

## How to be a great sports parent

Parents can have a tremendous positive role in their child's athletic career — or make them miserable. In recent years, more and more emphasis has been placed on identifying best practices for parents of student athletes.

### • RELEASE YOUR CHILD TO THE GAME

Bruce Brown, founding partner of Proactive Coaching, urges parents to “release their child to the game.” That means stepping back, becoming an encouraging supporter — and that's all. The game needs to belong to the athlete, not to the parent. Support is critical, but pressure and over-involvement are counterproductive.

Releasing your child to the game includes allowing your child to work through problems with a coach on their own.

“It's important that a child learns to speak to their coach and have a direct relationship,” John O'Sullivan, founder of Changing the Game Project, told *The Nugget* in 2015.

“I think a lot of times parents jump in and take that action away from their kids... That kind of ‘helicopter parenting’ leads to long-term detrimental effects — because you aren't always going to be there.”

### • MODEL GOOD BEHAVIOR

Sisters High School athletics guidelines state that: “The single most important contribution a parent can make during a game is to model appropriate behavior. What parents need to model more than anything is poise and confidence. If parents expect their children to react to the ups and downs involved in a game with poise, then they must model it.”

### • GET ON THE SAME PAGE REGARDING EXPECTATIONS

Clear communication is key to a successful relationship among student-athletes, parents and coaches. Coaches should lay out their philosophy and expectations clearly in a pre-season meeting and provide ongoing feedback on how a player is doing.

Perhaps most important is clear communication — and congruent expectations — between a parent and child. O'Sullivan notes that a parent may be frustrated and angry that his kid isn't playing a bigger role on a team, when the athlete understands her role and is satisfied with it.

It is important that parents and their children share expectations and goals for their participation in sports. A parent should ask: Why do you want to play? What will make a successful season? What role should the child play on her team?

If the answers to those questions align, great. If they differ, Brown says, “Drop your expectations and accept theirs.”

### • RESPECT COACHES' BOUNDARIES

Coaches devote a huge amount of time to their sport. The ability for parents to ask a question or raise a concern instantly via text or cell phone call makes it hard for coaches to find down time or family time. “One quick question” asked 40 times by 40 different people adds up to a lot of time and a lot of frustration.

“Dig for information before calling or texting,” suggests cross-country Coach Josh Nordell.

Sometimes you won't need to call or text. And, if you do need to communicate, perhaps 8 p.m. on a school night or on a Sunday afternoon isn't the best time to do it.

If there is an issue that truly needs to be addressed, schedule a mutually workable time with the coach.

### • TRUST THE COACH

Coaches are human and they make mistakes, but the coaches interviewed by *The Nugget* emphasized that they always do their best for all their athletes.

“Trust that I have your child's best interests at heart,” said Rory Rush, Outlaws volleyball coach.

An “assumption of good instead of an assumption of negative” goes a long way, Nordell noted.

### • REMEMBER WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

The stark reality is that kids have very limited athletic careers. Facing the high cost of a college education, it's perhaps understandable that parents have dreams of scholarships dancing in their heads. That can create unreasonable expectations that make their relationships with both coaches and their kids more tense and complicated than they need to be.

Fewer than three percent of all high school athletes play their sport in college. Only one in 10,000 high school athletes gets a partial athletic scholarship. The average award is \$11,000 per year. It's really not about a scholarship — much less a pro career — for the vast majority of student-athletes.

What youth sports is really good for is creating an arena where students can learn some key life lessons: the value of hard work and preparation; teamwork; sportsmanship; facing and overcoming challenges and developing a “never-quit” ethic. Those are qualities most every parent hopes to instill in their children. And every expert in the field will tell parents that the best way they can do that is to step back, let go — and show up and cheer.

## COACHING:

Parents can make life tough for coaches

Continued from page 1

Intense and constant criticism, even abuse, from parents — and parents seeking to have coaches fired from their positions — is a factor facing coaches in Sisters, but it's not by any means just a Sisters phenomenon and it doesn't just affect coaches. Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) recently sent an op-ed across the state (published in *The Nugget*, January 23, page 22) noting that parental behavior is driving officials off field and court.

“According to a recent survey by the National Association of Sports Officials, more than 75 percent of all high school officials say ‘adult behavior’ is the primary reason they quit,” the op-ed noted. “And 80 percent of all young officials hang up their stripes after just two years of whistle-blowing. Why? They don't need your abuse.”

Thorson — and his coaches — see the same phenomenon and attribute it to the expectations some parents have of their children's sports career and the nature of school sports programs.

“Sometimes I feel like we've professionalized high school sports,” said cross-country Coach Josh Nordell.

Parents develop expectations based on impressions of college or professional programs that have vast resources. And many parents have invested years of effort and considerable financial outlay into developing their kids' athletic prowess. When their high school career isn't going the way they'd like it to, there is a tendency to lash out at coaches.

“I think people want success all the time and don't see the value in the struggle,” said head football Coach Neil



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Rory Rush works with her volleyball players.

Fendall.

And yet every coach *The Nugget* interviewed emphasized that the struggle — coming together to chase a goal and overcoming adversity — carries by far the greatest educational value in athletics.

Social media can amplify criticism and empower negative behaviors, the coaches say.

“I feel like the age we live in with cell phones and communicating behind a keyboard hurt coaches as well, as people are much more likely to share their feeling to the world when it is not done face to face,” Thorson said. “There is absolutely no question social media has made it harder on coaches. Our coaches do and will make mistakes, as I did as a coach and as AD, but there seems to be much less grace and support and much more entitlement than 10-15 years ago.”

Fendall concurs.

“As adults, we come unhinged so quick,” he said. “It's just this kind of hyper-reactive state.”

Volleyball Coach Rory Rush said that sometimes social media chatter among parents about a coach “becomes this kind of mob mentality.”

Parents also are far more prone today to seek remedies for their complaints by going directly to administrators, bypassing the coach. And the

coaches would like to see that stop.

“I feel like they (administrators) try to have my back, but I think they give parents too much voice and don't always direct them back to the coach,” Rush said.

The protocol is to work an issue out with a coach before moving on to the athletic director or a principal. And as far as Fendall is concerned, the best educational protocol is for the student athlete himself to deal directly with the coach.

“I'd rather have the kid come talk to me, that's what I'm saying,” he told *The Nugget*.

And no coach wants to hear second-guessing and criticism yelled out from the stands.

“Parents should be seen and not heard at competitions,” said John Sanders, a longtime coach and athletic director now retired in Sisters. Cheering is fine — as long as it's positive and not yelling at and denigrating other players, which Sanders said he's seen too much of in his career.

None of this is to indicate that coaches want to exclude parents.

“I want parents to be involved,” Rush said. She just wants the relationship between her and the players to be the primary focus with “parents on the journey with us, not dictating what the journey should be.”

## WAY TO GO, OUTLAWS!

From your local Realtor, Suzanne

Real Estate, Sisters second-favorite contact sport!



Suzanne Carvlin, Broker  
541-595-8707

suzanne@homeinsisters.com



Cascade

Sotheby's  
INTERNATIONAL REALTY