

## **Parents: Build a Partnership with the Coach**

By Jim Thompson, PCA Founder and Director

Research shows that when parents and teachers work together children tend to do better in school. There is no reason to think it's any different in youth sports. Parents who want their child to do well in sports should develop a partnership with the coach. The following are some tips—for parents who are not coaching their child—to create a Coach/Parent Partnership that will enable athletes to get the most out of their lacrosse experience.

### **Recognize the Coaches' Commitment**

For whatever reason, you have chosen not to help coach the team. The coaches have made a commitment that involves many, many hours of preparation beyond the hours spent at practices and games. Recognize their commitment and the fact that they are not doing it because of the pay! Try to remember this whenever something goes awry during the season.

### **Make Early, Positive Contact**

As soon as you know who your child's coaches are going to be, contact them to introduce yourself. To the extent that you can do so, ask if there is any way you can help. By getting to know the coaches early and establishing a positive relationship, it will be much easier to talk with them later if a problem arises.

### **Fill Coaches' Emotional Tanks**

When the coaches do something you like, let them know about it. Coaching is a difficult job, and most coaches only hear from parents when they want to complain. This will help fill the coaches' Emotional Tanks and will motivate them to do an even better job. Having recognized these positives will also make it easier to discuss problems later (because you have shown support for the good things). And just about every coach does a lot of things well. Take the time to look for them and publicly recognize them.

### **Avoid Putting Players in the Middle**

Imagine a situation around the dinner table, in which a child's parents complain in front of her about how poorly her math teacher is teaching fractions. How would this impact this student's motivation to work hard to learn fractions? How would it affect her love of mathematics?

While this scenario may seem farfetched, when we move away from school to youth spots, it is all too common for parents to share their disapproval of a coach with their children, whether it is about coaching tactics or playing time. This puts a young athlete in a bind. Divided loyalties do not make it easy for a child to do her best. Conversely, when parents support a coach, it is that much easier for the child to put her wholehearted effort into learning to play well.

If you think your child's coaches are not handling a situation well, DO NOT tell that to your child. Rather, seek a meeting with the coaches where you can talk about it. It is important to talk with the coaches first, before going over their heads

to a board member or league leader. Most coaches want to do the best job possible, and you owe them the opportunity to respond to your concerns before moving up the ladder.

### **Allow Coaches to do the Coaching**

It can be very confusing for a player to hear someone other than the coach yelling out instructions during a game or practice. You are not one of the coaches, so avoid giving your child instructions about how to play. If you have an idea for a tactic, go to the coaches and offer it to them. Then let them decide whether or not it works for the team. If they decide not to use it, let it be. Getting to decide how to teach certain skills and choosing which strategies and tactics to use is a privilege the coaches have earned by making the commitment to coach. If this paragraph sounds particularly difficult to you, maybe it is time for you to sign up as an assistant coach!

### **Fill your Children's Emotional Tank**

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to be there unconditionally for your child. Competitive sports are stressful to players, and the last thing they need is a critic at home. Be a "talent scout" for your child. Focus on the positive things he does and leave correcting mistakes to the coach. During games, look for specific things your child does and mention one or two things you noticed him doing well after the game. "I like the way you hustled after that ground ball near the end of the game". Let him know you love him and support him without reservations, regardless of how well he plays. Don't criticize your child's play after a game. This is hard for many parents, but it will pay off in two ways. It will strengthen your relationship with him, and it will avoid draining his Emotional Tank, which needs to be full for him to play his best. Let me sway it again—Don't give him advice or criticize his play. Instead FILL his emotional tank.

### **Encourage other parents to honor the game**

Hold yourself to a high standard—never show disrespect for the other team or the officials. But more than that encourage other parents to also Honor the Game. If a parent of a player on your team begins to berate the official, gently remind him or her, "Remember to Honor the Game". The coaches on your team will appreciate this help on the sidelines. They would much rather spend their time coaching the players, rather than having to supervise the behaviour of parents on the sideline.

Together, coaches and parents can make lacrosse a powerful and positive experience for all involved. Good luck in establishing a partnership with your child's coaches. It will make a difference.