

Kidsports giving the game back to Eugene kids

□ Group is cracking down, disciplining some coaches, spectators, and even officials

By Carrie Vincent
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

As a referee of soccer and basketball for Kidsports, I have received "supportive" remarks such as:

"Why dontcha get a job at McDonald's instead?" "Are you blind?" "Do you know ANYTHING about about this game?"

Granted, more often than not, I received a pat on the back, a handshake or a "Good game, ref." in passing. But it only takes a few moody, angry, unhappy, sour — well, you get the picture — coaches or parents to put everyone on the defensive.

Many times at a Kidsports game it became a clash of wills between the official and the

coach or spectator. In the process of the battle of egos, the kids, whom we are all there for, get lost in the shuffle.

Kidsports, under new President Bob Josephson, is making every attempt to give the name back to the kids.

Josephson, 47, believes education is the key.

"There are several areas that we are improving upon: We are educating coaches and parents, teaching them what is acceptable and unacceptable conduct; we are demanding training for the coaches and for the officials; and, because education only goes so far, we are following up with punitive responses," he said.

Despite the fact that the number of participants in Kidsports has gone from about 16,000 in 1986 to 23,000 in 1993, Josephson said that the overall number of complaints against coaches, parents, players or officials has gone down.

"There has been a tremendous response to clamp down," said Josephson, who has also been a Kidsports coach of soccer and basketball for seven years.

Many of the problems arise from the enormous expectations of parents and coaches, he said.

"There are a growing number of parents who place way too high of an emphasis on the performance of their child at too young of an age. Therefore, they are instantly frustrated," Josephson said. "There is also a general disregard for self-control (on the part of the coaches and parents). If you throw in an inexperience official, it creates all the ingredients for an explosion."

Although Josephson has only been president since November (previously, he was executive vice president for two years and on the board of the directors for three years), his system has already been implemented.

In the current baseball/softball season, four coaches were suspended for at least one game (one for the entire season) after physically abusing an umpire. Two umpires were suspended for the season for inciting a problem, Josephson said.

Josephson said that if he has any "beef" with the umpires it is that they are often "over-authoritative."

During the basketball season, a woman was brought up on criminal harassment charges for punching a referee and was consequently fined \$300, put on 18

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— Bob Josephson,
Kidsports president

months probation and ordered to undergo anger management counseling.

Any coach, whether soccer, basketball or baseball, was automatically suspended for one game if thrown out of the game.

"We're fighting an uphill battle to change the psychology of some of these people. But we will follow through," Josephson said.

Because Kidsports now provides training meetings for coaches and officials, Josephson said the next step is to become more pro-active with the parents, which Kidsports is now in the process of collaborating on with the 4J School District.

Teresa Grube is an active and supportive parent who has had three children involved in Kidsports, two of which are still active in soccer, basketball, baseball and football.

"We've been involved with Kidsports for nine years, and I really think they need to communicate with the parents more," she said.

"It's gotten a lot bigger since we started, but now it's almost too big because there is not enough fields or gyms," Grube said. "Another problem is the area directors (links to Kidsports) who often try to be everything to everyone. We haven't had any consistency or longevity with them."

Grube is also frustrated by the apparent lack of appreciation for

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