitions. We would love to be the parent of the best athlete there. That is natural but unrealistic. Your athlete is unique and wonderful. Try to stay away from too many comparisons within your own team and with the other teams at the meet. Yes we are competing but we need to remember that all of the kids out there are pretty neat young athletes. If we concentrate on individual improvement and what they are learning, we can all see success most of the time.

Scores? Good luck. This is a subjective sport and comparing scores from one meet to the next could drive you crazy. Most coaches preach improvement in the performance of the routines rather than scores going up and up. The judges are doing their best but to get the absolutely correct score every time for the routine performed is very difficult.

After The Meet

A time to dwell on the good. Sure there will be things to improve upon but that is for the next practice. Even the child who blew the entire competition did something right. Stress the good immediately after the meet and then start a conversation with your athlete later about what she thought about her performance. You may be surprised to hear what she has to say.

Coaches after a good meet - they are in a good mood but they still probably had a gymnast or too not do well. Try to put yourself in their position before you approach them. Be sensitive. They also need a pat on the back for a job well done.

Coaches after a bad meet - they have a right to be less than excited about what happened. This is the exact time “not” to get into difficult conversations. Let things calm down and understand how they are feeling. Be sensitive. Everyone may need a little time to recover from a poor performance.

Bottom Line - We all should work extremely hard to see all of the positive things that are happening in competitions. We are a team of athletes, coaches, parents and officials creating a positive learning experience for the benefit of the kids.

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