

NAIA/CSM Champions of Character The Role of Parents in Youth Sports

“Whatever I accomplished came mainly from what my dad accomplished as a father and teacher.” –John Wooden, former UCLA head basketball coach, leader of 10 NCAA national championships.

“Never cease trying to be the best you can become.” -- Joshua Hugh Wooden, father of John Wooden.

Athletes want their parents to be a part of the inherently fun aspects of sport. There are some special things adults can do to help young people enjoy their athletic experience and help them through stages of their athletic lives.

Parent’s Role:

- Attend as many games as possible.
- Be a model, not a critic; model appropriate behavior, poise, and confidence.
- Attend pre-season team meetings.
- Do everything possible to make the athletic experience positive for your child and others.
- View the game with team goals in mind.
- Attempt to relieve competitive pressure, not increase it.
- Encourage multiple-sport participation.
- Release your child to the coach and the team.
- Look upon opponents as friends involved in the same experience.
- Accept the judgment of the officials and coaches; remain in control.
- Demonstrate winning and losing with dignity.
- Dignify mistakes made by athletes who are giving their best effort and concentration.
- Be an encourager—encourage athletes to keep their perspective in both victory and defeat.
- Be a good listener.
- Accept the goals, roles, and achievements of your child.

Parents should address the following critical issues:

- Ask their children questions about why they play, what their goals and roles are, and then accept young athletes’ reasons as their own.
- Once parents know their children are safe physically and emotionally, they should release them to the experience (the game, the team, and the coach).
- During the game, parents should model poise and confidence and keep their focus on the team.

- After the game, parents should give their children space and time, and leave them alone.
- Parents should be confidence builders by maintaining a consistent perspective and not saying or doing anything that will have their children feel like their self-worth is somehow tied to playing time or outcome of the game.

When parents stop and analyze the athletic experience for their children, **the reasons they want their kids to play sports involve providing an opportunity to develop physically and emotionally, and to enjoy themselves.** The side benefit of playing sports is that kids are given a good opportunity to:

- learn how to work and get along with others
- take good risks in a public arena and survive
- learn to set and achieve goals by developing positive work habits
- learn how to succeed and fail with dignity
- develop friendships outside the family unit that can last for a lifetime

Relatively speaking, being an athlete in school lasts a short time. Kids want their parents to be part of their positive athletic memories. **Parents need to be the individuals who see the big picture and bring their children back to reality when necessary.** If young people are making good decisions about drugs, friends, and academics, then sports are just dessert. On the other hand, if a child is not making good decisions about those kinds of things, no amount of athletic success by a young athlete will justify allowing a parent to overlook his child's other choices.

